

Theological Studies on Saint Chavara 15

**KENOTIC SPIRITUALITY OF  
SAINT KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA**

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**KENOTIC SPIRITUALITY OF  
SAINT KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA**

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SAINT KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA**

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## **THEOLOGICAL STUDIES ON SAINT CHAVARA**

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

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

Chavara had a firm foundation in Christian faith, which is clearly visible throughout his life and is testified by those who knew him. He articulated his views and perspectives primarily based on his personal encounter with Jesus and only secondarily based on his readings and theological reflections.



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

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

The present number in the Theological Studies on Saint Chavara (TSSC) titled, *Kenotic Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara* by Grace Thomas CMC, a formator and an academican, reflects and reveals the kenotic dimension of Chavara's spirituality. Chavara, a prominent Indian saint

embodied kenotic spirituality imbibing “the same mind of Christ” (Phil 2:5) in his life and mission. He endured all the hardships and sufferings for the greater good of the community pursuing a deeper union with God. He always set a priority to the well-being and growth of his fellow brethren and he imitated Christ closely. In Pauline language, ‘he did nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regarded others better than himself, he did not look to his own interests, but to the interests of others’ (Phil 2:3-4). Chavara’s profound humility and his entire life dedicated to serving others embody the kenotic principle of self-giving love. The present work of Grace Thomas has a special merit of presenting the kenotic spirituality of Chavara, an embodiment of outstanding virtues, emphasizing his self-emptying love, humble service and deep commitment to God and His people.

**Naiju Jose Kalambukattu CMI**  
(kalambukattunaiju@gmail.com)  
General Editor



## **FOREWORD**

Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara, a beacon of spiritual enlightenment and social reform stands as one of the most revered figures in the history of the Indian Catholic Church. Saint Chavara's life was marked by profound devotion, visionary leadership and an unwavering commitment to the betterment of society. He awakened not only the people of his time but also the future generation. All his accomplishments were natural expressions and extensions of his intimate God experience and contemplation.

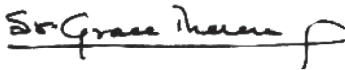
This book written by Sr. Grace Thomas seeks to illuminate the extraordinary journey of Saint Chavara whose legacy encompasses a wide array of contributions. His holistic approach to faith and life which continues to inspire generations is well explained. Through this comprehensive exploration we delve into the various faces of Saint Chavara's life -his early years, spiritual awakening and the transformative initiation - he championed. By examining his writings, teachings and the institutions he established Sr. Grace Thomas aims to offer readers an insightful understanding of his enduring influence.

The kenotic aspect of Jesus Christ revealed in the Gospels and letters is well depicted with apt quotes. Moreover, the kenotic spirituality emphasizing humility, self-emptying and self-sacrifice, reflected in the writings and teachings of the Church fathers are also highlighted in her writings which make the readers easily understand the emphasis given in this book to the spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara that is rooted in humility and self-emptying towards all his being and undertakings. The long hours he spent in

the Eucharistic presence in rapt attention, enabled him to assimilate the spirit of Christ (Phil 2:6).

The theological studies of Sr. Grace Thomas serve to be a strong back support in exploring the kenotic spirituality of Saint Chavara in reflection to that of Jesus throughout all the gospels and epistles. She has masterfully captured the essence of Saint Chavara's spiritual journey inspiring the readers to engage deeply with his legacy.

I appreciate Sr. Grace Thomas for her enduring hardship in this strenuous effort that has disclosed Chavara spirituality in the sequence of this particular aspect of kenosis. It is my prayer that may the Lord bless the author and the readers through the intercession of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara. May this book serve not only as a tribute to Saint Chavara but also as a source of inspiration for all who seek to lead a life of compassion, dedication and service.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Sr. Grace Therese CMC". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal line.

**Sr. Grace Therese CMC**  
Superior General

## PREFACE

Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara was a man who committed his life wholeheartedly to God and his people without any trace of egoism. He was concerned with the salvation of his own soul and the salvation of others as well. He adopted the kenotic life of Jesus Christ and could become his credible witness. The kenotic spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara presented in this book elucidates how he could offer hope and meaning to the people around who were poor and disadvantaged due to the unjust and oppressive structures of the society. Jesus came to the world to give us life and life in abundance. Saint Kuriakose was motivated by this example to dedicate his life to the people by his involvement in their lives and through his ministries. He imbibed the spirit of Jesus and shared his life to the people credibly and meaningfully. Through his life of compassion and kindness they could experience the love of God and life in abundance. He stood for the cause of poor and oppressed as a social reformer who spoke against unjust structures and practices. Being true to the spirit of Jesus Christ he brought to light the power and liberating potential of kenotic imagery to transform human attitudes and actions. As a servant leader he was following the way of Jesus who humbled himself and offered himself totally. He could witness Christ in an authentic and relevant manner so that others might enjoy its fruits. Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara was a man of humility, detachment and openness and he exercised his leadership in humble service to others. Following the model of Jesus Christ he emptied himself and became a servant to be available to others and he could empower them. His service was not limited to his own

community but extended to everyone even to the world at large. Thus he could become the living presence of the Master who emptied himself, took the form of a slave and washed the feet of his disciples and left for us a pattern to follow (Phil 2:6). He was so much concerned about the salvation of souls that he did whatever possible ways and means to help them. He was a defender of Catholic unity in a troublesome situation. Although he is a canonized Saint his spirituality and contributions are not yet well known all over the world.

At the close of this work my heart is throbbing with gratitude to God Almighty and I thank God from the bottom of my heart for the ineffable graces he has showered on me throughout this work. It was indeed a great pleasure and privileged opportunity for me to delve deep into the saintly and devout life of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara and to be inspired by him. Certainly it was God who inspired me to take up this theme and work on it and provided all the necessary facilities for the completion of this book. I dedicate this book for the greater glory of God.

In this attempt many have contributed in one way or other and I would like to point out the names of some of them. I acknowledge with gratitude the former and present Superior Generals Mother Sibi and Mother Grace Therese for their constant support and encouragement. I would like to place on record my sincere gratitude to Mother Grace Therese for blessing this work with her meaningful message. I am greatly indebted to my Provincial Superiors Sr. Prasanna and Sr. Maria Anto for their concern and prayerful support throughout this work. I also extend my profound gratitude to the former and present General Editors of this project Fr. Saju Chakkalackal CMI and Fr. Naiju Jose Kalambukattu CMI for their valuable suggestions and constant support. I express my sincere gratitude to Rev. Fr. Norman SFX for his scholarly guidance and suggestions in this endeavour. I am

immensely grateful to all my sisters who have helped me in diverse ways during the composing of this book.

I extend my immense gratitude to the authorities of Dharmaram VidyaKshetram and my Sisters of Jnanodaya convent Bangalore for their care, concern and support during my library work for this book. I hope that this book will be an inspiration for many to know and love Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara and to imbibe his spirituality and theological visions.

Feast of Assumption of Holy Virgin Mary  
15 August 2024

**Sr. Grace Thomas CMC**  
Angamaly





## **INTRODUCTION**

In the unique history of Christianity in India, especially in the history of Thomas Christians, Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara stands as a prophetic visionary, and a committed Pastor of the Church. He had a great passion for God and passion for humanity. He was a versatile genius and a man of wisdom who was inspired by the example of Jesus Christ from the perspective of self-emptying as expressed in Phil 2:5-11. It refers to a de-centering of the self so as to give space for others, as an attitude of humility with its implication of loving fulfilment in its openness and outreach to others. His multifarious personality and his great contributions served the growth of the Church in diverse ways. He was always obedient to the authority of the Church and as a true son of the Church always stood for the unity of the Church and communion with the Holy See. Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara was from a very ordinary family but the divine providence selected him and anointed him with the power of the Holy Spirit to serve the people in many areas of social, cultural, and religious spheres. As an authentic disciple of Jesus Christ he was committed to carry on the liberating mission of Jesus and as a lover of the Church he had been guided by the social teachings of the Church.

Saint Kuriakose Elias was convinced of the vanity of earthly honour and glory and the futility of engaging in material pursuits. He had a realistic perception of true values in life that prompted him to take a decision to commit himself to the Lord in a critical time. To get an idea of his active personality as a zealous religious, it is enough to cast a glimpse on the manifold and incredible projects and

initiatives he got accomplished within a short span of his life time (1829-1869). His active involvement in secular as well as religious fields was really prophetic, initiating numerous projects and activities much ahead of his time. He was a trailblazer and pioneer in education-campaign, print-media, literary carrier, societal reforms etc. of his time.

The state of affairs of the nineteenth century Kerala Church and society has challenged him to initiate various activities for the less privileged and the marginalized of the society. His dedication has opened up new avenues of showing solidarity with the marginalized and oppressed of the society and to work for their advancement. His capacity to respond meaningfully to the social issues of Kerala has brought forth integral development of the Church and society. He was a God seeker and a man of humility and openness who never had any ambition of projecting himself or seeking positions and possessions. Saint Kuriakose had a special gift of reading the signs of the times. He knew the conditions of his people in Kerala and the problems they faced, and he creatively responded to solve those problems in the best possible way. His universal outlook considering everyone as children of God helped him to work for the integral growth and development of all beyond geographical, liturgical or any other boundaries. He initiated many reforms in the socio-cultural and religious realms of the society. He had realized that the integral growth of a generation could be materialized only through good education and therefore, he established schools attached to every parish Church. By awakening the people through education he could bring about drastic changes in the society and dispelled the darkness of ignorance. He was an ardent lover of authorities of the Church and he obeyed their instructions wholeheartedly even in difficult times. He was a charismatic person who always trusted in the providence of God and tried to do the will of God thereby denying his selfishness in favour of an

orientation towards God and others. That was his life breath. He was always ready to sacrifice his own individual interests for the sake of common good.

One of his intentions to found two religious congregations was to have saints from our land because Kerala Church was very much barren without having any sprout of saints. It was his long cherished dream that there should be canonized saints from among the Syrian Christians who had been following Christ from the very first century. Now he may be rejoicing from heaven seeing the long list of saints, servants of God and venerable. He excelled in love of the Church and he desired that there should be many canonized saints so that others may get inspired. His life was an example of holiness and he committed his life for the growth and unity of the Church. The multifaceted personality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara we shall explore in the ensuing pages.

Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara was an exemplary religious and was considered a living saint. He was a man of great vision and dreams regarding the Kerala Church. He was like a city built on the hill top (Mt 5:16) and people could see and experience the fruits of his good works and glorify God. He was convinced that the Church in Kerala needed renewal and revitalization and the clergy needed to be updated. The Christian families were in need of renewal from within. He took up these challenges and did whatever he could to bring out a lasting renewal in the Church in Kerala. As Jesus said you are the light of the world and salt of the earth, Saint Kuriakose was really able to enlighten the people around him, the Kerala Church and even the world at large.

Saint Kuriakose Elias had strong faith in God and he was doing everything trusting in the providence of God. He had such an intimate relationship with God that he conversed with God as if like intimate communication among friends.

His urge to be united with Jesus was so strong that he longed to see how the Lord God became one among us as the word Emmanuel denotes. His desire was to see Jesus in all the mysteries associated with him. His ideas of faith correspond not only to his century but far ahead of his time. He was always impelled by his motto, "the Lord is my portion" and held on to it until his death. Therefore he could dedicate his whole life totally for God and his people without having any selfish motive. He could integrate prayer and work in such a harmonious manner that he was truly a contemplative in action. He was a rich mine of virtues and his contemplative personality is visible in his writings, especially in his poems.

In order to make himself available Saint Kuriakose Elias sacrificed or spared his time, energy, health, wealth whatever possible at his disposal for the benefit of others. He spent his life totally for God and his fellow human beings without any reservation. He did not have the desire of the fruits of his action and in that sense he was a *karma-yogi* who dedicated his life selflessly for the benefit of others. He was well aware that a responsibility meant nothing other than an opportunity to render greater service to his brethren, and to show a greater responsibility before God. He enlightened people, especially women and the marginalized by giving them education. He worked hard for the social and spiritual uplift of women. By founding two religious congregations he awakened people spiritually. As a social reformer he could turn the culture of the country upside down and brought about radical changes. His attempt to convert the aborigines was a very bold venture when we consider their social condition at that time. They were almost like slaves and the motive behind this attempt was the zeal for the glory of God. All his apostolic activities were for the greater glory of God and he was always willing to submit himself to God and responsive to his plans. He was a prophet of his times who awakened the world and continues to do that until

today. He had a personal intimacy with God and always remained on the side of God and evaluated things from a divine perspective in all matters.

Saint Kuriakose was of the opinion that our service is to be rendered freely without asking or expecting anything in return. One has to serve with humility as Jesus did, He being God humbled Himself, lowered Himself, and debased Himself to serve. In this age of synodality it is to be noted that humility is at the core of synodality, which implies communion, participation, and mission. Fraternal communion promoting the participation of all in community life, will effectively implement the proclamation of the Gospel, which is our mission. Saint Kuriakose was a true religious in every sense and followed the footsteps of Jesus.

This book is an attempt to show how Saint Kuriakose as a religious spared himself for God and his people totally and completely without any reservation. As the prophet Elijah who led a life burning with zeal for the living God Saint Chavara was also leading a life with much zeal and enthusiasm. The unique character of his God experience was Abba consciousness and he experienced God as his loving father, a father in whom he could trust and rely on for everything at any time and everywhere. This book is divided into three chapters. In the first chapter we delve deep into the personality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara to highlight being a religious, how he was a man of altruism and pro-existence following the model of Jesus Christ. He could see the face of God in human faces and he dedicated his life totally to the service of others. He was convinced that service to God can be rendered through service to humanity. He was aware of the fact that he was a man specially sent by God to fulfil some special mission on earth.

In the second chapter we shall discuss the meaning of the term kenosis and its various interpretations and how is it relevant and meaningful in the present context. We shall

explore the biblical foundations of kenosis and how it has a bearing today where individualism and self-centeredness are prevailing everywhere. Significantly it is in such a context the idea of self-emptying for the sake of others gets more relevance. We shall examine its relation to religious life and how Saint Kuriakose practiced it in his life and made him available to all. He was a man of exceptional virtues and he was able to commit himself to God and his people. He was a man of faith and he proved the authenticity of his faith through his life witness. He excelled in the love of the Church and he dedicated his life for the renewal and unity of the Church. We shall also highlight the understanding of some of the important Church Fathers of repute regarding the theme of kenosis. In the final chapter we investigate the life and mission of Saint Kuriakose and elucidate the diverse kenotic elements in his life. He was a man of intense prayer and relentless action. His Abba experience motivated him to consider others as his brothers and sisters to dedicate his life for their well-being.

## CHAPTER 01

### SAINT KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA A MAN OF ALTRUISM AND PRO-EXISTENCE

Contemporary society is more and more characterized by individualism and ego-centeredness in social as well as religious realms. This is particularly true in this age of globalization and secularization with its marks of market economy and profit-orientation. Pro-existence, inter-personal relationship and altruism<sup>1</sup> are concepts that are being widely used in our times in order to emphasize and promote the need of an authentic and meaningful life in the world. The meaning of human existence as pro-existence is one of the leading thoughts that have a sway in the contemporary theological discussions. Dietrich Bonhoeffer one of the leading theologians during the period of Second World War, is generally credited with characterizing Jesus as the 'man for others.' The life of Jesus involved a radical kenosis and altruism so that his only concern was totally to be for others. Jesus is the embodiment of the ultimate and unconditional love of God, and in him there was no trace of egoism. Christ renounced his divine position and became human so that humans might become fully human.<sup>2</sup>

In the letter to the Hebrews we read regarding the purpose of the coming of Christ into the world, "a body you have prepared for me ... I have come to do your will, O'God"

---

1 Altruism is a term used to describe a behavior characterized by acts with no apparent benefit for the individual who performs them but that are beneficial to other individuals. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/altruism>, Accessed on 28 January 2024.

2 See my book Moly Thomas, *Christology in Context: Kenotic Perspectives*, New Delhi: Intercultural Publications, 2005, 214.



(Heb 10: 5-7).<sup>3</sup> Similarly in the gospel of Saint John we read: “I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me” (Jn 6:38). Similarly during his prayer at Gethsemane Jesus said to his Father: “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet not my will but yours be done” (Lk 22:42).<sup>4</sup> Thus Jesus showed his readiness to do the will of the father and committed himself to father’s will. The meaning of these passages is clear from what happened on the night when he was betrayed with its climactic statements: “This is my body that is broken for you. And this cup is the new covenant in my blood. ...Do this in remembrance of me” (1 Cor 11:24-25). In Jesus Christ, God has become a God of human beings in a human way. As we have already noted, in the words of Bonhoeffer, Jesus the man- for-others unveils God’s pro-existence for human beings. According to Jacques Dupuis, Jesus Christ is the human face of God and in turn, he is the symbol and image of God’s personal dealings with the humankind.<sup>5</sup> As Bonhoeffer points out, it is true that

the experience that a transformation of all human life is given in the fact that ‘Jesus is there only for others.’ His ‘being there for others’ is the experience of transcendence. Faith is participation in this being of Jesus. The transcendental is not infinite and unattainable tasks, but the neighbour who is within reach in any given situation. He is

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3 All biblical references are from The Holy Bible, The New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition, Bengaluru: Theological Publications in India, 2021.

4 In the book of Psalms also we see the same eagerness of the Son of God to do the will of God “Here I am; in the scroll of the book it is written of me. I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.” Ps 40:7-8.

5 Jacques Dupuis, *Who Do You Say I Am? Introduction to Christology*, Mary Knoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994, 170.

‘the man for others’ and therefore the crucified,  
the man who lives out of the transcendent.<sup>6</sup>

The focus and orientation of his entire humanity was in terms of his altruism and pro-existence and he commanded his disciples to be at the service of others. “The image of God inscribed in the face of Jesus is that of a God who has freely chosen to empty God’s self (*Kenosis*) in self-giving. In Jesus, God has become ‘God-of- human-beings- in- a- human-way.’”<sup>7</sup> According to Pope Francis, the Gospel is the living “book of God’s mercy that must be continually read and re-read, that has many blank pages left. It remains an open book that we are called to write in the same style, by the works of mercy we practise. ... St Chavara is one of those who heard the invitation to continue the work of Jesus and to fill the blank pages of the ‘incomplete’ gospel with love and total commitment.”<sup>8</sup> In a similar vein, in the words of Bonhoeffer:

The church is the church only when it exists for others....It should give away its property to those in need. The clergy must live solely on the free will offerings of their congregations, or possibly engage in the secular calling. The church must share in the secular problems of ordinary human life, not demanding, but helping and serving. It must tell men of every calling what it means to live in Christ, to exist for others.<sup>9</sup>

Today it is our duty to respond to the invitation of our Pope and continue the work of charity sharing in the problems of the people and helping them.

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6 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Letters and Papers from Prison*, New York: Macmillan Company, 1953, Revised Edition in 1967, 202.

7 Joseph Xavier, *Mercy in Practice: Theological Reflections on the Life of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2016, 66.

8 Quoted in Joseph Xavier, *Mercy in Practice*, 66.

9 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Letters and Papers from Prison*, 203-204.

## 1. Availability and Dedication to Others

Life becomes meaningful when we live for others. As a true follower of Jesus Christ, Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara dedicated his life totally and fully for others. His life was both God and man-oriented, a man for the Other and for others, an altruistic person, not only for his own time, but for centuries. His baptismal name 'Kuriakose' in Greek denotes 'one who belongs to the Lord.' Indeed, belonging to the Lord made him a compassionate person. He realized the mercy of God as the ultimate expression of his love. He was a person pertained to the Lord totally and completely so much so that on his death bed he could testify that he never lost his baptismal sanctity of union with God. His belonging to the Lord prompted him to work so hard for Christ and for his Church. He was convinced that service to God is rendered through service to humanity.<sup>10</sup> He experienced the joy of belonging to the Lord. He was an exemplary model of divine intimacy. "Living in constant fellowship with Jesus remains as the fountain spring of the spirituality of Saint Kuriakose. He ascended every day to the hand of the heavenly father and descended every day to the needs of the people. He could grow vertically to the presence of God and horizontally to the needs of the people."<sup>11</sup> This produced enormous energy to transform the world. Being touched by the Divine he could not but dedicate himself to God and his people and to serve them in a totally different manner in accordance with

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10 Discipleship is an invitation to witness Christ and to serve humanity. As a religious Saint Kuriakose was very much dynamic and sensitive to the surrounding world. "Religious life will continue to have meaning and therefore a future as long as it is directly involved in the critical issues of our time." Sr. Inigo, "The Response of Religious to Multi-Faceted Reality of India," CRI National Assembly Report, Chennai, 10-15 January 2000, 123.

11 Augustine Mlavarayil, "Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara: A Fruit Bearing Branch of Jesus," *In Christo* 53 (2015) 61. See also K.C. Chacko, *Lead Kindly Light: A Voyage into the Sainly Life and Vision of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Kakkanaad: A Bethrauma Publication, Chavara Hills, 2014, 17.

the sublime beauty and love he had experienced. He was an ordinary man with an extraordinary way of spiritual life, who spent long hours in front of the Holy Eucharist, before he could interact with the people, particularly the poor and the needy who came to him. It is to be noted that this is true in the case of everybody who was touched by God. When Holy Virgin Mary received the Word of God she went to the house of Elizabeth to be with her and to serve her (Lk 1:39-40). In the words of Jeremiah, “within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot” keep silent (Jer 20:9).

Saint Kuriakose was so grateful to God that every blessing he received from God was an incentive for him to commit himself for his brethren. The altruistic life of Saint Kuriakose is an example for us to imitate and live our life meaningfully. This is very clear in the words of Arch bishop Mathew Kavukatt, “he was a priest who dedicated himself to love and serve the Lord. At the same time, he committed himself totally with the same love, to love and serve humanity.”<sup>12</sup> Saint Kuriakose never projected himself and was always at the back or behind the curtain. His life was an inspiring and edifying story. From the very day he was ordained as a priest he devoted his whole life to God and worked piously for the social, cultural and educational uplift of his fellow beings. He advised and practised: “Days on which you have not rendered any good to others will not be reckoned with as days in your book of life.”<sup>13</sup> In his deep Father-Child relationship with Jesus, he identified the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of his fellow beings and this led him to serve them selflessly. Thus the God experience of Saint Kuriakose did not end with his personal encounter with God rather he extended this experience to others as well.

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12 Augustine Mlavarayil, “Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara: A Fruit Bearing Branch of Jesus,” 61.

13 St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Testament of A Loving Father*, ed., Thomas Panthaplackal, Kakkanad: Chavara Central Secretariat, 2014, n. 13.

Saint Kuriakose literally lived the liturgical invitation to lift our hearts always to heaven. It is important to note that he had an eschatological outlook. That is the reason why he was never influenced by worldly attractions of praise, prestige, position, and fame. All his actions were guided by a divine perspective, whether it was in showing affection, correcting, advising, building houses or financial dealings. What prompted him to do so was his motto “God is my inheritance.” He left everything-his dear ones and patrimony, and he resolutely held on to this determination till the end of his life. We can observe a divine touch in each of his letters.<sup>14</sup>

It is to be noted that his spiritual life was a harmonious blend of love for God and concern for human beings. His humanitarian services were based on his foresight and other-centeredness. When he was a deacon himself whenever the *Malpan*<sup>15</sup> had to go anywhere for some reason or other, he entrusted him in charge of the seminary and to teach the other students. He was intimately associated with his *Malpan* and assisted him in the academic as well as administrative affairs of the seminary. Soon after his priestly ordination *Malpan* Palackal asked him to assist at the seminary. When the seminary was erected at Mannanam he was in charge of it under Fr. Porukara. All these show that the *Malpan* had high appreciation and best of impression regarding the knowledge and administrative capacities of Saint Chavara. Not only the *Malpan* but also the prelates and missionaries including Fr. Leopold considered him sufficiently knowledgeable person in ecclesiastical sciences.<sup>16</sup> Vicar Apostolic Francis

14 Santhi Rose, “Behold the Man! The Person of Chavara in His Letters,” *The Lord of Heaven & Earth: Chavara Studies in Honour of Fr. Lucas Vithuvattickal CMI*, Paul Kalluveettil & Paulachan Kochappilly, eds., Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2004, 321.

15 It is a Syriac word which literally means ‘professor’ or ‘teacher’.

16 Leopold Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, translated from Malayalam and re-printed by the Postulation of the Cause of Bl. Chavara, Mannanam: St. Joseph’s Monastery, 2003, 5. See also Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bangalore:

Xavier Pescetto raised him to the status of *Malpan* and appointed him examiner of priests aspiring for faculties to hear confession and preaching in Churches. The successor of Pescetto, Monsignor Ludovic Martini appointed him rector of the seminary at Mannanam in 1846.<sup>17</sup>

It is a well known fact that we remember people and the subsequent generations perpetuate the memory of them who live for others. Saint Kuriakose was such a person who dedicated his whole life selflessly for the sake of others. His heart was so broad that he forgot himself and his needs and even neglecting his health he worked for the welfare of others because according to him, everybody is God's child and we belong to one family. The sense of this universal brotherhood made him work for the good of others. The social reforms and the mission he undertook, with the view of the other, were indicative of his intimacy with God.<sup>18</sup> "It is this selfless service and self-gift to others that exalts humankind. Consecrated life has its relevance and worth in this self-sacrificing love. The greatness of consecration is this self-gift and availability."<sup>19</sup> Saint Kuriakose was a man with a clean heart and pure conscience, and his life was the experience of divine compassion. As the Lord reminds us, "it is more blessed to give than to receive," (Acts 20:35) the leading principle of his life was to give everything whatever he received from God to everybody those who are in need. In the present context people are interested in amassing wealth and everything for themselves but Saint Kuriakose was a generous man who gave up everything for others. The

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Dharmaram Publications, 2008, 235, 242.

17 Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 234.

18 Sebastian Mulloparambil, "The God-Experience of Bl. Chavara," *The Lord of Heaven & Earth: Chavara Studies in Honour of Fr. Lucas Vithuvattickal CMI*, Paul Kalluveetil & Paulachan Kochappilly, eds., Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2004, 266.

19 Shanthi Rose, "Behold the Man! The Person of Chavara in his The Letters," 320.



Scripture says, “Those who are generous are blessed, for they share their bread with the poor” (Pro 22:8). Moreover, the Gospel tells us to give in abundance “take heed what you hear: the measure you give will be the measure you get, and still more will be given to you” (Mt 4:14). Therefore he imparted in abundance the gift of divine love and compassion to his brethren without any reserve. At the time of his beatification in February 1986 Pope John Paul II rightly said:

See the innumerable charism and activities came upon from his (Chavara’s) dynamic leadership and deep spirituality. Schools, seminaries, printing presses, public awareness centres, religious instruction centres, etc., have all come up from that multifaceted charism. He has compiled and improved the Syro-Malabar Liturgy. He could popularize the devotions to the Holy Eucharist and the Holy Family throughout Kerala. Understanding the importance of the role of families in the Church and society, he exhorted and strengthened the Christian families through his writings and sermons.<sup>20</sup>

Saint Kuriakose was also always ready to give others whatever he had received from God. From the beginning of his life until the end, all of his undertakings were altruistic activities. His sharing and giving mentality was reflected in all his endeavours. He was aware of the fact that he received a lot; therefore any amount of giving back to others was not enough. In his testament, he advised his congregation to be grateful to all benefactors who helped them even in little things.<sup>21</sup> For example he advised them to be grateful to

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20 Augustine Thottakara, “Saint Chavara, A Karma-Yogi: A Paradigm of the Mysticism of Active Ministry,” Keynote Address delivered on the Workshop on Theological Studies on Saint Kuriakose Chavara (29-30 June 2019, CMI Prior General’s House, Chavara Hills).

21 Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara*, Vol. IV, *The Letters*, trans. Mary Leo, Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of

Archbishop Menezes and the Jesuits, Archbishop Bernardine, the missionaries, Marcelline, Fr. Leopold and so on. Moreover, he mentioned certain families who helped them in various matters like giving the plot for building the monastery etc.<sup>22</sup> He recommended them to remember and pray for Peter Beccaro and family of Aquì<sup>23</sup> in Italy. They helped them to remain united as one body in Christ. He also reminded them Vicar Apostolic Bernardine, who was mainly responsible for bringing about many blessings for the community.<sup>24</sup> He had a deep sense of gratitude towards Fr. Thomas Palackal who had spent all his seminary expenses and from his early childhood onwards Fr. Thomas Palackal nourished him both physically and spiritually.<sup>25</sup> He expressed his gratitude even to the least of the community. He mentioned even the names of some poor people who helped them in the initial stages, to prepare the ground for the building of the Mannanam Monastery. When he was affected by small pox, after the recovery, he and his disciples visited the physician and his attendants and offered some presents.<sup>26</sup>

As it was said more would be asked from the one who received more and vice versa. He had written to his nephew Fr. Joseph, "God the Almighty granted more time to me than to my predecessors. This was granted to me not so much for me I know, as for the benefit of others."<sup>27</sup> He was aware of this fact and made use of his time fruitfully, and engaged in an excellent life of self-less self-giving. He had no concern of

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Bl. Chavara, 1990, 71-74.

22 CWC, Vol. IV, *The Letters*, 72-73.

23 Fr. Leopold was from this family and they helped the congregation in many ways.

24 Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 174.

25 Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara*, Vol. I, *The Chronicles*, trans. P. J. Thomas, Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Bl. Chavara, 1990, 52.

26 CWC, Vol. I, *The Chronicles*, 48.

27 CWC, Vol. IV, *The Letters*, V/14, 53.



his own comfort or any selfish motives but always had an attitude of sharing and he had distributed even his family inheritance to his relatives. In the Letters we can observe many occasions of his sharing whatever he had with his spiritual children. For example he sends his prayer book *Jnana Piusham* to the sisters, so that they may love and serve Mother Mary in a better way. During the last days of his life he even translated a book from Tamil into Malayalam for the use of the sisters. We can notice how he shared his person, time, skills, health, faith, prayer, experience etc., with others.<sup>28</sup> He was convinced of the fact that our life is a gift from God and it should be freely spent for the good of others. The fulfilment of one's life depends on this conviction. He was a person who shared everything with others whatever he had at his disposal. He literally practised what Saint John says in his first Letter Chapter 3:18: "Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action." As Mathias Mundadan rightly points out,

The ardent love for God was revealed concretely in his love for others. The Blessed always bore in mind the new commandment of Jesus: love one another and serve them humbly. He was quite convinced of the gospel message of Saint John: "Those who say, 'I love God', and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars'; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen" (1 Jn 4:20). His fraternal love had no limits or boundaries; it flowed towards all, especially to the poor and the sick. Even bitter experiences did not stop him to embrace in love those who caused them... Chavara does not condemn them as many others did, but points out the good the

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28 Shanthi Rose, "Behold the Man! The Person of Chavara in his The Letters," 320.

community received from them and exhorts his fellow religious to be grateful to them... How kindly he deals with Mar Roccas, Frs Kudakkachira, Thondanat and others involved in the Roccas affair! If he says anything against them, it was minimum, just necessary to dissuade people from following their leadership and hurting themselves and the unity of the Church.<sup>29</sup>

### 1.1. Attitude of *Nishkamakarma*

The greatest satisfaction a person could have at the time of his/her death is the thought that one has spent oneself and all that one had for God and others without any selfish motive. One can be a *karma-yogi* by doing *nishkamakarma*, selfless service to God and humanity.<sup>30</sup> Doing service to others without expecting anything in return is called *nishkamakarma*.<sup>31</sup> In other words it is to do one's duties without attachment, renouncing sense passions, detaching oneself from selfish motives and with an attitude of indifference to the outcome of the actions. It can also be said that doing duties without any desire for the fruits thereof is known as *nishkamakarma*. It is the means for liberation. What is renounced here is not action, but only the attachment to it. Thus *nishkamakarma* is not abstaining from action. But abandonment of selfishness is the essential condition for entering the path of action. When one treads the path of disinterested action, by constant

29 Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 472.

30 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Kakkanad: Chavara Central Secretariat & Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2017, 154-155. See also Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 324.

31 This is what Jesus meant as he said, "when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, 'we are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!'" (Lk 17:10). Saint Kuriakose was such a person who was disinterested or not concerned about the fruits of his actions.

spiritual exercise comes to the awareness that he is not the agent but only an instrument in the hands of God who acts through him. If one is not the agent of action, then he has no right for the results of actions. A seeker has right only to do his duties and that he should not aspire for the results. This was the spiritual path earnestly and bravely followed by Saint Kuriakose during his earthly sojourn. He was ready to sacrifice himself and whatever he had at his disposal for the well being of others without expecting anything in return. He gives credit to God for all his successes and achievements that make him humble and free of attachments. This is the defining mark of a *karma-yogi* which shows his spiritual maturity and it was his personality trait. His attitude was just like St John the Baptist who said, "He must increase, but I must decrease." (Jn 3:30). That means to be not at all concerned with one's own self. "His deep sense of humility and detachment was unparalleled, as it was clear from the concluding words of the letter of Vicar Apostolic Baccinelli to the prefect of the Sacred Congregation of *Propaganda Fide* dated 15 June 1861."<sup>32</sup> He recommended Saint Kuriakose to be consecrated as auxiliary bishop but his comment was that he might not accept it because he had taken the vow of humility, and even if he had not taken that vow, he would not accept such a character and dignity without a formal command. Service without expecting anything in return was the characteristic mark of Saint Kuriakose.

Saint Kuriakose was involved in various kinds of works and responsibilities, but was equally immersed in the contemplation of the Divine. One might notice that as he advanced in the spiritual realm in proportion to it he was involved in selfless acts of charity. As he was more and more aware of the approaching end of life, he became

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32 Thomas Kochumuttom, "A Contemplative in Action," Paul Kalluveettil and Paulachan Kochappilly, eds., *The Lord of Heaven & Earth: Chavara Studies in Honour of Fr. Lucas Vithuvattickal CMI*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2004, 138.

increasingly God-oriented, and simultaneously his love for others overflowed more tenderly and touchingly. When one takes the vow of poverty the attitude behind it is that one shares one's possessions with those in need rather than uselessly and aimlessly giving them up. The motivating force behind this was that "though he [Lord Jesus Christ] was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (2 Cor 8:9). In the same way, the religious voluntarily keep themselves poor in order to make others rich. What they renounce should benefit others. In this way one can follow the example of Jesus Christ. Even after entering the religious community also one should continue the sharing of one's possessions such as their time, knowledge, health, energy, talents, etc., for the benefit and wellbeing of the needy and society at large. Saint Kuriakose recommends the sisters also to practice a life of *nishkamakarma* namely, to be united to the Lord and simultaneously engaged in the service of the society, regardless of any reward. They should harmoniously integrate prayer and work, that is to say, they should be contemplatives in action.

The religious may not have any possession of monetary value, as already noted, but they have their "precious time, bodily health and strength, the mental powers of intelligence, memory and creativity, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit like knowledge, wisdom, counselling, faith, hope and love, and the natural talents to sing, speak, teach, paint, and cook and so on."<sup>33</sup> One should use all these gifts for the service of others, without any reservation for oneself. In sharing everything one should not have any selfish motive rather it should be selfless service. As the widow's offering we should contribute not out of abundance but out of poverty (Lk 21:4). In his opinion, the religious should not run institutions or undertake programmes in order to generate income or profit. Rather it should be a matter of sincere love and selfless

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33 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 154.

service of God and humanity. This was the distinguishing mark of Saint Kuriakose and all other founding fathers of the congregation in all their undertakings in the fields of pastoral ministry, social apostolate, education and print media.<sup>34</sup> When he takes charge of an office he showed no other concern than the good of others. According to him a responsibility meant nothing other than an opportunity to render greater service to his brethren, and to show a greater responsibility before God.

According to Saint Kuriakose our service is to be rendered freely without asking or expecting anything in return. We have to serve with humility as Jesus did, He being God humbled Himself, lowered Himself, and debased Himself to serve. We should have humility in service, in order that we are able to say 'we are unworthy servants'. Jesus is the servant, he presents himself as the servant, the one who came to serve and not to be served (Mk 10:45). On the occasion of the Chavara Jayanthi inaugural address His Beatitude the late Cardinal Varkey Vithayathil said: "He was a person who lived in God. It was a life absorbed in the love of God. He did not go after fame and position. What he had learned from the Gospel was to empty himself and serve others. ... Blessed [Saint] Chavara considered a day lost if he did not do some service to others."<sup>35</sup> It is to be noted that the aim of a true religious is to serve God by serving humankind. Such a person aims at wholeness by enlarging the object of sympathy and compassion. This eternal truth has been affirmed by all our seers and saints throughout the ages. Saint Kuriakose also reaffirmed this reality by his selfless services to the lowly and the least.<sup>36</sup>

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34 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 155.

35 Cardinal Varkey Vithayathil, "Blessed Chavara: Shining Star of the Indian Church," *Herald of the East*, Vol. VI, 3 (July 2004) 5.

36 P. Ramachandran, "Fr. Chavara, The Pride of Humankind," John Mannarathara, ed., *Light on the Burnt Horizon: Chavara, The Reformer Saint*, New Delhi, Chennai, Bangalore: Viva Books, 2017, 414.

## 1.2. A Man of Concern and Compassion

It may be true to say that Saint Kuriakose was a man with a passion for God and a passion for humanity. This led him to be the pioneer of many innovations in the field of spiritual, educational, and social reforms. His contributions in these fields show his concern for the well being of others. After the foundation of the Congregation for women he said, "Almighty God, I believe that you allowed me to live so long so that I may be able to see this and feel all the more obliged to you. Greater praise be to you and now forever."<sup>37</sup> Saint Kuriakose was grateful to God for making him an instrument in this great event. He stood as a champion for the cause of women, the downtrodden, the oppressed, the marginalized, the poor, the Dalits etc. His contributions for the liberation of these people were noteworthy. At that time certain castes were considered 'untouchables' and he took pain to bring them to the mainstream of the society and proceeded to render them chances to get education. The seeds that he sowed in these fields bear lasting fruits even today.<sup>38</sup> He followed Jesus Christ in serving others. The basis of his ecclesial service was that he willingly submitted himself to become a perfect instrument in the hands of God. Thus he acted and responded being fully available and fully responsive to the will of God and God's plans.<sup>39</sup> His life was a manifestation of God's love, concern and compassion. He was a father to all and everybody could relate with him easily. In his dealings with people he could radiate loving presence of the fatherly figure of God.

Saint Kuriakose showed his concern for others even at a very young age. There was among his seminary companions a forty-year old man, Philip, from the parish of Kaduthuruthy.

37 CWC, Vol. I, *The Chronicles*, 117.

38 Sergius, "Relevance of Blessed Chavara Today," *Herald of the East*, Vol. VI, 3 (2004) 32.

39 Mathew Thenamkalayil, "The 19<sup>th</sup> Century Kerala Church and the Leadership of Bl. Chavara," *Herald of the East*, Vol. VI (2004) 125.

He was very slow to learn languages. He spent a lot of time over him to initiate him into the Syriac language. Fr. Leopold, his first biographer writes: “he (cleric Chavara) never harboured any petty jealousy or narrow mindedness against his companions, as was usual among the young, but always kind and charitable towards them.”<sup>40</sup> As Santhi Rose expounds, Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara

was a man with practical wisdom and common sense, a man of great moral strength and fortitude, extraordinary courage, a high sense of justice, foresight and watchfulness. He was a visionary with a third eye, a reformed with a sixth sense, and a superior with a mother’s heart. He can be called a man for others, always giving priority to the needs of the time and Church. He invested all the gifts and charism that he received from the Holy Spirit for the growth of the Church. ... God alone was the fascination in his life. ..<sup>41</sup>

### 1.3. A Concerned Superior

Saint Kuriakose had a clear vision of an ideal superior and in this regard he was indeed ahead of his time. The unity and well-functioning of the community depend much on the superior. The Second Vatican Council restored the concept of service as the major characteristic of leadership in the Church and effected a paradigm shift, away from “triumphalism, clericalism and juridicism.”<sup>42</sup> The Church was presented by the Council as an instrument of Christ’s service. Hence authority in the Church should be understood primarily as service.

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40 Leopold Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 5; Fr. Leopold, *Introduction to Atmanutapam*, Mannanam, 1871, 2.

41 Santhi Rose, “Kuriakose Elias Chavara: A *Besrouma*,” *Herald of the East: Dharmaram Journal of Chavara Studies*, Vol. 10, 1 (2014) 118.

42 Joseph Comblin, *The Meaning of Mission: Jesus, Christians and the Wayfaring Church*, translated by John Drury (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1977, 69.



True authority derives its power from the crucified Lord. Hence any authority is meaningless unless it is supported by the example of the humble, poor, weak and servant Jesus. Moreover, authority must be exercised diaconally as Jesus did, with due respect as between brothers and sisters and not as between lords and subordinates.<sup>43</sup> It is important to remember the teaching of Jesus to all leaders that greatness is not found in rank or position but in service. He makes it clear that love is the basis of true leadership and it must be issued in service.<sup>44</sup> Saint Kuriakose imbibed the mind of the Council almost a century before. He was well aware that authority was for humble service and he considered himself a servant leader who never acted arrogantly or arbitrarily. God was the focus and sum of all his activities and his rule was therefore a conscious effort to share the love of Christ more by example than by precept. Holding the position of authority for twenty five years, as Prior and Prior General he never made his term a burden or infliction on the community. He was always calm and quiet and characterized by a smile that penetrated everybody's heart. He secured the confidence of all by love and kindness. He shared the sorrows and joys of all and he made everyone feel that each one received his personal attention. During his leadership there was no trace of any complaint about his style of functioning either from the part of superiors or from the subordinates. Perfect harmony prevailed in the community under his wise and gentle direction and all extolled him with love and respect. It was with extraordinary respect and affection the members, his contemporaries and the first generation after them, looked up to him, spoke about him and cherished his memory.<sup>45</sup> He was a concerned, understanding and paternal superior, loved

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43 Leonardo Boff, *Church, Charism and Power: Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church*, translated by John W. Diercksmeier, London: SCM Press, 1985, 61.

44 Moly Thomas, *Christology in Context*, 240.

45 Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 148.



and respected by all. There were many instances of his care and concern towards the subordinates. One of the examples of his tender love for the members is found in sending the special, sweet, delicious mango which he received from someone to the monasteries. He wanted that this rare variety of mango to be planted in the compound of every monastery and be called 'our memory.' And they complied with the desire of Saint Kuriakose and the mango eventually called as 'Prior Manga'. Similarly he sent the chillies which he had grown in a pot at his window to the sisters in honour of the Mother of God.<sup>46</sup> Indeed he was a fruit bearing tree and he was generous enough to share everything with everybody. His love and concern towards the community of sisters he founded in Koonammavu was obvious. As Patriarch Jacob had a greater love for his younger son Benjamin, so also Saint Chavara loved the sisters most deeply, and brought them up with special care and protection, providing for all their needs, even as a mother takes care of her children.<sup>47</sup> His love towards them was both paternal and maternal and as he advanced in age, it became more and more deep and intense. He used to address his confreres as *sahodarankal* or *koodappirappukal* (those born of the same womb/mother). In the testament he even calls them as *priyamulla-kunjunkal* (beloved little children). In many of his letters also he addresses them likewise.<sup>48</sup> He was so much concerned about his spiritual sons and daughters that he was always sensitive to their needs.

He had a humane consideration for others. For instance, the attitude he showed in the case of Fr. Scaria Kalathil being allowed to visit his dying uncle priest even against the express wish of Fr. Leopold. He was kind and considerate towards

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46 CWC, Vol. IV, *The Letters*, VII/8, 84.

47 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Mumbai: St Paul Publications, 2014, 78.

48 CWC, Vol. IV, *The Letters*, VII/2, VII/6, VII/7 and VII/11.

his fellow religious especially the sick and disabled. He was generous enough to acknowledge and praise the positive traits of his dependents and co-operators.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, his attitude towards the sick and suffering members was remarkable. He used to spend a lot of time with the sick members attending to and consoling them. He was very solicitous with regard to their health in selecting sites for locating the foundations and very cautious to see that the places were healthy, easily accessible and pleasant. For instance when Plasnal monastery was offered to the congregation, his first concern was how the health of the inmates would be affected. He used to appreciate the sisters generously and praise them in their good examples and achievements. His sincere and true love for the members is manifested in the esteem in which he held them.<sup>50</sup> His special care and paternal affection to the sisters of the convent is very clear in his writings. He used to write letters to them and gives instructions to them regarding spiritual life, transcribing for them books to read, instructs them how to cultivate the land, how to write the chronicles etc. He had a special love and concern for the poor and outcaste members of the society. As a good shepherd would look after the weak sheep of his flock with special care he showed care and compassion towards them. His love towards God was proved authentic by his love for his brethren especially the poor. We have already noted as Saint John says, "We cannot love God, whom we have not seen, if we do not love others, whom we have seen" (1 Jn 4:20).

It is to be noted that the story of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:29-37) could be enlarged to include not only one's neighbour but also anybody who needs our help. According to Jesus mercy or compassion was not to be kept as a high ideal but to be practised in our daily lives. Therefore the demand of Jesus was that one should practise love and mercy

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49 Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 451.

50 Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 159-160.

in one's life. That is why he said 'go and do likewise.' Saint Kuriakose dedicated his life totally for others and this was the basis of all his humanitarian works for the betterment of others. He was always ready even to risk his own life in order to help others. One of the examples of his pro-existence was that while he was parish priest at Pallipuram, he was informed one night that a critically ill parishioner was asking for the anointing of the sick. He immediately got ready to go to him. It was a case of contagious small pox and people tried to dissuade him. But saying 'it is my duty and God will take care of me,' he courageously set out to the patient's home and administered the last sacrament.<sup>51</sup>

#### 1. 4. Spirit of Love and Forgiveness

According to Saint Kuriakose the real Christian love is forgiving love. Even though one is doubly insulted, you should not retaliate, but tolerate, forgive and be generous. As he had dedicated his entire life to God and his people, for him, a generous heart is always in search of ways to help others in their need. His concern for the poor is clearly expressed in the letter he wrote to the people of Kainakari Parish. We can find such expressions in his writings, especially in his last two exhortations –*Nalla Appante Chavarul* (1869) and *Chavarul* (1870). Here he invites his readers to transcend their selves through heroic love and charity.<sup>52</sup> He encourages his confreres not only to love but also to help even one's enemies as the expression of Christian charity. According to him, "even animals are capable of wreaking vengeance on those who cause pain and displeasure to them. To be unaffected by such ill-doings and to forgive them completely is a mark of great strength and prudence."<sup>53</sup> It is important to note that he is able to see the wrongdoers not as enemies, but as persons who need his support and helping hand. Such

51 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 19.

52 Joseph Xavier, *Mercy in Practice*, 25-26.

53 CWC, Vol. IV, *The Letters*, X/6, 104.

an attitude would help the transgressors to recognize their mistakes and it offers them opportunities to return and be reconciled with dignity. It is more than just forgiving and forgetting. Moreover, here mercy takes the form of empathy that tries to see the other person's perspective.<sup>54</sup> In order to love one's enemies one should rise above the natural feelings and love the person from the supernatural perspective of faith and consider all as children of God. Therefore, forgiving love is the real Christian love. He practised this kind of love and wants his followers also to practise such a love.<sup>55</sup> He illustrates an episode from the life of Emperor Constantine in order to show how to forgive. Once a man from the street came up and dealt a blow on the King's cheek. The whole army sought his permission to kill the offender. But the Emperor replied, "Even my lowest officer can do that. That is not a big thing. But I forgive him. That is the sign of my strength."<sup>56</sup> This is the way to practise mercy. Not only in his writings and exhortations but also in his very life itself we can find occasions of his generosity. There were many occasions in which he showed his generosity thereby he won the hearts even of his rivals. For example when intruder bishop Rocco decided to return to his country after the excommunication he was greatly in need of some money for his return journey. Then Saint Kuriakose out of his generosity reached out to help him by providing his travel expenses. He treated him very friendly without having any grudge towards him. There were many incidents in his life that illustrate his love for his neighbour. It is to be noted that after the departure of Rocco, Saint Kuriakose worked diligently to bring back the Churches that had joined the schismatics. He considered forgiveness as a great value and gave much emphasis to it in his life. All his activities were natural expressions of his

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54 Joseph Xavier, *Mercy in Practice*, 29.

55 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 67-68.

56 Quoted in Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 263.

inner divine experience. He had a special grace to forgive others and he always tried to reconcile with his adversaries. In the same manner he treated the trouble makers, Fathers Antony Kudakkachira and Antony Thondanat (Audiso). He was very generous towards them and even relieved them from the punishments imposed upon them by the bishop.<sup>57</sup> In the *Chronicles* we can notice another incident.

When one of the candidates (aspirants), a member of the Perumalil family had to be send back home, as it was discerned that he had no vocation. When Chavara came to know that the parents of the candidate, on this account, were very much annoyed and offended he went in person to the family and explained to them how and why the boy had to be sent back home. When the parents came to know the truth, they were very much consoled.<sup>58</sup>

Once it happened that the steward of Mannanam monastery Mathan Manjooran Kalapurackal had unjustly appropriated some of the properties of the monastery in his possession. The local civil court punished him for the crime. Later, this person filed a lawsuit against Saint Kuriakose in the criminal court of Aleppy with the help of forged documents in order to humiliate him. He personally appeared before the court and the officials including Judges, advocates, and notaries, who were all Hindus after hearing the case, declared that Saint Kuriakose is innocent and the petitioner Mathen Kalapurackal was heavily fined and punished. Moreover, the judge, being a Hindu, after listening to Saint Kuriakose dismissed the case as fraud. He remarked, "this priest indeed is a man of God. Those who complain against so great a man must be grossly wicked and deserve God's anger." Although

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57     Jose Eroorickal, *Mystical and Missionary Spirituality of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2014, 175.

58     Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 160.

Saint Kuriakose tried to befriend him, he could not succeed. "In spite of all these, Chavara in his testament to the members of his congregation recommended him to the superiors to have a special consideration for his family and to support it in times of need."<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, he instructed them to "render as much help as possible to the family of Mathan Manjooran Kalapurackal of the parish of Muttuchira in Manjoor. In so doing you will be imitating the disciples of Christ and setting a first model."<sup>60</sup> Saint Kuriakose in his testament advised the Mannanam monastery to help him in all possible ways. Thereby he was exemplifying the Christian ideals of love and forgiveness. He asked his children to the challenge of a heroic love that transcends all self – "a love that finds joy not in the fulfilment of one's material dreams, but in the salvation of the people one would draw into one's path!"<sup>61</sup> His mission was to follow Jesus who identifies himself with the world's lost and least and to reconcile with adversaries. Thus, he wanted to follow the way of Jesus. He requested his brethren to practice a heroic model of charity namely, to be considerate to those outside the monastery, moreover to remember and help specially those who were not friendly towards them. That is to say to love one's enemies.<sup>62</sup> Thus he was trying to make his enemies, his friends.

### **1.5. A Life of Simplicity and Hard Work**

It is to be noted that the religious with the profession of the vow of poverty should work hard. They should not be exempted from the universal rule of work. They should work hard at least for their own livelihood. A poor man should work hard for survival whether he likes it or not.

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59 Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 160. See also Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 6-7.

60 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 6. See CWC, Vol. IV, *The Letters*, VI/3, 73.

61 Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 176.

62 Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 176.



Man should work hard is the first command of the Creator: "By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread" (Gen 3:19). In the words of Saint Paul, "Anyone unwilling to work should not eat" (2 Thes 3:10). Taking advantage of the hard work of the rest of the community would be doing injustice. By refusing to work hard one turns out to be a parasite in the community. One should also support those members of the community who are unable to work. Hard work is the sign of poverty which the religious should certainly bear. It is equally important that the religious should help the poor around them not merely distributing what they receive from other generous people, but also from the fruits of their own hard work. It is mandatory that the religious should bear the sign of poverty, namely, hard work, and share the lot of the poor people. The poor have not only to work hard but also to face all the associated ordeals like humiliations, rejections, denial of rights and so on. This was true in the bitter life experiences of the Fathers during their prolonged effort to set up the press. The motivating force behind it was the love for and loyalty to the Church, thereby to strengthen and ensure her wellbeing. They had to work hard for the realization of this project for three long years. For this purpose they had to undertake difficult and long journeys, some of them with no avail. It was a tiresome business because those days there were no good roads and comfortable vehicles and communication facilities as today. Sometimes the climatic conditions were also not favourable. In spite of all these adverse factors and even health problems the Fathers undertook frequent journeys to fulfil their goal. Moreover, they had to undergo all sorts of human conditions such as humiliations and embarrassments, they had to take time and be patient, sometimes their faith in God was tested and tried, they had to depend on so many people, and beg for money and sometimes they were rejected and disgraced. However, they did not lose heart or give up their trust in God or stop seeking help from people. Finally, with God's

blessing and good people's cooperation they realized their goal.<sup>63</sup>

Saint Kuriakose lived a very ordinary life with hard work and was very poor, and simple. He lived in a single room where there was an ordinary table with few books on, a simple bed with a pillow, and a plain chair. The Cot was also too simple and the mattress was very thin and rough with a single pillow which was very ordinary. There was no provision for mosquito net and there was no bed sheet either. His food was very simple and ordinary. He was very happy with the common meal and he demanded nothing special. Even when he was sick and laid up, he tried to manage with the common meal. The common meal of that time consisted of *kanni* (rice gruel) and one curry for breakfast; cooked rice (*choru*) with two curries for lunch and some *kanni* at 4 o'clock in the evening and cooked rice with two items of curry for dinner.<sup>64</sup> When Archbishop Baccinelli once visited him in his room in the monastery he was surprised to see the poorly furnished simple room of his Vicar General. There was no place to sit and the Archbishop made him sit on the chair and he sat on a box.<sup>65</sup> He was a hard working person who rarely got time to rest. In spite of his ill health and old age he worked very hard making journeys up and down for various pastoral and other official purposes. Forgetting himself he dedicated his life for God and his people. There were many instances of his hard work. For example,

In his zeal to construct the convent, he [Saint Kuriakose] in the beginning of the season of [second] monsoon [September-October] went to the parishes in Malayattoor side. While at Cheranalloor he was laid up with rheumatic fever,

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63 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 160-161.

64 Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 448.

65 Testified by the eye-witness Fr. Ambrose Thoppil who died in 1938.



and was unconscious for two days. Thoroughly exhausted he came back to the monastery in Koonammavu. The swelling in the leg aggravated and burst. And gradually he recovered.<sup>66</sup>

He was a person of simple living and hard work who had no possessions.

### 1.6. Saint Kuriakose: A Prophet

The achievements of Saint Kuriakose were numerous in pastoral and social fields, but more than anything else, he was a prophet of his times and for all times. A prophet is a person directly called by God in order to accomplish a specific task in the name of God. It is a call and a mission simultaneously. Saint Kuriakose was a prophet of this kind, a man who was called and a man who was sent into a society of his times, to speak and to work in the name of God in a particular context, especially in a context that is critical for a community.<sup>67</sup> In the Apostolic Letter *Witnesses of Joy*, Pope Francis said: "I am counting on you 'to wake up the world,' since the distinctive sign of consecrated life is prophecy."<sup>68</sup> Saint Kuriakose was a prophet who awakened not only nineteenth century, but also twentieth century and continues even today. He awakened not only his own context - Kerala church and society - but also the whole world. It was his prophetic personality that made him what he was for the society of his times and what he is for us today. All genuine prophets had a profound intimacy with God. They always remained on the side of God and evaluated things from a God perspective. For them everything was derived from and destined to God. They had no exclusive secular understanding of the world. They always lived in a divine milieu. This divine intimacy of the prophets was often implied in their

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66 Quoted in Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 174.

67 Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 428.

68 Pope Francis, *Witnesses of Joy*, Vatican City: Liberia Editrice, 2014, II/2.

very names. As we have already noted the baptismal name of Saint Chavara was Kuriakose and in Greek it means 'one who belongs to the Lord.' His new way of life in Mannanam at *tapasbhavan*, also known as *darsanaveedu* on the *bethrauma* are symbols of the yearning of the soul to be in union with God. From his writings it is evident that he always kept this union with Christ throughout his life. This intimacy with the Lord is the basis of his manifold altruistic activities for the Church and society. The establishment of the *tapasbhavanam* and the religious community instituted for women in 1866, both served the Church and society equally well. Immense good have been ensued to the people of Kerala through the establishment of them.<sup>69</sup> Those days books were rare and Bible also was scarce in the seminaries. It is to be noted that in this context seminary education was important, and attached to the monasteries Saint Kuriakose founded seminaries. These seminaries could bring about a paradigm shift, a new era, in the field of theological education among the St Thomas Christians.

Another characteristic of a prophet is a profound sense of history. "It is the power of discernment by which one is able to understand events and their implications for the total context of his life. To live with the sense of history means to be sensitive to the needs, concerns, and problems of all persons."<sup>70</sup> Here history refers to a dynamic process and interaction between the past, present and the future. All of us are historical beings, carrying with us the dynamic interplay of past, present and future. Every moment we move from one into the other. Thus history is one of the dynamic realities, guiding the destiny of humanity. The OT prophets were able to see and evaluate the past, present and future in their close relatedness. They had their faith in the past, love for the present and their hope for the future. Their faith

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69 Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 445.

70 Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 428.

in the past enabled them to see it as something guided by God; their love for the present compelled them to critically evaluate it in the light of the past and commit themselves to it. In doing so they had to condemn many things which were not in tune with the ideals of an authentic community, such as externalism in cult, practice of social injustice and the overall breakdown of the covenant religiosity. They were not prepared to make any compromise on vital issues. This bold standpoint of the prophets to uphold the present was possible precisely because of their hope about the future. It is true that the future is shaped by the present, and God is the author of it. But the prophets were not mere onlookers of the future, rather they were collaborators with God, doing what they could and leaving the rest to God. When we look at the life of Saint Kuriakose and evaluate it we can find that as we have seen, he also had the profound sense of history. He was sure that the Church in Kerala had an authentic apostolic tradition and a genuine spiritual wealth, which got blurred and confused through the historical happenings of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries with the arrival of Portuguese colonial powers. So he worked hard for a spiritual renewal of the St Thomas Christians by introducing various liturgical innovations. Another characteristic of his prophetic mission was that as Jesus stood for the salvation of every one of the society, his services were all-encompassing. It is apparent in the various services he rendered to the society that could touch and transform every dimension of human life. For example, the establishment of schools, the educational and social uplift of all the people, the pain he took to establish the printing press, the evangelization of the outcastes, his effort to keep the unity of the Church, the liturgical renewal programmes, uplift of women etc.

### **1.7. Saint Kuriakose: An Educationist**

As Fr. Valerian testifies Saint Kuriakose was an educationist. He was concerned not only with the seminarians but also

with the education of the laity. Until his time the Church in Kerala has not achieved much in the field of education. If today the Catholics of Kerala are literate it is largely due to the farsighted policy of Saint Kuriakose Elias, in the establishment of a school for each parish. According to him the society would ever remain downtrodden if it did not move according to the signs of the times. He was of the opinion that “just as without eyes, one cannot see the material things of the world, so also, without knowledge, it will be impossible for us to see or understand the reality of the world that is above, and the Lord who dwells therein. As those who have no eyes are called ‘blind,’ so too, those who have no learning should be called spiritually blind.”<sup>71</sup> Therefore he decided to concentrate more on education and in 1846 he started a Sanskrit school close to the monastery at Mannanam.<sup>72</sup> It was open to all sections of people irrespective of caste, creed, or colour and thereby he planned to strengthen even the marginalized people having in touch with Sanskrit, which was the language of the nobles and aristocrats of the society. Thereby he was conveying the message that the doors of knowledge should not be shut against any one. He had a universal outlook and his approach towards the marginalized and the downtrodden was praiseworthy. He became a trailblazer for the kingdom values like justice, equality and freedom. He was convinced that a society can develop and progress only through education. Later he tried to establish and develop as many schools as possible. The founding fathers had the desire to do whatever is good to others -*kannilkandanammaellamcheyuka*- in the vision and experience of the love of God.<sup>73</sup>

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71 CWC, Vol. IV, *Letters*, IX/2.

72 K. C. Chacko, *Lead Kindly Light*, 98.

73 Thomas Kadankavil, *Chavara: A Multidimensional Saint*, Kottayam: Deepika Books, 2014, 108.

Moreover, the contributions and the daring step Saint Kuriakose had taken in the fields of education and social work are well known. As already mentioned the school was opened to all sections of people, which was unthinkable in the caste-ridden society of those days.<sup>74</sup> His concern and love for the outcaste and the downtrodden was manifested in his starting two schools for them, one at Mannanam and another at Arpookara. He was interested not only in the spiritual realm of the people but also in the material field. His efforts and achievements in these areas were revolutionary in those days. The Syrian community was far behind others in learning. At that time, hardly anybody, including the clergy had higher education. There were English schools run by the non-Catholics but entry to them and the study of English language were forbidden for the Catholics. It was in this context that Saint Kuriakose's endeavours to promote education got importance.

Later he took leadership to make school education more popular and available to all sections of people in the society. He even provided books, clothes and noon meals for the poor and Dalit children to encourage them to attend school and he invested some capital for their ongoing support.<sup>75</sup> He had a wide vision and he considered all as children of God and deserved equal treatment. The catechetical schools which he started at various places were an indication of his concern for the integral well being of people, especially the poor and the needy. He started other schools of more secular nature, but provisions were made to educate not only the

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74 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 42-45.

75 He faced lot of problems initially because there were so many drop outs from the part of Dalits due to their poverty and their parents wanted their children to go for work rather than study. Nowadays the government is providing all these facilities for the children, but Saint Kuriakose was aware of the importance of education even those days and he was the pioneer who provided education to the children providing whatever possible necessities to bring them to the School.

upper class people but also others. As already noted one of the revolutionary innovations attributed to Saint Kuriakose was the setting up of a school each attached to all parishes. By this he was perpetuating his vision to the end of the world and was insisting the Catholic Church in India the responsibility of building it up to meet the needs of the time. Through this he insisted that the Church has to lay a solid foundation for a life-long process of growth in every human being towards a fully human and fully mature individual. He even threatened them to close down the Churches which failed to comply with this order.<sup>76</sup> This idea was conceived by Saint Kuriakose and the circular was written by him who was then the Vicar General of the Syrians. The intention was that, attached to every parish a school should be established for the education of children. But this was a kind of private school and a regular English school was started at Mannanam in 1885. In all his undertakings he had in mind the wellbeing of all sections of the society. His vision was an egalitarian society in the cast ridden context of Kerala. So he had an inclusive and integral outlook. The greatest gift he could offer was the Christian faith which was considered the prerogative of high caste people.<sup>77</sup>

## **2. Pastoral Contributions of Saint Kuriakose**

Saint Kuriakose had a deep rooted pastoral orientation which he had inherited from the Dominican ideal of Fr. Thomas Palackal and the pastoral background of Fr. Porukara. "The pastoral commitment was, in fact the mandate they had received from the Vicar Apostolic Maurilius Stabilini when he permitted them to start the religious life." It is obvious

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76 R. Venkataraman, "Chavara Represents Indian Christianity at Its Best," Paul Kalluveetil & Paulachan Kochappilly, eds., *The Lord of Heaven & Earth: Chavara Studies in Honour of Fr. Lucas Vithuvattickal CMI*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2004, 87. See also K. C. Chacko, *Lead Kindly Light*, 98.

77 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 43.



from his words: "If you, the one or two, who know something, go into solitude, who will be there to teach the people? If you so wish it, build a monastery, which will be useful for all."<sup>78</sup> They integrated pastoral commitment into their vision of monastic spirituality which was the original charism bestowed upon them. Thus their life style was a blending of prayer and action. In serving others Saint Kuriakose followed the model of Jesus Christ, as a good shepherd he was committed to the care of his sheep doing good to everybody. As Jesus Christ, he was committed to continue the liberating mission of Jesus as a true lover of the Church. The condition of the nineteenth century Kerala society had challenged him to initiate various programmes for the under privileged and the marginalized of the society. His dedication has opened up new ways of showing solidarity with the downtrodden and working for their uplift. His initiatives to respond meaningfully to social issues of Kerala have brought forth integral development of the Church and society. His life and apostolate were guided and inspired by the missionary manifesto of Jesus in the synagogue at Nazareth (Lk 4:18-21). He dedicated his whole life totally for God and his people. He was very much concerned about the poor and the marginalized of the society. He desired that the all pervading love of God should reach all realms of the society, to the rich and the poor, the marginalized and the oppressed. Although the slogan 'option for the poor' was unknown to him he literally followed that ideal. His service extended to all those who suffer from any form of poverty, whether economic, cultural or spiritual, like the marginalized, and to all the under privileged of the society. He asked his parishioners to open an orphanage for the aged and the destitute, and to prepare them for a holy death.<sup>79</sup> He was a protector of the poor and destitute. He established a confraternity in his home town at

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78     CWC, Vol. IV, *The Letters*, 74.

79     Thomas Kadankavil, *Chavara: A Multidimensional Saint*, 45-46.

Kainakari. Such organizations started by him were first of its kind at that time. He suggested many other ways to help the poor and the needy. For example he asked the parishes to educate annually one child at their expense. He encouraged the Christians to feed the poor in the Churches and in public places and to give clothing to women and children. This reveals his love and concern for the poor and the less fortunate. He was concerned with the least of the society. He reminded his parishioners, "it is the Lord's command to men to extend mutual help. ... You should never let a beggar leave your home empty handed, for if God sees their tears, he will demand an account of it from you. Never deny or delay just wages to the labourers."<sup>80</sup>

According to him, spirituality is not being with God alone in the chapel but also reaching out to the needy in their difficulties. As Pope Francis reminds us we should go to the marginalized people, to the periphery, to those who are deprived of everything. Saint Kuriakose was always ready at the service of the children of God whenever they sought his help. His charitable mind manifested in various ways and his selfless services were many, numerous and uncountable. He was convinced that the aim of evangelization is the total transformation of people and society. Therefore he started many pioneering apostolates which show his concern for the well being of others. His contributions in the field of spiritual renewal, education, family apostolate and mass media were motivated by the desire to see growth in others.<sup>81</sup> He extended his services even to those who were hostile to him. As a pioneer in many revolutionary and progressive activities, he had many enemies during his life time. But he was always kind and considerate to them. He was magnanimous enough to seek out those who tried to hinder his work or to humiliate him and promised all sorts of encouragements and co-

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80 CWC, Vol. IV, *The Letters*, X/6, 108.

81 Joseph Xavier, *Mercy in Practice*, 68-69.



operation in all their work. His charitable activities include social welfare, restoration of faith, and salvation of souls.<sup>82</sup> He was a man of moral integrity. When the construction of the convent was going on at Koonammavu there was an urgent need of some money. Under his direction Fr. Geevarghese Thoppil went to different parishes and returned with Rs. 400 received as donations. The need was met with just half of the amount and he gratefully gave back the rest of the money.

According to him service to God is service to humanity. He silently fought against the social inequalities of that period. He was gratefully remembered for his contributions in support of the downtrodden in both the material and spiritual aspects. Moreover, the foundation of two indigenous religious congregations (CMI & CMC) was the natural outcome of his farsighted, other-oriented thinking. The foundation of several monasteries and convents at key localities were equally important contributions. The relentless war he fought against Mar Roccas and party to preserve the Christians under the communion of the Catholic Church and the plans he envisaged for the future of the Church of Saint Thomas Christians were great steps he took to make the Church pastorally effective and spiritually vibrant, without losing its identity and selfhood. It is to be noted here the establishment of various associations and institutions for the poor and disabled to help them. His efforts towards social reformation, beginning with the establishment of a printing press for the better communication and the setting up of schools attached to the Churches in villages were eloquent examples of his option to serve the needy. Moreover, this holy man spent whole of his life for the material and spiritual well being of his brethren.<sup>83</sup> In all his endeavours we can find a desire to do the will of God always with a spirit of

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82     Magi Maria, "Challenges of the Social Apostolate as Followers of Blessed Chavara," *Herald of the East*, Vol. VI (2004) 100.

83     Sebastian Mullooparambil, "The God-Experience of Bl. Chavara," 266.

service and humility. By his constant communion with God he was able to translate Gospel values in his life. "His intimate relationship with Jesus enabled him to be caring, comforting, forgiving and ministering the needy."<sup>84</sup> His love for his brethren was expressed not only through spiritual helps but also through material help, especially to the poor, the destitute and the outcasts. He contacted and persuaded the rich people to contribute their share for the welfare of the needy and the destitute. According to him, they would be deprived of their wealth if they amassed it at the cost of their unfortunate brethren.

He advised the Christians never to send away empty handed the poor who knock at their door, never to withhold the due wages from the workers which would be a serious act of sin to do. ... For their tears would cry out to God for revenge. Fr. Kuriakose Porukara testifies that even when he was sick, he was helping the poor with donations and alms received from the rich.<sup>85</sup>

His love and concern for the poor and suffering were very impressive in his words and deeds. The establishment of catechumenates,<sup>86</sup> schools and the arrangements he made for the noon-feeding of the poor students and providing them cloth and books etc. were examples. Today there is noon-feeding in the schools by the government but in

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84 Mathew Maniampra, *Psycho-Theological Paradigms: In Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Kochi: Chavara Central Secretariat & Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2019, 17.

85 Joseph Kanjiramattathil, *The Pastoral Vision of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1986, 54-55.

86 Catechumenate was an institution of the ancient Church, where potential adult converts to Christianity were given catechetical and liturgical training. Almost all the monasteries of the congregation opened Catechumenates attached to them and many adults and infants were cared for, instructed and baptized every year. It lasted up to the seventh century. See A. Mathias Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 226-228.

the nineteenth century Saint Kuriakose initiated it. In his 'testament' to the parishioners of Kainakari he exhorted them to be just in their dealings with others instead of going greedily after riches. In addition he said: "Be more zealous about other people loving you than fearing you... Do not refrain from giving alms whenever you can."<sup>87</sup>

### **2.1. Directives for Family Renewal**

Being aware of the fact that family is the basic unit and the most decisive factor of the Church and society Saint Kuriakose believed that renewal of them depended much on the revitalization of family. Therefore to strengthen the society we need to empower the family. The supreme rule of the Christian family is mutual love and the consequent unity of mind and heart. He was extremely concerned about Christian families and it is very much evident even in the name he took, Kuriakose Elias of the Holy Family. His pastoral zeal for the renovation of Christian families finds best expression in his lengthy letter addressed to his parishioners. He says, in this world of sufferings and tribulations, the great consolation is to live in a family where love, order and peace reign.<sup>88</sup> In his opinion the essential significance of a family consists in its holiness and fear of God. According to him, one's experiences in the family would decide the quality of one's life on the personal as well as social levels because each person is the product of one's family upbringing. This is based on his devotion to the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph that is handed over to him by his parents. From his childhood onwards the picture of the Holy Family had impressed on him. According to him the Holy Family is the most ideal family which should be the model for all families to inspire them. In addition to it his experience of the good family in which he lived, where the way he was brought up by his parents, especially his

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87     CWC, Vol. IV, *The Letters*, X/6, 108.

88     CWC, Vol. IV, *The Letters*, X/6, 103.

mother. It was a family of God-fearing and loving parents and relatives who moulded his character and prepared him to do the noble things he accomplished in the course of his life.<sup>89</sup> He cherished this experience in his poem *Atmanutapam* gratefully. Another fact was his experience of community life with his fellow religious at Mannanam, Koonammavu and other monasteries, where he had an experience of heaven on earth.<sup>90</sup> In his longest letter to his parishioners at Kainakari which he calls as his testament to the people of Kainakari, a parting message, he presents “Charter of an Ideal Christian Family.” In this letter he touches almost all aspects of family life using impressive stories and incidents. This is an evident testimony of his loving paternal heart which he developed and kept ever alive. He ever wanted to be a good father to his spiritual children as he addressed God the Father and Jesus as *ente nalla appan*. He wrote this document during his illness and it reveals the true spirit of selfless love that motivated him. He focuses on the rules and principles of an ideal Christian family. His concern for Christian formation of those who are entrusted in his care clearly appears in his letter to the Parishners of Kainakari. It contains matters like rule of life for the families, relations with others, business, justice, compensation for workmen, the proper use of things, patience, good reading, spiritual obligations, daily time-table, education of the children etc. In this letter we can find a programme for the renewal and sustenance of Christian families. Although it is addressed to a small few group of families, the practical directions and guidelines in it have a universal significance even today. Moreover, the ideas expressed in this book are very much relevant in today’s context when the families are undergoing tremendous challenges and crises. “Many of his admonitions

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89 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 46.

90 Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 262.

still influence our families and serve as bright beacons that guide our families."<sup>91</sup>

The aim of Saint Kuriakose in writing this letter was "to offer the people of Kainakari a set of definite principles and practices that would assure them a steady growth in their faith life as well as in their social grooming required in a cultured society."<sup>92</sup> He wrote to them: "Accept this as a piece of advice coming from one of your ancestors, keep it sacred, practise it faithfully, and make others, too, practise the same."<sup>93</sup> This letter is a comprehensive plan for a Christian family in which the disciplinary measures and guidelines for the healthy growth of its members are offered in order to become full-fledged members of the Church. He says humility should be the hallmark of a Christian family and the greatest wealth of a family is piety and fear of God.<sup>94</sup> It is important to note that almost hundred years before the Second Vatican Council he offered an affirmative theological vision on families and their vocation in the Church with a definite plan of action. The Council raised the status of family to that of a 'domestic Church' and affirmed that it shares in the perfect holiness of God the father. It is true that in the subsequent years there were many documents that highlight a positive outlook on families and the contemporary Church acclaims the vocation to family life as unique. For example in 1981, Pope John Paul II in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio* affirmed the unique value of family inviting them to love the family with the hope to reinstate its prime place

91 Thomas Kadankavil, "The Christian Family, A Prototype of Heaven on Earth, in the Vision of Bl. Chavara," Paul Kalluveetil & Paulachan Kochappilly, eds., *The Lord of Heaven & Earth: Chavara Studies in Honour of Fr. Lucas Vithuvattickal CMI*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2004, 230.

92 George Kaniarakath, *Saint Kuriakose Chavara: A Teacher of Family Theology*, Kochi: Chavara Central Secretariat & Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2019, 9-10.

93 CWC, Vol. IV, *The Letters*, X/6, 103.

94 Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 264.

in the society. Recently a step further in the Post- Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis on family *Amoris Laetitia* (2016), affirms “family is good news indeed.”<sup>95</sup> Until then there were no known source of a comprehensive plan for a Christian family. ‘Testament of a Loving Father’ written by Saint Kuriakose is widely recognized and its insights and principles are valid and relevant for all times especially in the contemporary context of losing stability of families. In order to transform Christian families into a heavenly abode according to the plan of the Creator practical instructions and suggestions are formulated in this document. Family ties are becoming weaker and weaker in the present world and the cases of divorce are increasing especially by the advent of the nuclear families. He advised the people of Kainakari that they should preserve the testament, each family should take a copy of it, read it every first Saturday of the month and it should be their rule of life. He presents a set of 24 rules for a good family and 16 guidelines for parents who bring up their children. He illustrates it with interesting stories, anecdotes and incidents.<sup>96</sup> He starts this document with the introduction: “A good Christian family is the image of heaven.” The reason for this is that those related by bonds of blood and love live together respecting and obeying the parents peacefully before God and people, seeking eternal salvation according to each one’s state of life.<sup>97</sup> His vision was that every family should be a replica of the heavenly kingdom.

According to him an ideal religious community also should be a family where there should be a family spirit. The model for all families is the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, which in turn is the Holy Trinity of God on earth.

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95 Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation*, Vaticana: Liberia Editrice, 2016, n.1.

96 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 47.

97 Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Testament of a Loving Father*, Introduction.



Accordingly the Holy Trinity is the prototype of all families and of the religious community as well. Saint Kuriakose highlights the idea that the love and unity found within a family should reflect the divine love and unity within the Holy Trinity. Seen in this light, family is considered a divine institution where love, obedience, mutual respect, support, sharing, selfless service etc. should be practised so that the love that exists within the Holy Trinity would be reflected there. This insight is reinforced by Pope Francis: “The Triune God is a communion of love, and the family is its living reflection.”<sup>98</sup> This vision of the family is already clearly stated in the Church teaching, in the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*. “This particular way of ‘following Christ’, [the consecrated life]...expresses in a particular vivid way the *Trinitarian* nature of the Christian life and it anticipates in a certain way that *eschatological* fulfilment towards which the whole church is tending... The consecrated life, thus, becomes a confession and a sign of the Trinity, whose mystery is held up to the Church as the model of every form of Christian life.”<sup>99</sup>

The ‘Testament of a Loving Father’ that Saint Kuriakose prepared for the families and the instructions he gave regarding the upbringing of children are certainly in tune with the insights of modern psychology. According to him bringing up children in the proper way is the grave duty of the parents. Pope Francis is also reinforcing the crucial role of the parents in the faith formation of their children. He says, “the family is thus the place where parents become their children’s first teachers in the faith.”<sup>100</sup> Pope Francis is encouraging the parents the importance of prayer by stating that “the family that prays together stays together.” Parents

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98     Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, n. 11.

99     Pope John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, Vatican City: Liberia Editrice, 1996, nos. 14 and 21.

100    Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, n. 16.

are the prime witnesses of a living relationship with God for their children. Therefore moments of family prayer and acts of devotion can be more powerful for evangelization than any catechism class or sermon.<sup>101</sup> The context in which Saint Kuriakose had written the testament is entirely different from our context. A lot of changes have taken place in the Indian society over the last one and a half century, after he had written this letter. With such a far-sight he had written it that most of the insights and admonitions offered in it are valid for practice at home and society today. His contributions in the field of family renewal are admirable and the instructions and guidelines given in it are relevant even today. His efforts to empower families with Christian ideals have to be appreciated. The social context around us is making us more and more aware that we need to focus more on the empowerment of families because broken families are on the rise day by day.

The cases of divorce are on increase throwing the parental care of the children in the hired hands. The sacredness of the monogamous marriage is being challenged. We find permanent singleness, and various other questionable forms of cohabitation. Families are losing their power, attraction and functions. Family as a cultural value is diminishing its hold and people are less willing to invest time, money and energy in family life but are investing the same for self-satisfaction and self-growth.<sup>102</sup>

In such a situation the contributions of Saint Kuriakose in this field are really worthwhile.

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101 Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, n. 227.

102 Thomas Kadankavil, *Chavara: A Multidimensional Saint*, 25.



## 2.2. Emancipation of Women

The 19<sup>th</sup> century Kerala society was thoroughly caste-ridden. It had the most rigid and complex caste structure and the society was divided into heterogeneous castes based on occupation. The society denied rights of the poor. The lower caste people, the *Pulayas* and the *Parayas* were the most inferior among untouchables. They are believed to be the aborigines of the state and the women as well as the men of these communities suffered so many disadvantages. They were bought and sold like cattle, made to starve, flogged like buffaloes, made to work all the day for a little rice and were considered untouchables.<sup>103</sup> In the particular caste-ridden social context of Kerala women had a very low status in the family and in the society at large. They were extremely underprivileged socially, educationally, economically and religiously. Saint Kuriakose was a man of holistic vision and he was well aware of the plight of women at that time. Empowerment of women was a constant concern of Saint Kuriakose because the condition of women was very miserable in the existing social context. Patriarchal system was prevalent in the families and the girls developed a low self-esteem. They were not allowed to go out from their homes and denied education. They do not go out for shopping and do not play with other boys and girls. They were not involved in the decision making in the families, in the Church or in the society. They were given in marriage at a very young age. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century society of Kerala women had no equality with men in any fields. They did not have any right or title to the family property.<sup>104</sup> Their education was limited to that

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103 Jossy Maria, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara: The Pioneer of Social and Ecclesial Reform*, Kochi: Chavara Central Secretariat & Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2024, 48-50.

104 Saint Kuriakose took a revolutionary step in this regard. When his parents and brother died due to epidemic and there was none to take care of the family except his sister-in-law and her daughter there was lot of pressure from his relatives to return from the seminary to continue the family lineage. But he stood firm in his priestly vocation and prudently

of acquiring basic skills in reading and writing in the village school called *Kalari*. When he envisioned the founding of the Congregation of Mother of Carmel (CMC) his aim was the emancipation of women and the wholesome development of the society. One of the primary aims of Saint Kuriakose in founding the women congregation was to strengthen the social status of women.<sup>105</sup> For that purpose as a first step he introduced education facilities for women as one of the most important scheme of service. However, he was aware that education alone would not be sufficient enough to solve the burning issues of the society. He did not want to make education merely academic and therefore he introduced vocational training to the system, which was open to the weak and destitute women of the neighbouring places.<sup>106</sup> He included topics like cooking, painting, stitching, handicrafts, gardening etc. in the curriculum. This enabled them to have economic freedom and made them financially independent. Moreover, he provided books for them, taught them different languages, encouraged their reading habit and the art of writing. In all these his intention was to prepare the women as catalysts of change and transformation in the society.

The objective of founding the women congregation was clearly mentioned. “Besides striving for *their own spiritual realization* they [the members of the congregation] have to

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took a courageous step and entrusted his sister, his inheritance and the responsibility to take care of the family believing that his brother’s daughter would continue his family line. Thereby he was upholding the noble ideal that a woman too can continue the family lineage which has not been fully assimilated and honoured by the Syrian community even today. Thomas Kadankavil, “The Christian Family, a Prototype of Heaven on Earth, in the Vision of Bl. Chavara,” 217-218.

105 Thomas Felix, “Dedicated to the Cause of the Sick and the Poor,” Paul Kalluveetil & Paulachan Kochappilly, eds., *The Lord of Heaven & Earth: Chavara Studies in Honour of Fr. Lucas Vithuvattickal CMI*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2004, 168.

106 Louis Malieckal, “The Legacy of St Chavara’s Pioneering Religious Life: Challenges for the Consecrated Life in India,” *Herald of the East: Dharmaram Journal of Chavara Studies*, Vol. 10, 2 (2014) 263.

*teach other girls catechism and the practice of virtues, and train them in some handicrafts.*"<sup>107</sup> He wanted to enhance the dignity of women and thereby improve the quality of life in the family. By founding a religious congregation for women he intended to empower women folk. Besides attaining personal holiness, through the members of this congregation he aimed to give education and training to girls, thereby future mothers would be enlightened to instruct and guide their children.<sup>108</sup> Therefore it was meant to be an effective agent of the uplift, reform and wellbeing of women. Although the modern ideas of liberation and empowerment of women were unknown to Saint Kuriakose and his contemporaries he was well convinced of the fact that the stability and sanctity of the families depend much on well trained women. He is considered the pioneer of women's emancipation and the leader of women empowerment. Women were not given education and they were very poor educationally, socially, economically, and ecclesiastically. His vision on women was a revolutionary step at that time. He was a farsighted man and he had a lofty ideal regarding the status of women in the family and according to him women should be honoured and respected in the family, in the society and in the nation. Therefore he considered the liberation of women as an effective means to improve the quality of life in the family. His aim was to bring the women to the forefront and to reach out to the larger society through these empowered women. He was convinced that the first step for this purpose should be the formation of a group of consecrated women in the Church. His insights and efforts for the empowerment of women were very challenging to the thought-pattern and practices of his time.<sup>109</sup>

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107 CWC, Vol. I, *The Chronicles*, 195.

108 Thomas Felix, "Dedicated to the Cause of the Sick and the Poor," 168.

109 Thomas Kadankavil, "The Christian Family, a Prototype of Heaven on Earth, in the Vision of Bl. Chavara," 227-230.

### 2.3. Renewal of Liturgy

The efforts of Saint Kuriakose for the renewal and adaptation of the liturgy of Malabar Church were remarkable. He updated the Syriac text of the Missal, introduced new liturgical programmes in the Church, like the Forty-Hour adoration of Blessed Sacrament, popularized Sunday homilies, established catechumenates etc. All these activities were the expressions of his overflowing God experience. Being aware of the significance of liturgy in the life of the faithful and the Church he spent lot of his time and energy to codify the rules and regulations for the Holy Mass, compiled a breviary systematically codifying and abridging the traditional one in the Syrian rite and sent it to Rome for permission to print it. Saint Kuriakose was very particular that Holy Mass is celebrated in an orderly manner. In his opinion, public worship should be performed with decorum and solemnity. But there was no book available which gives the correct rubrics in detail. Therefore there was no uniformity in the Eucharistic celebration. For this purpose whatever traditional matter was available he made use of and for the rest he borrowed from the Latin sources.<sup>110</sup> Thus he took the trouble to prepare a book called *Tukasa* which contains the rubrics of the Syrian Mass for the use of priests. For almost a century this served as the only means of ensuring a systematic and uniform manner of Eucharistic celebrations in Syro-Malabar Church. The Divine Office which was in use those days was too lengthy and very badly preserved. He collected old manuscripts from different places and discussed with several *Malpans* and made necessary changes. Though it was a tiresome work he took pain to write down the whole breviary neatly and orderly and thus prepared a handy book of Divine Office. This shows his concern for the spiritual life and growth of priests and people. He adapted and translated the Holy Saturday ceremony from Latin to Syriac

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110 Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 266.

for use in the Syrian Churches. Moreover, he contributed in the restoration and updating of the liturgical calendar of the Syrian community. He prepared a liturgical calendar for the use of Syro-Malabar Church based on the ancient sources which unfolds the salvation history centred on the redemptive work of Christ. This was prepared and printed in the year 1865. Until then, they were using the Latin Rite calendar which ignored the Syrian practices like the division of the year into liturgical seasons.<sup>111</sup> For the spiritual revival and renewal of the Church he adopted some pious devotions like the forty-hour adoration, devotions to the Holy Family, the Rosary and Carmelite Scapular etc. from the Latin rite because he found them helpful to deepen the spiritual life of his brethren.<sup>112</sup> These popular devotions contributed much to foster the simple faith of the ordinary people.

One can find the inner flame of a soul burning with love of God and concern for spiritual life and growth of priests and people who spent lot of time and energy to introduce numerous popular devotions. He prepared an Office for the Dead and funeral services which was printed and published in 1882.<sup>113</sup> Some of the other devotions he introduced were the Way of the Cross, Eucharistic adoration, devotion to Blessed Virgin Mary and devotion to St. Joseph etc. He gives central place to the Holy Eucharist in the life of Christians and advices them to participate in the mass if possible every day. If it is not possible for all the members, let at least one or two of them go in turn every day. It was his personal love and profound faith in the Eucharistic presence of our Lord Jesus Christ that prompted him to do all these. He intended that all should know and love the Eucharistic Lord. The

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111 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 32-34.

112 Thomas Mampra, "Kuriakose Elias Chavara: A Saint for Our Times," *Herald of the East: Dharamaram Journal of Chavara Studies*, Vol. 10, 1 (2014) 34.

113 Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 275.

Holy Eucharist is the mystery of the universal availability of the Lord so that anybody who wills can easily meet him personally, anywhere, at any time.

His zeal for the renewal and sanctification of the clergy he extended to the laity also. Hence for the renewal of the parishes he focused on the parish missions with supreme confidence. The religious priests were divided into groups of three and four and distributed in Latin and Syrian Churches and preached spiritual retreats there. It was not common or effective in Kerala at that time. He himself was an eloquent and effective preacher and had preached in almost all churches of Kerala in different occasions. Soon after his ordination he started to undertake preaching ministry. Every year twenty to thirty retreats were preached in the parishes.<sup>114</sup> This was followed by a pastoral visit of the Shepherd himself. During the celebration of the Sunday mass every priest was advised to preach regularly. He tried his level best to make it a regular practice in all the Churches thereafter. Thereby he intended to make the faithful real vehicles of the Gospel. As many of his colleagues testify he was zealous in the service of God without any consideration for worldly attachments.<sup>115</sup> Through preaching, teaching and print media he could influence and challenge the rigidly conservative mind-set of the Syro-Malabar community. It is to be noted that his far-sightedness in initiating such retreats what is now known as annual retreats or parish retreats for people under the auspices of parish Churches is remarkable. Talks, classes, prayer, confessions, liturgy etc. were the various components of such retreats. Significantly family counselling was also given as part of it thereby reconciling families, divided couples and broken relationships are essential features of these retreats. Indubitably, these retreats contributed much

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114 Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 218. Thus they casted out the reign of devil and brought salvation to people.

115 K. C. Chacko, *Lead Kindly Light*, 106-107.



for the effective renewal of personal, familial, as well as parish and societal life. From then onwards it has become a common practice in every parish. Saint Kuriakose was convinced of the importance of the Word of God in the life of the Christian community and according to him it should be properly nurtured by the divine Word. Everything was created by the Word. According to him, the existence and identity of the Church is derived fully from God's Word. The Church is built upon the Word of God and it is born from and lives by the Word.

#### **2.4. Contributions in the Field of Press and Print Media**

Among the epoch making initiatives the most important, far-reaching, illuminating, all embracing, edifying and even sanctifying field of activity by Saint Kuriakose was that of Printing. Among the means of social communication, press is a very powerful force. It is one of the useful methods to the learning process. He was convinced that to communicate knowledge, Christian doctrines and values to people the best means is print media. He pointed out the lack spiritual care for the people. He was a pastor who really wanted to form the faithful in true Christian spirit. At a time when media and modern communications were not much in use, in spite of all difficulties he wanted to establish a printing press.<sup>116</sup> To start a press in those days was really a daring initiative and it was a selfless service from his part for the benefit of the Church and society. It cost a huge amount of money and they did not have ready cash with them and when the project was completed they were literally bankrupt. They contributed out of their poverty for this purpose without expecting any profit for themselves. As already mentioned, they had to undergo a lot of hard work for three years and also humiliating and embarrassing experiences. It was not an easy task rather it was an arduous work. They had to undertake difficult and long journeys, go through all kinds

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116 Joseph Kanjiramattathil, *Pastoral Vision of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 76.

of human situations and hardships, and there were times when their trust in God was tested and tried, they had to depend on so many people, almost go begging for help and money.<sup>117</sup> “The motive behind establishing a press was due to the spiritual poverty of the faithful and that of the clergy was to a great extent owing to the lack of good books on Christian doctrine and other spiritual matters.”<sup>118</sup>

The only books available at that time in these matters were in Tamil which were not of much use to the common people as many of them did not know Tamil. The only means at the disposal of Saint Kuriakose and his colleagues those days for the spiritual enlightenment of the faithful were preaching in its various forms. Consequently, he found that a printing press would be a very effective means for the spiritual strengthening of the community. The tremendous impact the printing presses have had upon the Catholic life in our country is beyond our grasp. The prayer books, devotional books, the Scriptures and the numerous other timely publications emerging from these presses have permeated every Catholic home in our country. The first book came out from St. Josephs’ Press Mannanam was *Jnana Piusham*. “Without much exaggeration, one could assert that the prayer books from Mannanam would have literally shown many the way to heaven.”<sup>119</sup> At the time of dissensions, difficulties and misunderstandings, various periodicals, like dailies, weeklies, monthlies, annuals, special numbers, serial publications and well informed authoritative books were published in defence of truth. They sustained the spirit of truth and loyalty. The contribution of the Catholic Press was immense for the preservation of moral values and social

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117 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 40.

118 Joseph Kanjiramattathil, *The Pastoral Vision of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 78.

119 K. C. Chacko, *Lead Kindly Light*, 100.



justice in the country.<sup>120</sup> Spiritually the faithful profited very much from the books printed from this press. The printing of *Nazrani Deepika* was a milestone in the media history of India itself. Later it was abridged as *Deepika* came out from this press in 1887.<sup>121</sup>

Saint Kuriakose undertook numerous social and charitable activities to reach out to the people. All the pioneering activities were very challenging because it was started with minimum financial support. For example the uplifting of *Dalits*, *Upavisala* (House of Destitute), association of confraternity and fund raising programs for charitable purposes. The long cherished dream of Saint Kuriakose was that, in Malabar there was not a religious house ('*Tapasu Bhavanam*') even for the priests. Consequently many good things are not being realized here. Hence he earnestly desired to start a religious institute ('*Darsana Veedu*') at least for the priests.<sup>122</sup> He even dedicated his first Holy Mass for the realization of this dream.<sup>123</sup> The purpose of Saint Kuriakose was that the Syro-Malabar Church was barren (*Macci*) without having a saint-offspring and the faithful are spiritually blind (*Jnanakurudanmar*). As a solution to this impoverished situation he wanted to have a monastery at least for the priests. The nature and goal of these institutes were well expressed in the names they adopted. *Tapasu Bhavanam* means a house of discipline (*tapas*) where virtue is regularly practised which can generate wisdom (*darsana*). For this purpose one has to stay permanently in a place as in one's own house (*veedu*). The Syriac word *Bes Raumma*, house in the highest, also refers to the same meaning.<sup>124</sup>

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120 K. C. Chacko, *Lead Kindly Light*, 101.

121 Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 353.

122 Thomas Panthaplackal, *A Pearl Truly Indian: Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Ernakulam: CMI Generalate, 2005, 13.

123 CWC, Vol. I, *Chronicles*, 25.

124 Thomas Kadankavil, *Chavara: A Multidimensional Saint*, 72.

The Syro-Malabar Bishop's Conference characterized him as a 'man of prayer' saying that 'he practised all the Christian virtues and that in a heroic degree.'<sup>125</sup> Moreover, 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.<sup>126</sup> Bishop Bernardine Baccinelli constituted him as the Vicar General for the Syrians of the Vicariate.

## **2.5. Humble Selfless Services**

Saint Kuriakose was an extremely active and dynamic person. He pioneered a number of new initiatives for the spiritual, religious and social uplift of Kerala society, and in that way was a man ahead of his times. His contributions were in the fields of promotion of Catholic Religious Life, Spiritual Renewal of Kerala Church, Advancement of Education, Social Involvement for the Uplift of the Poor and the marginalized, and Literary Works. His concern for the poor, sick and dying comes out very powerfully in his letter to the people at Kainakari on 15 October 1869. He can be considered a patron saint for the sick and dying and people preparing for a happy death. We can find many palliative care centres today all over the world but he was the pioneer in this field in those days. To come up with such an original idea one needs a burning love for those who are sick, old and destitute. His concern and regard for the poor and suffering were very impressive in his words and actions. Caring for the sick, suffering and the destitute is an act of mercy and compassion. According to him the Lord will be so much pleased in our services to the sick and suffering.<sup>127</sup> We have to be aware that it is Christ himself who is present in such people. As we have noted his love and concern for

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125 The details of it we shall discuss in the following chapter.

126 Thomas Panthaplackal, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara: Great Soul of India*, Kakkanad: Chavara Central Secretariat, Chavara Hills, 2013, 24-25.

127 CWC, Vol. IV, 1982, *The Letters*, IX/7, 123.

the poor and suffering got institutionalized in the *Upavisala* or *Dharmasala* at Kainakari. While encouraging and pleading his parishioners to open an orphanage at their own expense he extols nursing profession as having highest order of value. He can be considered a potent mediator and a patron saint of those of our brethren who labour in the field of medicine with untold hidden sufferings and hardships.<sup>128</sup> He advised them that it should be run by their own contribution and from the coconut trees set apart for the church.<sup>129</sup> It is a sign of his universal love and all-round compassion. It is still functioning at Kainakari until today. There instruction in faith is given to those who desire it.

According to him to help the invalid at the moment of death is the greatest virtue a man can perform for him for the last time. He requested them to start a 'Confraternity of Happy Death' and also build a modest 'House of Charity' to accommodate and serve the destitute, aged and street beggars. He points out how important it is to prepare ourselves and others for a salutary death and how important it is to love the sick and the dying. According to him, the assistance rendered to the sick and the dying is not merely a matter of helping them to have a good confession and such other spiritual supports, but it includes also the care and nursing of the sick and aged, providing them with good food, neat clothes, comfortable shelter, medical treatment, psychological support, and above all personal attention and love.<sup>130</sup> Now many palliative care centres are present all over the world. He demanded them to visit and help the sick, especially those on the death bed following the examples of saints like Francis Assisi, many nobles, princes, and princesses of Europe etc. He asked them to take turns

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128 Thomas Kadankavil, *Chavara: A Multidimensional Saint*, 107.

129 CWC, Vol. IV, *The Letters*, IX/7, 127. Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 259.

130 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 46.

so that they are always be near the dying, helping him/her to have a good death. They were asked to form voluntary groups who would visit the sick in hospitals and even in families and nurse them or would if necessary, take them to the 'House of Charity'. They have to do all this by begging alms and thus collecting funds.<sup>131</sup> Besides this he advised the members to adopt a poor family in the neighbourhood and to provide them with food and clothes on the feast of Saint Joseph. All poor people in the locality were invited to the monastery on that day. All these show his universal love and all-round compassion. He advised the sick, not only the sick but anyone those who desire God-experience, to offer God everything of himself, the pulse beat of his veins, winking of the eyes, every breath and each little chirping of the birds, and everything in which one attend as prayer.<sup>132</sup>

## 2.6. Formation of the Clergy

One of the urgent needs of the Church in Kerala at that time was priestly formation. According to Saint Kuriakose "those who have no learning are spiritually blind. 'And if one blind person guides another, both will fall into a pit.'" (Mt. 15:14). Although the St Thomas Christians claim ancient origin, they did not have the necessary knowledge and they lacked the seed and sprouting of wisdom of the sages. So there was the necessity of learned, prudent and virtuous priests for the growth of the Church. In order to solve this problem he decided to erect a seminary with the consent of the bishop and there first of all he planned to start courses on languages like, Malayalam, Tamil, Syriac and Latin. His plan was that if any of the boys who study in the seminary desire to dedicate themselves to priesthood when they come to maturity, and if the superiors find them fit for priesthood, they would be

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131 Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 261.

132 CWC, Vol. IV, *The Letters*, VII/3, 78. Thomas Kadankavil, *Chavara: A Multidimensional Saint*, 88. See also Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 336.

selected and teach them theology and other subjects related to priestly life. But in order to erect a seminary and appoint competent teachers to teach, a big amount of money was necessary. In order to meet this need it was decided that every year, on a fixed date, after the accounts of the Church have been audited, one tenth of the income be contributed for the seminary. Along with this a modest monthly allowance also be added and given regularly to a special deputy appointed for this purpose.<sup>133</sup> But later this contribution was reduced to five percent. A circular was sent to all parishes with the signature of the Vicar Apostolic. In the circular the Vicar Apostolic expressed his deep concern for the Christians under him and the financial crisis he was experiencing for the construction of a seminary and the maintenance of seminarians and their teachers. It was because of this constraint he was appealing to the Churches for the special contribution. Another method employed to improve the income of the vicariate was called *pidiyari*<sup>134</sup> system. This was introduced first by Fr. Geevarghese Thoppil for the construction of the Pulincunnu Monastery and then it was expanded to the whole Vicariate. This system was also made use of the expenses of catechumens and catechumenates. In addition to this there was the introduction of the practice called *kettutengu* i.e. reservation of one of the coconut trees of a family for the Church purposes. This was introduced by Saint Kuriakose by the advice of Fr. Geevarghese Thoppil for the needs of the monastery at Mannanam. Later it became more common and spread all over Kerala.<sup>135</sup>

Being the Vicar General of the Syro-Malabar Church from 1861-1871, he persistently tried to ensure proper training for

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133 CWC, Vol. IV, *The Letters*, IX/2, 96f.

134 *Pidiyari* means 'a handful of rice.' Whenever they take rice to cook a meal, each Catholic family is asked to put away a handful of it as a means of raising funds for a special purpose. See Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 166.

135 Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 250.

priests, because as Leopold Beccaro, the first biographer of Saint Kuriakose points out even as a young cleric, he was aware of the fact that “an uneducated priest was not only inefficient to do anything worthwhile in his pastoral work, but may be even detrimental to the salvation of souls.”<sup>136</sup> His seminary formation helped the candidates to contribute in the renewal of the society and fight against injustice. During those days priestly formation was under the *Malpans* and Father Palackal and Father Porukara were the *Malpans* of the seminary formation started at Mannanam. Saint Kuriakose entered this field as assistant and collaborator, gradually became the main formator of the priests. When Father Thomas Palackal died in 1841, bishop Francis Xavier appointed Father Porukara and Saint Kuriakose as *Malpans*. Later when Father Porukara also left this world the whole responsibility of the seminary and priestly formation vested upon Saint Kuriakose. He was convinced of the fact that priests are the pulse of the Church, and so he spent all his life after ordination for priestly formation. According to him the Saint Thomas Christian community remained infertile (*macci*) without having any saints due to the lack of indigenous leadership in the hierarchy. To make it clear it was because of the impoverished training of the clergy and total absence of native hierarchy. Hence it was necessary that there should be well trained and erudite priests in his Church and he considered seminary training an important apostolate of his congregation. Therefore he erected seminaries attached to the monasteries for the education and formation of priests and these seminaries marked a new era, as we have noted, a paradigm shift in the theological education among the Saint Thomas Christians.<sup>137</sup> Being aware of the need of the

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136 Leopold Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 6.

137 Until then the priestly formation existed in the Malabar Church was *Malpanate* system that had many drawbacks and shortcomings. It was a system where Candidates for priesthood gather under one priest (*Malpan*) and receive formation by staying with him.



hour was the necessity of quality formation for priests he established seminaries for priestly formation as substitute for *Malpanate* system. The purpose of erecting seminaries was to revitalize the moral and spiritual life of the clergy and to provide them deeper knowledge in theology. He introduced proper monitoring system to improve seminary formation. He ordered books of the Divine Office for better recital by the priests, and the ongoing formation of the priests was assured by organizing retreats for them every year and making available spiritual books and other literature.<sup>138</sup> He consolidated parish administration, launched his famous educational programmes and started charitable schemes for the poor and destitute.

## **2.7. Strong Defender of Catholic Unity**

It was on 9 May 1861 that the Chaldean bishop Thomas Roccas from Baghdad arrived in Kochi without any authorization from the Holy Father. For Saint Kuriakose what was important was the authorization from the Holy See. The Holy See had already instructed him not to interfere in the affairs of the Church in Kerala. His role was just to enquire about matters in Kerala and leave. But when he landed in Kochi, the Syrians, misguided by some of their own leaders, with much enthusiasm welcomed him in spite of the repeated warnings from Archbishop Baccinelli, the Vicar Apostolic of Varapuzha and also from Saint Kuriakose. Since Roccas belonged to the same rite as the Syrian Catholics of Malabar they had a soft corner for him and majority of the people including several *Malpans* accepted him. Due to the enthusiastic reception he got from the people, he gradually began to exercise faculties such as ordaining candidates to minor orders and even to priesthood. It had many consequences. Bishop Roccas landed in Kerala and claimed unlawfully jurisdiction over the Malabar Church. Majority of the parishes around 116 of them joined the intruder bishop. This Schism created lot of

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138 Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 445.

confusions and difficulties in the Kerala Church, especially among the Syro-Malabar Christians. It was a storm that shook the Syro-Malabar Church at its very core. Bishop Roccas wanted to meet Saint Kuriakose whom he knew was practically the religious head of Syrians but he did not create an opportunity to meet him. At that critical time Archbishop Baccinelli appointed Saint Kuriakose as the Vicar General for the Syrians and entrusted him and his confreres to face the challenge of Roccas. The bishop found Saint Kuriakose the right person to manage the issue. He said: "For, I am convinced that you have the fortitude, ability and the virtues necessary to carry out this office."<sup>139</sup> Saint Kuriakose immediately started to work hard to convince the people that bishop Roccas had no permission from the Holy Father, and to persuade him to stop his destructive works in Kerala and go back to his country. It is important to note the role played by Saint Kuriakose even risking his life in sending back the Schismatic bishop. He fought without any compromise with the schismatic bishop and he safeguarded the Church from such an external danger. It was a time of extreme mental agony and physical fatigue for him and with the help of ecclesiastical and civil authorities, and with his characteristic goodness and openness to truth he could send back the intruder bishop. He could bring all the separated parishes back into the mother Church within a short period of time. So by the timely intervention of Saint Chavara the Church was saved from division. Fathers Leopold and Porukara, the early biographers of Saint Kuriakose are of great appreciation for the pastoral concern with which he fought against Roccas. Pope Pius IX hearing about the stability of the faith of Saint Kuriakose and his zeal for saving the people from schism wrote a letter to him of high appreciation and

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139 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 27. See also Thomas Panthaplackal, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara: Great Soul of India*, 24.



deep satisfaction.<sup>140</sup> His deep love for Christ filled him with apostolic zeal and he worked hard and especially careful to promote the unity of the Church. Today it is all the more important to promote unity in the Church because we are undergoing lot of problems like disunity and disharmony not only from outside the Church but also from inside. Significantly it is necessary that there should be unity with the See of Peter and the universal Church and for that the clergy and the faithful should be encouraged. So we need to pray and work for the unity of the Church as Jesus prayed on the night before his sacrifice on the cross “that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us” (Jn 17:21). Saint Kuriakose could overcome all those difficulties due to his intense charity and prayer and by his constant communion with Christ that was his daily schedule.

## **2.8. Saint Kuriakose A Prolific Writer**

It is a well known fact that Saint Kuriakose was a person who was engaged in so many external activities after his priestly ordination till the end of his life for the building up of the Kingdom of God. He was engaged in a busy schedule of administrative, pastoral and other activities. It is a surprising fact that in the midst of such hectic engagements a person would get time and leisure to write so much. Still he found time to write not because of getting name and fame or for the mere pleasure of writing, but rather from an inner spiritual urge to build up the Malabar Church and for his spiritual children in particular. Although he had an innate talent to write, he had written not according to a worked out plan in advance as a professional writer but spontaneously as opportunities sprang up or according to the promptings of the spirit.<sup>141</sup> He was indeed a versatile writer, who could

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140 Leopold Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 11.

141 Sebastian Poonoly, “Writings of Chavara,” Paul Kalluveettil & Paulachan Kochappilly, eds., *The Lord of Heaven & Earth: Chavara*

write with ease both prose and poem in his native language Malayalam. He learned Tamil and Sanskrit during his pre-seminary period and he had a working knowledge of Latin, Italian and Portuguese and he was well versed in his liturgical language Syriac. He wrote with much variety, poetic flavour, mystic depths and apostolic urgency. His writings reveal his personality to a great extent like his vision of life, his concerns and his spiritual quests.<sup>142</sup>

Most of his works except a few of his letters were written during the last decade of his life (1861-1871) and it present and reflect the final phase of his life and spirituality. So we get a comprehensive picture of his spirituality in his works: *Anastasia's Martyrdom* (1862), *Meditation Colloquies* (1866-1868), *Compunction of the Soul* (1870-71), *Dirge and the Letters*. Soon after the departure of the schismatic bishop Roccas the main concern of Saint Kuriakose was to repair the harm done by the former to the Church of Malabar. At the same time he was also engaged in the matters related to the progress and well being of his own religious community. When he was transferred to Koonammavu in 1864 he was involved in founding and bringing up of the Congregation for women. Along with these activities he was also interested to give literary expression to his own spiritual experiences, reflections and insights in the form of works mentioned above. During the final stage of his life one can notice that he became more and more a contemplative in action. It is to be noted that on the one hand he never ceased to be active; on the other he became more contemplative. That is to say his spirituality was more matured and found expression in selfless acts of charity (*nishkama-karma*). As he was more aware of his approaching end of life, he became more God oriented on the one hand, which is clear from the letters and

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*Studies in Honour of Fr. Lucas Vithuvattickal CMI, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2004, 116.*

142 Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 346.

on the other hand, his love towards others overflowed more and more tenderly and touchingly.<sup>143</sup>

Almost all of his works written in Malayalam were collected and published in four volumes from Mannanam in 1981.<sup>144</sup> These were translated into English and published in 1990 which can be divided into four volumes, the first volume *Chronicles*, second volume *Literary Works*, third *Spiritual Works* and the fourth *Letters*. All of them compiled and published under the title *Complete Works of Chavara*.<sup>145</sup> The *Chronicles* are historical writings and it testifies that he is a responsible historian, and a creative and innovative thinker. Although he was not a trained historian, he narrates the history of the Church of that time with great accuracy. The *Chronicles* and *Letters* are clear sources of information regarding the history of the Church. He used to write a diary in his own handwriting for over a period of forty one years from 1829 to 1870 in Malayalam. He was well aware that the tradition of recording *Chronicles* would serve as great source for future generations to know the past life. Knowing the importance of it in one of the informal letters he had written to the sisters at Koonammavu he refers "Persuade Sr. Anna to write down all the matters. If you write down even silly details without stopping due to idleness, after sometimes you yourself will feel so happy."<sup>146</sup> The *Chronicles* written by him give an accurate record of the historical events that occurred during the nineteenth century. He gives not merely a sketchy account of facts and figures but a detailed description of men, events and interesting matters. For instance, while

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143 Thomas Kochumuttom, "Blessed Chavara A Man of Prophetic Charism and Contemplative in Action," *Herald of the East*, Vol. VI (2004) 55-56.

144 *Chavarayachante Sampoorana Kruthikal*, an edited collection of the writings of Saint Chavara published in 1985 from CMI Prior General's House, Ernakulam.

145 Published by The Committee for the Cause of Blessed Chavara, Mannanam.

146 CWC, Vol. IV, *The Letters*, VII/I.

mentioning the priestly ordinations of the Chaldean rite he gives the details of the ordination ceremonies which are new in Kerala. When recording facts and figures, about ten places he left out space for noting later the day and year of an event, which remained unfulfilled.<sup>147</sup>

The *Chronicles* of Saint Kuriakose are a rich mine of information for historians of Kerala, both secular and ecclesiastical. In scope and style it has great affinity to the Foundations of Saint Teresa of Avila.<sup>148</sup> It unfolds an authoritative historical record of events in the Church in Malabar, in which he had a pivotal role. It reveals many of the personal qualities of the author. His deep sense of dedication and strong determination, his enduring faith in the Providence of God, his fervent devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, his audacious and even adventurous efforts to attain the precise goals he had fixed, his candour and simplicity, nobility and kindness. It bear witness to his attitude of gratitude, his generosity, his sense to feel with the Church, his obedience and faithfulness to the legitimate authority and teachings of the Church etc.<sup>149</sup> From it one can infer that he was a man of humility, thoroughness, honesty and sensitivity. By writing this *Chronicles* Saint Kuriakose not only set a model for the monasteries and convents he founded, but also inspired his contemporaries and succeeding generations to record the events of ecclesiastical significance and preserve documents.<sup>150</sup>

Saint Kuriakose was a great poet of the nineteenth century Kerala. Among his Literary works there are three

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147 Sebastian Poonoly, "Writings of Chavara," 118.

148 Sebastian Poonoly, "Writings of Chavara," 118.

149 Thomas Mampra, "Kuriakose Elias Chavara: A Saint for Our Times," 35-36.

150 Sebastian Poonoly, "Writings of Chavara," 119.

poems. 1. *Dirge*, or a song of mourning, is a poem of 1162 lines written in a popular chant style called ‘parvam’ or ‘pana’, which is to be sung while keeping vigil over a corpse before funeral. 2. *Anasthasias’s Martyrdom* is a minor epic (Kanda Kavya) of 182 lines describing in a very moving language set to the rhythm of a boat song (*vanchippattu*). It is very popular in Kerala. It describes the martyrdom of the beautiful and holy virgin Anastasia in Rome under the persecution of Emperor Valerian. 3. *Compunction of the Soul* is the biggest poetic work of Saint Kuriakose and it is as a song of a penitent. The best of Saint Kuriakose as a poet is found in the mystic strains of this poem. When a soul is witnessed by the ineffable love and mercy of God throughout one’s life the person will be overwhelmed with awe and gratitude. It is his own God experience that is depicted in this work. It has an autobiographical flavor and gratitude is the most frequent of the sentiments that he expresses throughout this work.<sup>151</sup> His mystical experiences are mingled with a deep sense of sinfulness. The characters in the poem are vibrant. He considers the holy couple Mary and Joseph, the greatest models of holiness. By portraying different characters like the Magi, shepherds and other personalities involved in the scene of the nativity he brings some novelty to this scene. He continues to dwell on the passion, death and burial of Jesus and concludes with a note on Mary in the life of the Church.<sup>152</sup>

The third volume is entitled *Spiritual Works* and it is called *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father* which contains nine meditations. It is the most expressive of the author’s

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151     Jose Eroorickal, “Compunction of the Soul The Song of a Penitent,” *Herald of the East: Dharmaram Journal of Chavara Studies*, Vol. 12, 1 (2016) 65.

152     Jose Eroorickal, “Compunction of the Soul The Song of a Penitent,” 65.

God experience and contemplative dimension. It is a kind of spiritual diary which was written between 1866 and 1868. Here we can find the spontaneous overflow of the emotions of a mystic who approaches God as his beloved father and converses with him lovingly with the tenderness of his heart in prayerful reflection. It shows his purity of Soul, his sorrow for offending God even slightly by being disobedient to him, his return to the Father like that of the prodigal son and the lost sheep in the Gospel etc. *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father* offers a sort of comfort and confidence to any repentant sinner who is enslaved by sin. Through these colloquies he expresses his deepest feelings in spiritual life. His gratitude to a loving father for the abundant blessings showered upon him and sorrow for the smallest drawbacks in his personal life. This reveals his childlike innocence and gives an idea of his height of mystical union with God.<sup>153</sup>

The last volume *Letters* and under the category of *Letters* and circulars he wrote almost 64 pieces which can be categorized under different groups. These *Letters* reveal his quality of warmth, humanity, sincerity and concern for the well being of others. These express the quality of his pastoral leadership and they were written to help the growth of the Syro-Malabar Church, give wholesome advice to his parishioners, or spiritual guidance to CMI Congregation as a whole and to his spiritual children.<sup>154</sup> The three circulars that he wrote to his own Parishioners at Kainakari give a comprehensive instruction to Catholic families and are relevant even today.<sup>155</sup> Liturgical writings we have already mentioned.

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153 Sebastian Poonoly, "Writings of Chavara," 122-123.

154 Sebastian Poonoly, "Writings of Chavara," 123-124.

155 Sebastian Poonoly, "Writings of Chavara," 124.

## 2.9. Evangelization among the Outcastes

The thoroughly caste-ridden society of nineteenth century Kerala was divided into different castes based on the occupation. The condition of the low- caste people *Pulayas*<sup>156</sup> and *Parayas* were very pathetic at that time. The attempt of Saint Kuriakose to convert the aborigines was a very bold venture. He wanted to inculcate in them a healthy awareness of self-worth and self-confidence. He wished that they would not be excluded from the society and should lead a sound moral life. As we have seen earlier, he opened schools for them at various places which were accessible to the deprived classes. He was very sensitive to the basic needs as well as the dignity of human person. By introducing 'noon feeding' in schools he assured their regular attendance of classes in the schools. The motive force behind this attempt was the zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of fellow beings. He had a universal outlook and his zeal for the salvation of souls was not limited to flock within the fold but went beyond it and extended to the poor outcastes like *Pulayas*. He had a supernatural point of view and considered everyone as a child of God. Hence he wanted to make them also sharers of the kingdom of God.<sup>157</sup> Social customs like untouchability

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156 *Pulayas* is an aboriginal tribe of India whose members are found in Kerala.

157 Joseph Kanjiramattathil, *The Pastoral Vision of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 53. It is important to make a distinction between the Church and the Kingdom. The Kingdom of God is recognized as a wider reality than the Church in history. The Church is seen as always as a sign both concrete and historical, and as an instrument of the Kingdom, in salvific service to the world. As we have already referred Bonhoeffer contends that, if Jesus is the man for others, and the Church is to continue his mission, then the Church must be 'the Church for others'. That means the Church's presence in this world is not for itself; it should serve the whole human family. See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 382-383. See also Leonardo Boff, *Church, Charism and Power: Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church*, Trans. John W. Dierckmeier, London: SCM Press, 1985, 1-2.



existed in Kerala. They were forbidden to be anywhere close to the people of the high caste who were passing by. They were looked down upon by the high caste Hindus and even by the Catholics. They were considered even as slaves. The Catholics were not happy to admit the converted people to their community. They were denied many of the human rights which the high caste people enjoyed. Schools, places of worship, and even other public places were prohibited areas for them. It is in such a society that Saint Kuriakose launched his social welfare programmes, uniting everybody into one.<sup>158</sup>

As we have mentioned already, his apostolic zeal was not restricted to his own community. He started educational programmes in order to empower and educate them. He dared to take certain steps to liberate them. He wanted to evangelize even the outcastes, like the *Pulayas* and *Parayas*. In order to evangelize the *Izhavas* and *Pulayas*, he opened catechumenates where he provided them not only spiritual instruction but also bodily needs like food and clothing. Moreover, while opening public schools he made it a point to include members of *Dalit* groups even though there was insurmountable social resistance. In the light of the social context in which he lived his attempt was really a bold endeavour. The fundamental rights for knowledge and well-being were neglected to these people. His conviction was

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158 Thomas Felix, "Dedicated to the Cause of the Sick and the Poor," 165. Although Saint Kuriakose started various projects for the empowerment of the outcastes and the downtrodden, even today they have not liberated fully. Caste system is still prevalent in our independent India in different forms. The atrocities towards them are on the rise day by day. After him many people like Sr. Rani Maria FCC, Fr. Arul Das SJ, Sr. Valsa John and in recent times Fr. Stan Swami SJ are some of them who fought for the rights of such people for their emancipation. All of them had to sacrifice their lives. Fr. Stan Swami was a tribal rights activist for several decades.



that the faith he professed should be shared with the less fortunate of his fellow beings, and that a correct knowledge of the fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man would be the first step towards developing a very necessary self confidence in them. Furthermore, this would eventually lead to social empowerment of the downtrodden.<sup>159</sup> It is important to note that his services were not limited to his own people or of the Church. He had a wider perspective and was ready to help anybody and everybody who is in need. As we have already mentioned he started two schools exclusively for the Christian converts from the depressed classes. At Mannanam, where the *Pulayas* and *Parayas* used to come on Sundays and on other holidays and they remained there the whole day and he provided them midday meals and clothes.<sup>160</sup> As we have already seen in order to meet their expenses he started a system of collection of money known as *Pidiyari*. Every time when rice was measured out for cooking, Catholic families were asked to take out a handful from the measured pot and keep it in a special vessel labelled “*to infant Jesus*”. Once a month or week the deputies will collect this. As noted earlier, this simple collection helped to support even the construction of monasteries.<sup>161</sup> He also approached the rich people for donations and they contributed generously to his just demands and projects.

Saint Irenaeus of Lyons says, ‘the glory of God is human being fully alive’. For this purpose Saint Kuriakose also dedicated his life totally to God and his people.<sup>162</sup> He was always emptying himself and making room for others, or

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159 K. C. Chacko, *Lead Kindly Light*, 107.

160 Thomas Felix, “Dedicated to the Cause of the Sick and the Poor,” 165-166.

161 Thomas Felix, “Dedicated to the Cause of the Sick and the Poor,” 166.

162 Joseph Xavier, *Mercy in Practice*, 69.

making himself available to others, he was not at all concerned about himself, and his orientation was always how to do good to others. He dedicated his life totally for the cause of others and not at all concerned about his own selfish ends. His focus was on the well-being of others and betterment of others. He was not concentrating on his own self-centred interests, but was thinking only of the will of God. As for Jesus to do the will of God was his food, in the same way Saint Kuriakose was concerned about doing the will of God. He was a person who always related vertically to God and horizontally to his fellow beings. This two-fold relatedness enabled him to set aside himself for greater cause. The highly God-oriented life of Saint Chavara from the very beginning onwards paved way for his manifold contributions to the Church and to the society. He translated his preaching into practice and made his life a message and therefore as Gandhiji said 'my life is my message' the same can also be said about Saint Kuriakose whose life itself was his message.



## **CHAPTER 02**

### **DIVINE KENOSIS AND HUMILITY IN SAINT KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA**

The entire life of Saint Kuriakose was oriented towards God and his people. To be available to others he emptied himself of his ego centred life to other centred life as Jesus did in his life. When a person's life is rooted in God and when he has a deep God experience he will be transformed and there will be a gradual conversion to other centred life. We read in the book of Samuel "The Lord has sought out a man after his own heart; and the Lord has appointed him to be a ruler over his people" (1 Sam 13:14). When God's searching eyes find a person qualified to lead, God anoints that person with the Holy Spirit and calls him/her to a specific ministry. This ministry follows the path of God, who loves his people unconditionally: "You received without payment; give without payment" (Mt 10:8). God's ministers embody the ministry of selfless service, and it is ultimately the mission of God, where the ministers are only his instruments.

The inspiration of such ministry is Jesus Christ himself: "As the Father has sent me, I send you" (Jn 20:21). Therefore, as already mentioned, the model of Christian ministry is Christ himself, who emptied himself to take the form of a servant<sup>1</sup> to die on the cross. In other words, his kenotic

1     It was understood in Paul's context where slavery was prevalent. A servant or a slave could be purchased from the slave market and set free. While freed from the bondage of slavery, he belonged to the one who redeemed him. We were on the slave market because of sin. Jesus paid the price by giving his life as ransom and saved us. He took upon himself our sins and thus paid the price in order to redeem us, or set us free. Now we belong to our redeemer. It is true that in the contemporary society the servant image is degraded to such an extent

style (self-emptying) challenges religious leaders as well as the religious members of all times to self-actualize the self-emptying love of Christ through practising their own given charisms. Indubitably, Saint Kuriakose, as a religious, was such a person who actualized his charism in this way.

### **Kenosis: A Challenging Theological Concept**

Kenotic theology is a specific expression of Christian theology. The concept of kenosis as expressed in Philippians 2 has been interpreted within a speculative understanding of the incarnation as inherently kenotic and as necessarily Trinitarian by some, including recognition during the Patristic period to the contemporary theology.

The Church Fathers developed their *kenosis* Christology. It says: God did not just stand by and watch human misery. He does not sit motionlessly enthroned over a world full of horror. He himself also became involved in humiliation, suffering and death, even unjust death, in order to be near us in such extreme situations, so that where all hope is lost, he can give us hope and a share in his divine life.<sup>2</sup>

Further, kenosis, as self-emptying love, is upheld as an interpretive prism to understand the life of Jesus and therefore illustrative as a model for the followers of Christ. N. T. Wright remarks that the “real theological emphasis of the hymn ... is not simply a new view of Jesus. It is a new understanding of God,”<sup>3</sup> and therefore when faith seeks to

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that “a servant is one associated with social servitude or with racial inferiority, so that nobody would be a servant if he could be anything else.” See John A. Mackay, “The Form of a Servant: The Restoration of a Lost Image,” *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 10 (1989) 185. Although this term is a misleading one in the present world, in a context marked by absolutization of self-interest and self-privilege at the expense of others, it is important to note that this is a very enriching term and most appropriate and all the more imperative, if we take it in a positive sense.

2 Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, London: T & T Clark International, 2011, xiii- xiv.

3 N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993, 84.

actualize given understanding of God, it becomes a challenge in a given situation.

Self-denial of Christ was indeed in the interests of obedience to God and he sought to do the will of his father in his ministry. However, the essence of God's will is love of God and love of neighbour (Mk 12:30-31). His ministry was not in the realm of a heroic human act but a ministry of boundless compassion and forgiveness of God's love, which makes the "sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous" (Mt 5:45). His miracles and his exorcisms were signs of God's love, which people misunderstood and tried to make him their king (Jn 6:18). It was their wishful desire and he prudently avoided it. But he does not deny that he is a king, but he made it clear that his kingship is not of this world (Jn 18:36) rather at the service of God's Kingdom. "Christ's royal rule is marked by the two basic motives which characterize his whole being and work: dedication to God and service of human beings."<sup>4</sup> His ministry was one of healing, forgiving, challenging and total self-giving and he suffered and died for the truth of his message. And his death on the cross was the ultimate expression of Jesus' commitment to God and his love for human beings. It was the supreme expression of the compassionate love of God.<sup>5</sup>

Jesus submits himself unreservedly in obedience to God, in order to make historically present God's unconditional love for the human beings. In his obedience Jesus is the setting forth of God's nature as love, which ultimately revealed on the cross. It is his self-giving love and it meant his self-emptying for the sake of the Gospel (Mk 10:35) for which he called his disciples. It is a self-giving love, which led him

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4 Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 252. Significantly in the life of Saint Kuriakose also we can find the same motive.

5 M. Corita Clarke, "Compassion: A Spirituality for Today," *Review for Religious*, 37, 4 (1978) 521.

to be victimized on the cross.<sup>6</sup> Superficially human persons are the agents and the guilty ones at the crucifixion of Jesus, although it is possible to see even the demons at work there (cf. 1 Cor 2:8), and in the last resort the cross is God's work.<sup>7</sup> In a supreme act of self-giving, God had defined himself for the world. By 'pouring himself out' (Phil 2:7), God revealed his identity as unconditional love on the cross.<sup>8</sup>

It is generally supposed that God reveals himself in power, strength, and glory. When Christians read Isaiah's servant passages (in particular, Isa 52:13-53:12) in the light of the crucifixion, they realized that God was revealed not only as the 'lofty' One, but also as the One who abases himself to the condition of the crushed and oppressed. Here God is seen as the very opposite of what is regarded as great, noble, fine, and reputable: in utter powerlessness, shame, unsightliness, and futility. The cross then can be interpreted only as the self-emptying (kenosis) of God and terrible humiliation and it was understood as to belong to the image of God as truly as his glorious exaltation.<sup>9</sup>

A self-giving love, which led Jesus to be victimized on the cross, was however vindicated in a glorious resurrection. That victory over death invites others to trust his promise that "losing" for the sake of God's Kingdom is not self-destructive but will bring the fullness of eternal life.<sup>10</sup> The self-emptying love of the cross then is the radicalizing of the message of the Kingdom for which Jesus stood; the message of the world-transforming love of God for the poor and outcast. It is love which endures and reconciles the paradox

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6 G. O' Collins, *Believing in the Resurrection*, New York: Paulist Press, 2012, 169.

7 Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 155.

8 G. O' Collins, *Rethinking Fundamental Theology*, New York: Geoffrey Chapman, 1993, 139.

9 G. O' Collins, *Rethinking Fundamental Theology*, 139. See also Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 156

10 G. O' Collins, *Believing in the Resurrection*, 169.

without minimizing it, therefore only self-emptying love can become selfless catalysts of social transformation.<sup>11</sup>

The concept of kenosis, or the kenotic motif, is a basic tenet of Christian faith. God redeemed humanity by entering creation accepting the limitations inherent in human existence. Kenotic theology expresses a theological understanding of the self-emptying action of God, in Christ, in the incarnation. At times, kenotic theology has met with dogmatic issues. However, new paths have emerged within an understanding of the sovereign freedom in the love of God. This includes an understanding of God as an excess of being, in freedom to love and suffering in Christ and absorbing the suffering of evil. This is the challenge that poses in theologizing the God of the cross.

## **2. Kenosis and Religious Life**

Significantly all baptized have discovered a “pearl of great value” and a “treasure” worth all that one has in life (Mt 13: 44-45) because they share in the very life of the Blessed Trinity and are called to be “light” and “salt” for the world (Mt 5:13-16). However, within the great family of the Church, God our father calls some of them for a closer following and to dedicate their lives with a special consecration through the profession of chastity, poverty, and obedience. The religious of the Church, bear public witness to the Gospel and the primacy of the love of God. By a permanent commitment and lifelong fidelity to the vows, religious grow in union with Christ and to contribute in a unique way to the life and mission of the Church.<sup>12</sup> Without the vital contribution of the religious, the charity of the Church would be lessened

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11 Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 156; Jacob Parappally, “Jesus and Christian Leadership,” *Jeevadhara*, Vol. XXXIX, 231 (May 2009) 190.

12 Pope John Paul II, “A Heroic Son of the Church in India,” (Extracts from the Homily during Beatification of Chavara, 08-02-1986), in Paul Kalluveetil and Paulachan Kochappilly eds., *The Lord of Heaven & Earth*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2004, 82.



and her fruitfulness would be diminished. That is why Pope John Paul II indicated, the place of the religious is in the heart of the Church. Religious, by their special way of discipleship, are called to empty themselves “for the sake of the Kingdom” (Mt 19:12). It is important to note that the demand of self-denial and renunciation are part and parcel of discipleship. It is to be noted that while Peter declared Jesus as the Messiah, however, he did not want to accept Jesus as the suffering Messiah. Jesus rebuked him, and is inviting everyone to endure the cross that is inevitable while accepting Jesus as one’s Messiah. According to Saint Kuriakose, Christ experience without cross is null and void. In order to follow Christ, one need to bear the cross. Only the cross can give depth and width to our Christ experience that makes us identify with Christ. This identification is the sign of a true follower of Christ and Saint Kuriakose could experience it through his various struggles and tribulations during his life time. He was convinced that only on the cross Jesus can offer his self-sacrifice for the salvation of humanity. It is the strongest weapon against Satan and it is the key to open the gate of heaven. It is through his death on the cross that he made the whole humanity as children of one God. And thereby they have become brothers and sisters in him. Moreover, Saint Kuriakose was able to overcome all the hardships, misunderstandings, problems and sufferings in his life because of his positive outlook and spiritual experience of the cross.<sup>13</sup> His deep faith experience enabled him to dedicate himself totally to God and do selfless service to the needy and the oppressed of his brethren. As a religious he could contribute for the building up of the Kerala Church that is very much apparent from the numerous apostolic initiatives he had undertaken.

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13     Sophy Rose, “Christ Experience in Atmanuthapam,” Paul Kalluveetil & Paulachan Kochappilly eds., *The Lord of Heaven & Earth: Chavara Studies in Honour of Fr. Lucas Vithuvattickal*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2004, 278-279.

It is important to note that at least since Vatican II, it has been accepted that all Christians, all the baptized are called to the same holiness. However, some are called by the Lord to live a radical expression of the baptismal commitment. Therefore, what distinguishes the religious from the non-religious is not the call but the response. This demands from the religious a total and all-embracing response. Our consecration is meant to help us to make our entire self as a gift to God. All of us are called to share in the holiness of God by following Jesus Christ. Pope Francis emphatically affirms that all of us are chosen by the Lord “to be holy and blameless before him in love” (Eph 1:4).<sup>14</sup> The religious, on their part, by accepting the evangelical counsels radicalize this following.<sup>15</sup> The evangelical counsels are the core of a life in intimate union with Christ. It is a life based on faith and trust in God’s providence, a life of total surrender and total abandonment. As Jesus Christ who considered the will of the father as his food (Jn 4:34) Saint Kuriakose abandoned his own will and conformed to the will of God. He was convinced of the fact that “God’s will be done and will be performed.”<sup>16</sup> He was motivated by this principle throughout his life and he surrendered himself totally and completely in the hands

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14 Pope Francis, *Rejoice and Be Glad*, Apostolic Exhortation, Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2018, 10.

15 See my article Moly Thomas, “Christian Faith and Significance of Religious Life in Indian Context,” *Indian Journal of Spirituality*, Vol. XVI/3, 2003, 389. By the profession of evangelical counsels, the religious are responding to a divine call, and dedicated their lives to the service of God that constitute a special consecration, which is deeply rooted in their baptismal consecration and is a fuller expression of it. “This service of God should stimulate and foster the exercise of the virtues by them, especially the virtues of humility and obedience, fortitude and chastity, by which they share in Christ’s emptying of himself (Phil 2:7-8)”. See *Perfectae Caritatis, Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed., Austin Flannery, Bombay: St Paul Publications, 1975, 552.

16 CWC, Vol. III, *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, Mannanam: St. Joseph’s Press, 1990, 1.

of God. Therefore the consecrated life of Saint Kuriakose can be considered a guiding star for all the consecrated people how to be more fruitful and meaningful in life. What is required of us to follow Jesus as a disciple is the total denial of self and total dedication.<sup>17</sup> There is no discipleship without renunciation, namely, a non-attachment to any form of power and status, not only to money but also to titles, offices, publicity, etc. An evangelizer, who does not have deep experience of God, will have little impact on people. God experience, if genuine should touch all aspects of our life and it is not merely related to feelings and emotions. It is deeply rooted in faith and it is fundamentally Christ centred. As Disciples of Christ, the religious need to follow the Lord who, as Mark would put it, "chose whom he desired to be with him and to be sent out" (Mk 3:13-15). Discipleship to Jesus is to be understood more in experiential terms than merely in intellectual terms. This experiential knowledge can be attained by constant sharing of their lives with the Master, and through repeatedly listening to the teachings of Jesus. The disciples learn from Jesus not through any intellectual engagement, but by walking with him. Jesus teaches not a series of doctrines, but a manner of living. Discipleship is a relationship, which implies that the whole life of the disciple must be with Jesus sharing his life. This is what succinctly expressed in the Markan saying that the disciples are called 'to be with' Jesus and 'to be sent out.'<sup>18</sup> Today we need a radical discipleship, then as the word (radical) implies, we have to go really to the root bottom. It is to follow the practice of Jesus of Nazareth, the life pattern of Jesus as found in the Gospels. As we have already noted, this is what Jesus demands from every one of his followers: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross

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17 Moly Thomas, "Christian Faith and Significance of Religious Life in Indian Context," 391.

18 Moly Thomas, "Christian Faith and Significance of Religious Life in Indian Context," 390.

and follow me” (Mt 16:24; Mk 8:34). The denial of the self or emptying of the self is very important in following Christ. As the Latin American Liberation theologian Jon Sobrino rightly emphasizes, following the practice of Jesus in the Gospels gives a better access to the person of Jesus.<sup>19</sup> Indeed this is the way to know Christ. To follow Christ is to lead a prophetic life, namely, a life that strives to read the signs of the times. Depending on the context the way of life may vary, so it is essential to discern what it means to be prophetic in each context. Religious by their lives of consecration, prayer and dedicated service is a reminder to all, both the Christian and non-Christian, of the universal call to holiness, and to inspire a self-giving love towards everyone, especially the least of their brethren.<sup>20</sup> We need to balance contemplation and action. It is important to note that Saint Kuriakose was a person who harmonized contemplation and action in a balanced manner throughout his life and responded to the signs of the times of his context. As Saint Paul, he was able to say “Jesus Christ has made me his own” Phil 3:12) and “it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20).

### **2.1. Religious Life: A Radical Option**

As we have noted religious life is a radical option and an alternative *way* of life pointing to the Kingdom, for which Jesus died. Religious life however becomes prophetic, when one accepts his/her religious life as self-emptying for the sake of the Kingdom.<sup>21</sup> That is to say, to transcend one’s own self-understanding of the givens and to identify himself/ herself with the needs of people in the peripheries.<sup>22</sup> It is indeed by

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19 Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological View*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2001, 53-54.

20 Moly Thomas, “Christian Faith and Significance of Religious Life in Indian Context,” 395.

21 D. O’ Murchu, *Religious Life: A Prophetic Vision*, Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1991, 18.

22 M. Amaladoss, “Religious and Mission,” *Sedos Bulletin* 25, 8 (1993) 213.

an alternative way of living the Gospel that the religious are going to give meaning to the world. It requires of them to tread new roads, to explore new possibilities, so that they involve themselves in new ministries and the necessity to discover fresh ways of doing these ministries. To follow Christ is to lead a prophetic life, a life that strives to respond to the signs of the times. The future impact of religious life is likely to be depended on prophetic communities or contrast communities that are opened to the Word and attuned to the Spirit. They attentively listen to God's Word and translate it into concrete actions. It is to be noted that as consecrated persons, the religious are called to be prophets of the New Testament, to represent and embody a radically alternative way of being and living. They should represent and embody the fellowship and love relationship to which God calls the entire human family. This is an absolute necessity today because divisions of caste and creed, language and culture and an ever increasing disparity between the rich and the poor are tearing our country apart.<sup>23</sup> In such a context the role of the religious is to counter such cultural trends and if needed swim against the current and speak in the name of God and uphold the Gospel values of love, forgiveness and justice.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, in a culture where there is a craze for wealth, power and prestige, the religious need to challenge such worldly values by their exemplary lives of detachment and renunciation. They must become the public conscience in an unjust society, discover and expose the sinful structures

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23 Moly Thomas, "Christian Faith and Significance of Religious Life in Indian Context," 393-394. Saint Kuriakose responded to the signs of his times and all the apostolic ministries he did were examples of that. He had taken initiatives for various projects irrespective of caste, creed, colour, nationality, language, culture etc. He was focusing more on the people in the peripheries like Dalits, *Parayas*, *Pulayas* etc. God shows his closeness to such people.

24 Moly Thomas, "Christian Faith and Significance of Religious Life in Indian Context," 394.

of injustice and exploitation at various levels in our country and animate them toward wholeness and salvation.<sup>25</sup>

Being a disciple of Christ does not mean that we merely imitate him, but rather we actually participate in the very life and mission of Jesus. It is important to note that Jesus is the light of the world because he is light himself. There was no dichotomy between his words and deeds or he lived what he preached. He was so intimately in communion with God the father that those who saw him saw the father (Jn 14:9). Jesus by telling us 'you are the light of the world' demands that just as the light, that has the natural function of dispelling darkness and giving light, we have a spiritual function of enlightening and guiding a morally confused humanity, to give hope and courage to them. In order to give light to others one has to become light oneself by abiding in him (Jn 15:4). Just as a lamp that is kept under a bushel (Mt 5:14-16) fails to fulfil its function of giving light similarly we lose the meaning of our existence if we cease to do good actions worthy of our call. If we live only for ourselves forgetting our brethren we will be like the lamp that is put under a bushel. What we require today is that our lives must become good news by manifesting the love of Christ in our ministries (Mt 5:13-16). Therefore the most appealing witness today will be that of concern and commitment towards the poor, the weak, the oppressed and the marginalized. Our Christian witness may not be authentic unless we involve in the struggle against oppression and injustice.

## **2.2. Significance of Life Witness**

It is important to note that Pope Paul VI highlights the primacy of life witness when he says, "proclamation must be

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25 Cleopatra, "Woman as Evangelizer with particular Reference to the Indian Syro-Malabar Context," Prasanna Vazeeparambil, ed., *Woman in Prism and Focus: Her Profile in World Religions and in Christian Traditions*, Mar Thoma Yogam, Rome: The St. Thomas Christian Fellowship, 1996, 202-203.



made above all else by witness."<sup>26</sup> He emphatically states that it is all the more important in a context "where it often seems that the signs of God's presence have been lost from sight, a convincing prophetic witness on the part of consecrated persons is increasingly necessary" (VC 85). By witness we mean an existential accord between faith proclaimed and faith lived. By virtue of our baptism in to the life of Christ, all Christians are called to proclaim their living faith in the Gospel by the witness of their lives.<sup>27</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church also states: "The disciple of Christ must not only keep the faith and live on it, but also profess it, confidently bear witness to it and spread it."<sup>28</sup> This life witness has great significance today because one of the gravest errors of our time is the dichotomy between the profession of faith and practice of life. Moreover, personal witness gives preaching a convincing justification. Therefore first and foremost all the religious are called to be authentic witnesses. This sort of life witness has special relevance today because people place more trust in witnesses than in teachers, in experience than in teaching, and in life and action than in theories.<sup>29</sup> Pope Paul VI insists that our consecrated life is 'a privileged means of evangelization' (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 69), but it must be *seen*. Both Vatican documents *Ad Gentes* and *Evangelii Nuntiandi* are quite emphatic about Christian witness as an essential element of evangelization.<sup>30</sup> Pope John Paul II reminds us that "Christians who speak of Christ must embody in

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26 Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, *Vatican Council II: More Post-Conciliar Documents*, Vol. II, ed., Austin Flannery, Bombay: St Paul Publications, 1982, n. 21.

27 James H. Provost, "Structuring the Church as *Missio*," 252.

28 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2012, 1816.

29 Moly Thomas, "Christian Faith and Significance of Religious Life in Indian Context," 396.

30 *Ad Gentes*, nos. 11-12; *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, nos. 21-22.



their lives the message that they proclaim.”<sup>31</sup> According to Lonergan, those who communicate the Christian message first and foremost need to practice it. “For without living the Christian message one does not possess its constitutive meaning; and one cannot lead another to share what one oneself does not possess.”<sup>32</sup>

The Lord teaches of himself as “I am the way” (Jn 14:6), that in effect implying that one should follow him means following the way he walked, while seeking the perfection of charity in the service of God’s Kingdom.<sup>33</sup> In this context, the religious vows get their significance; lived primarily as a style of commitment in imitation of Christ and as signs of hope in an increasingly difficult and complex world. The main goal of religious life is to place God at the centre of our lives, and it is best symbolized in the vow of chastity, in which we make a holy sacrifice (Rom 12:1) the gift of our very being to God. The end of religious life is union with God and doing his ministry in following the way of Christ.<sup>34</sup> Religious should lead a very simple life style and they need to be very dynamic and sensitive to the surrounding world. The radical demands of discipleship are very much apparent in the words of Jesus to the rich young man (Mk 10:17-31). The cries of the poor and the marginalized of the society must be heard especially in the present context of massive poverty, human rights violations, justice and peace issues,

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31 John Paul II, “Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation to Ecclesia in Asia,” *L’Osservatore Romano* (10 November 1999) viii, n. 23.

32 Moly Thomas, *Christology in Context*, f. n. 352. See Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., New York: The Seabury Press, 1979, 362.

33 “We follow Christ more closely under the action of the Holy Spirit and totally dedicated to seeking the perfection of charity in the service of God’s Kingdom, for the honour of God, the building up of the Church and the salvation of the world.” (*The Code of Canon Law, New Revised English Translation*, Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1983, Can. 573, 133).

34 S. Charivupurayidathil, *Religious Life as Imitation of Christ*, Vadavathoor: Oriental Institute of Religious Studies India, 1991, 20.

social, political and racial oppression, ethnic conflicts, issues connected with globalization, nuclear threats, ecological crisis, gender issues, religious rivalries, violence, war and everything related to anti-life or in the words of Sobrino 'anti-Kingdom'. Seen in this light the religious congregations need to update their missionary priorities based on these issues and respond accordingly. As already noted religious life is a way of being with God that takes the form of a gift and an act of worship. Against this background, we can better understand the person of Saint Kuriakose Elias and his religious call. He bears witness to the beauty and greatness of the religious vocation. Even today the role of the religious and their communities is to function as symbols of Christian perfection for all others to look at and feel inspired and encouraged. They should be able to challenge and inspire the people at large to follow the Gospel message with commitment and perseverance and in that sense they can be a corrective force. The 'Holy-call' marks the beginning of a shift which eventually makes a state of conversion from a "world-oriented-life" to a "God-oriented-life." This does not suggest that the ones who receive it, turn away from worldly life because a true religious life aims to serve God by serving humankind. Saint Kuriakose affirmed this reality by his selfless service to the lowly and the lost.<sup>35</sup> Although he opted for the monastic life, it is not because he is afraid of the world, tired of it or disliked it but in order to enrich the society around him with more vigour and clarity. He wanted to educate and reform the sons and daughters of God so that they become really God's children. "With a singleness of purpose he tried all through his life to equip himself with knowledge, wisdom and virtue and disseminate them to his fellow religious, priests and nuns and the laity at large."<sup>36</sup>

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35 R. Ramachandran, "A Man of Deep Vision," in Paul Kalluveetil and Paulachan Kochappilly eds., *The Lord of Heaven & Earth*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2004, 91.

36 Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 345. Although

Regarding the social commitment of the Church it is worth mentioning the words of Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador: “our Christian faith requires that we submerge ourselves in the world.” As already mentioned the aim of a true religious is to serve God by serving humanity. Therefore what we require today is a paradigm shift and not a liner change. This shift may lead to a re-founding of our congregations reading the signs of the times.<sup>37</sup>

### **3. Saint Kuriakose: A Man of Outstanding Virtues**

#### **3.1. Theological Virtues - Faith, Hope, and Love**

##### **3.1.1. Faith**

The holy life of Saint Kuriakose Elias was an embodiment of all virtues. When bishop Baccinelli appointed him as the Vicar General for the Syrians he stated: “I am convinced that you have the fortitude, zeal, wisdom, and the virtues necessary for the right fulfilment of this office.”<sup>38</sup> When the bishop introduced him to the Congregation of the Propaganda Fide he described him as a Christian, virtuous, very prudent and who is most attached to the Catholic faith and to the Holy See. He was a person spiritually rich with all the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit.

Christians are people characterized by faith, hope, and love (1 Cor 13:13) and they are directed to Christ (1 Pet 1:3-9; 1 Thess 1:3) and to their neighbours. Saint Kuriakose understood that for an authentic religious life, acquiring

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he had only elementary education in the traditional manner, he was fortunate enough to have good theological education and spiritual formation under one of the most famous *Malpans* of that time. His intellectual acumen and continuous pursuit of knowledge are well known to everyone. He was a man of wide knowledge of various aspects of life.

37 Moly Thomas, “Christian Faith and Significance of Religious Life in Indian Context,” 397.

38 Valerian Plathottam, *Malankara Sabhamathavinte Oru Veera Santhanam* (Malayalam) Mannanam: Saint Joseph’s Monastery, 1939, 230.

these virtues of faith, hope, and love is very important. From an evangelical point of view the basis of these virtues is in the mystery of Christ, namely, in his self-giving and reconciling love manifested on the cross. According to Saint Paul “faith, hope and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor 13:13). “Love is the fulfilling of the law” (Rom 13:10) and Paul gives primary importance to it and considers it as even superior to faith and hope. Because according to Paul love is not one of the virtues but it is the bond of union that holds together all other virtues. Therefore Paul exhorts: “Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Col 3:14). So the practice of all other virtues is animated and inspired by charity.<sup>39</sup> Christian tradition designated these virtues as the supernatural, infused theological virtues<sup>40</sup> which are totally free gifts of God’s generous love and freely bestowed grace. “Faith is the theological virtue by which we believe in God and believe all that he has said and revealed to us, and that Holy Church proposes for our belief, because he is truth itself.”<sup>41</sup> Faith is the total surrender before God and it enables one to call the heavenly father as his/her own father. All throughout his writings we can notice that Saint Kuriakose is addressing God as the father and the depth of his filial relationship with God. It is this father-son relationship with God that enabled him to have a universal outlook towards all the children of God and instilled in him the desire to commit for their welfare. In the Letter to the Hebrews (Heb 11:1–12:27) one can find what is faith and how is it applicable in the life of Saint Kuriakose. The passage from Hebrews starts by declaring: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

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39 CCC, 1827.

40 CCC, 1812-1813.

41 CCC, 1814.

It is true that we see each other and hear each other but in the case of God, we cannot see him as we see our neighbour and we cannot hear God in the same manner as we can hear one another. But in the prayer life especially in the contemplative prayer, we see God with our inner eye of love, and we hear God speaks to us in the heart. God can transform our human mode of communication to a transcendental mode of communication. True faith enables one to transcend the ordinary happenings of daily life to a more spiritual realm. In the life of Saint Kuriakose his most heroic observance of obedience was an expression of his faith. He obeyed all the rules of the seminary faithfully as a novice. Saint Kuriakose developed this attitude of faith from the very beginning. This was possible because he lived in the presence of the Lord and sought union with him through fulfilling his divine will. He could experience the presence of God in the beauty of creation which helped him to see the ultimate cause and to understand the glory of God and the blessed state of the other world. He was a man of God, a man adorned with divine grace, and a man filled with Holy Spirit. His faith helped him to see always and in all things and in all events of life, the providence of God even when anything happened contrary to his will and prior planning. As already mentioned the way he handled the heart-breaking situations, caused by the death of his parents and his only brother, the pressure of the relatives to return home, all these show his strong faith in the providence of God.<sup>42</sup> His strong faith was visible throughout his life and the uncompromising nature of his faith gave him a feeling of strong, unquestioning loyalty to the visible representatives of God on earth. His humble submission to the will of the superiors, his sense of

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42 Valerian Plathottam, *Malankara Sabhamathavinte Oru Veera Santanam*, 1939, 27. See also Lucas Vithuvattickal, "A Life Full of Virtues," Paul Kalluveettil and Paulachan Kochappilly eds., *The Lord of Heaven & Earth*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2004, 99.

renunciation and his forgiving mind all these are examples of his sublime life of faith.

His faith made him aware of the precious gift of his vocation to priesthood. Therefore he could say: "remember what the Lord has done for you. He chose you from out of thousands. There were many who more worthy than you were. Yet, wonder of wonders, he chose you, called you to his home, endowed you with many gifts of body and spirit."<sup>43</sup> He considered it as the greatest gift incomparable with any other privileges he received in his life. His faith was nourished by his prayer life consisted of frequent prayers and long meditation including night vigils. As Prophet Elijah who was very zealous for the Lord and was wedded to a life of prayer Saint Kuriakose was also devoted to a life of prayer that was very much apparent from his constant and intimate colloquies with his maker and master. He was convinced that "without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him" (Heb 11:6). He grounded all his actions on this divine promise, and living authentically in the devotion to the Holy Virgin Mary and to the saints, his heavenly patrons, so that "when the Lord Jesus comes to the tent of his heart, he may not weep, as did seeing the city of Jerusalem, but that he may find it adorned with those ornaments with which the tents of his celestial patrons are adorned."<sup>44</sup> He had great faith in the intercession of the saints and often he is asking the help of the saints like Saint Teresa of Avila, whom he considered his Mother in faith for graces to pray and meditate well.<sup>45</sup> Acquiring the above mentioned virtues was his main concern and he maintained that these virtues are interrelated, and one cannot overlook the other, because practising these virtues enables

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43 CWC, Vol. III, *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 27.

44 Quoted in Lucas Vithuvattickal, "A Life Full of Virtues," 99.

45 CWC, Vol. III, *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 15.



one to sustain the proper balance of “love of God and love of neighbour” (1 Jn 4:20-21). It is to be noted that faith is to be translated into concrete actions and Saint Kuriakose had proved the authenticity of his faith through his life witness. As Saint James testifies, otherwise it would be lifeless. “So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead” (Jas 2: 22).

### **3.1.2. Hope**

Saint Kuriakose had full trust in God alone and he expected everything from God. Faith naturally leads a person to hope and trust. A person who is rooted in faith would have a conviction in the goodness and superior wisdom of God. According to Pope Francis hope is rooted in Lord Jesus Christ who had died and risen for our sake. In his general audience on May 8, 2024 the pope said if we do not have hope it is not easy to acquire other virtues. In our life journey it is hope that helps us to move forward even in difficult situations. “Hope is the theological virtue by which we desire the Kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ’s promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>46</sup> Saint Paul says that in hope we are saved (Rom 8:24). The theological virtue of hope teaches us to bear patiently our daily sufferings in the sure hope that eternal salvation will be ours. Saint Kuriakose had entrusted his soul to the care of the Lord whom he loved ardently throughout his life. He was a man of hope and this is very much visible in his life because in spite of the painful failures and humiliations and even in the midst of the most desperate moments especially when he lost his parents and the only brother his hope never disappointed him and the lamp of his hope was blazing. He took refuge in Blessed Virgin Mary, the mother of hope.<sup>47</sup> Pope Benedict XVI presents in his encyclical *Spe Salvi facti sumus* Holy Virgin Mary as the star of our hope. Pope uses

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46 CCC, 1817.

47 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 273.



faith and hope interchangeably and he says faith is in fact hope. He is presenting human life as a journey on the sea of history and it is often dark and stormy, a voyage in which we search for the stars that indicate the route. The true stars of our life are people who have lived good lives. They are lights of hope (paragraph 49). We know that Jesus Christ is the true light, the sun that has risen above all the shadows of history. However, to reach him we need lights close by—people who shine with his light and so guide us along our way. According to the Pope there is nobody else other than our Holy Mother who is the star of our hope. With her fiat she opened the door of our world to God.<sup>48</sup> Saint Kuriakose in the critical situations of his life took recourse to mother Mary and was able to overcome the obstacles in his life. Moreover, through his various apostolic activities he could become the hope of the hopeless. He was well aware of the fact that he is only an instrument or tool in the hands of God in all his endeavours whatever he had done.

We can notice his attitude of humility always comes to the forefront in all his attempts. “He made himself a tool of God, or sometimes even a fool of God, in attempting to do big things with little or no resources.”<sup>49</sup> For example he decided to start the convent for women only with eighteen rupees and was trying to establish a printing press by starting with a model he could make of plantain sheath and core. He had great trust in the Lord and he used to say “our task is only to arrange for the work to be done. God will give us the money for it, because all this is God’s work our competence

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48 Moly Thomas, “*Spe Salvi factisumus*: In Hope we are Saved,” *Joskiran*, Vol. 6/2 (2009) 122. The Pope is saying those who have hope will live differently and those who hope are granted with the gift of a new life. According to him hope is equivalent to faith. Pope Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi facti sumus*, Encyclical Letter, Vaticana: Libreria Editrice, 2007, Introduction.

49 K. C. Chacko, *Lead Kindly Light*, 117.

here is only to work.”<sup>50</sup> He was convinced that God, the boundless source of riches, is ever ready to pay the labourers on our behalf. His spirit of utter poverty influenced the early members of the community of sisters to evolve a lifestyle of poverty and they could become “more fortunate in comforts proper to the world and heaven than all of the people in the world.”<sup>51</sup> When he had shortage of money to pay the workmen he had recourse to Saint Joseph and guardian angel. There were so many such occasions when he could encounter the intervention and providence of God. He was thus become a fool of God, however, his child-like trust was rewarded him by overflowing achievements. This is very much obvious from his short span of life how he could perform wonders so much ahead of his times. Moreover, he could experience the involvement of God whenever he was in troublesome situations. He was never wavered in such occasions and he could experience the divine power. His abiding faith and confidence in God had not shaken after laying down the foundation stone of the monastery at Mannanam when the Vicar Apostolic planned to transfer him and the fathers concerned to distant places. Moreover, at the time of Rocco schism although majority of the parishes joined them and accepted the intruder bishop and asked him to set apart two of his monasteries as residence of the schismatic bishop Chavara did not waver.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, his hope is very much evident in his words regarding his salvation reflecting on the parable of the prodigal son: “I confide firmly in my salvation, because I reflect on what you have taught in the Gospel. This prodigal son comes to your feet. Having meditated on your favours, I confide, more than in the past, that you will make me a saint.” Furthermore, when he was on the point of death, he could say: “I feel joy and peace.”

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50 CWC, Vol. IV, *Letters*, VII/5, 81. See Lucas Vithuvattickal, “A Life Full of Virtues,” 103.

51 CWC, Vol. IV, *Letters*, VII/5, 81.

52 Lucas Vithuvattickal, “A Life Full of Virtues,” 103.

### 3.1.3. Love

He firmly believed in the absolute graciousness of God and throughout his life we can observe that he was always grateful to God for all the manifold gifts he received in all realms of his life like, physical, intellectual, and spiritual. It is to be noted that gratitude was the characteristic mark of his spirituality that springs from his ardent love towards God. His passionate love towards God was overflowed in the form of dedicated service to his brethren. It is God who loved us first (1 Jn 4:19) and therefore our proper response to God's love is to love God and our neighbours in return. It is to be noted that it is the virtue of charity that motivates us to love God and our neighbours.<sup>53</sup> All our actions should be animated by this virtue of charity. As Saint John testifies "those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. .. those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also" (1 Jn 4: 20-21). Therefore, Saint Kuriakose advised his confreres "dear brethren, however numerous the monasteries may be, all of you should love one another as if you are children of the same mother and grown up drinking her milk. This love should never weaken, but keep growing stronger and stronger. Bear this in mind as my most important advice."<sup>54</sup> His earnest desire was that there should be genuine love and family spirit among his followers and the congregation was founded for the apostolic purpose of working for the salvation of brethren.<sup>55</sup> From the beginning of his life he was well aware of the fact that he was called by God to be a member of the family of God that is very clear in his motto: "God is my portion and inheritance" (Ps 16:5). The idea of the family both divine and human has a dominant place in his spirituality. His life in the seminary along with

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53 CCC, 1822.

54 CWC, Vol. IV, *Letters*, 71.

55 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 96.

other seminarians broadened and strengthened his vision on the large family of the Church. The thought that he was preparing himself for a total dedication to the Church filled him with joy and reminded him of the serious responsibility of shepherding the flock for whose sake Jesus the Lord had given up his life, suffering even the most humiliating death on the cross. As a consequence of this sublime consciousness he committed himself for their welfare even risking his life. Being a member of the family of God he was convinced of his serious responsibility to the wider human family which prompted him to dedicate himself for the spiritual, intellectual and social growth and development of the society.<sup>56</sup>

### **3.2. Cardinal Virtues**

The cardinal virtues play a central role and are called accordingly and all other virtues are grouped around them. They are prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance.

#### **3.2.1. Prudence**

It is to be noted that Saint Kuriakose was a man of great prudence and the Vicar Apostolic entrusted him with immense responsibilities of very delicate nature. The Vicar Apostolic proposed him to be the co-adjutor bishop for the Syrians because he is “good, prudent and obedient.” He was appointed as the Vicar General of the Syrians and Vicar Apostolic Baccinelli presented him to the Sacred Congregation of the propagation of faith in the following words: “A man truly Christian, virtuous, very prudent.” All these are proofs of his virtuous, holy life and due to his various personal qualities. His discretion and moderation were clearly visible in his accepting the Carmelite rules even though he was well aware of its severity. Moreover, in the case of choosing the places for the foundation of the monastery also as already noted he was cautious enough

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56 Thomas Mampra, “Kuriakose Elias Chavara: A Saint for Our Times,” 39-40.

to select a place which is healthy, easily accessible and pleasant. Another instance was at the time of Roccas schism knowing well the situation of the Church in Malabar, he proposed the cardinal prefect of the Sacred Congregation of the propagation of faith that in order to overcome the danger of the schism it may be good to have two bishops one for the Syrians and the other for the Latin Church. This was a far-sighted and prudent suggestion.<sup>57</sup> His idea was that thereby their desire to have a bishop of their own would be satisfied. Similarly there were many instances where he was commissioned by the Vicars Apostolic on their behalf to resolve disputes with his prudence in the Vicariate and also in the parishes. Furthermore, sometimes they consulted him to settle issues related to financial matters in the Vicariate. In dealing with money matters also he was always true to his conscience and there were no accusations against him. He was very much vigilant and alert in money matters and correct and regular in keeping accounts. He was very correct in maintaining the statement of the income and expenditure. He preached for respecting the ownership right of others and one's obligation to pay just wages for the workers. His instruction about just wages and honouring the dignity of workers was something unheard in the Kerala society those days. Moreover, he was solicitous about the things of others as well as about the good name of others and never tried to offend others in his writings either by mentioning certain names or by omitting them.

### **3.2.2. Justice**

Justice means give what is due to others. CCC states: "Justice is the moral virtue that consists in the constant and firm will to give their due to God and neighbour."<sup>58</sup> Saint Kuriakose was a man of justice who preached, practised and lived it. He was always diligent in promoting just wages for the

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57 Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 165.

58 CCC, 1807.

workers and also respecting the dignity of them. He was very particular in prohibiting every act against this virtue of justice and invited people to be compassionate and generous. He advises "justice toward others disposes one to respect the rights of each and to establish in human relationships the harmony that promotes equity with regard to persons and to common good."<sup>59</sup> As we have already noted according to him humiliating the poor or causing them any trouble, is something to be prohibited for God will seek revenge for them because of their tears.<sup>60</sup> He insisted that "never withhold just wages from labourers or never make undue delay in paying them, because it is an offence that cries out to God for justice. Do not insult the poor; neither should you vex them because if God sees them weeping he will surely wreak vengeance on you."<sup>61</sup> During his life time so many social inequalities and injustices were prevalent in the caste-ridden society of Kerala. As we have already noted most of the people were deprived of their dignity as human persons, were denied of their basic needs, the right to education etc. They were denied several human rights which the high caste people enjoyed. It is in such a society that he launched his social welfare programmes uniting all people into one family. He tried his level best to eradicate these social evils and promoted the dignity of human persons by accepting all as children of God.

### **3.2.3. Fortitude**

According to CCC "fortitude is the moral virtue that ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good. It strengthens the resolve to resist temptations and to overcome obstacles in the moral life."<sup>62</sup> It disposes a person even to renounce and sacrifice his life in defence of a just

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59 CCC, 1807.

60 CWC, Vol. IV, *Letters*, IX/10.

61 CWC, Vol. IV, *Letters*, IX/10.

62 CCC, 1808.

cause. This virtue enables one to conquer fear, even fear of death and to face trials and tribulations. Saint Kuriakose was a man of fortitude and he could overcome all trials and tribulations of his life. It is very much apparent in his life that he was courageous enough to encounter difficult and critical situations created by the Schism of Roccas. He was always looking at Christ as a model for him who being aware of his passion and the violent death on the cross, courageously communicated that "I have a baptism to be baptized with" (Lk 12:50). In all problematic circumstances the saint was bold enough to proclaim the truth openly even in front of the opposition of some of his own followers and even at the risk of his own life. Only a person who dwells in a spiritual world would be able to face such risky situations. More examples and detailed exposition we shall see in the following chapter.

#### **3.2.4. Temperance**

Saint Kuriakose was submissive to the will of God and from such an attitude he derived a serenity of the spirit that helped him to be tranquil and peaceful always. "*Temperance* is the moral virtue that moderates the attraction of pleasures and provides balance in the use of created goods. It ensures the will's mastery over instincts and keeps desires within the limits of what is honourable."<sup>63</sup> Saint Kuriakose was always trying to conform to Lord Jesus Christ and even in his sicknesses he bore the pain with patience. He used to have rheumatic fever and elephantiasis and the consequent difficulties, however, he never complained about it. During his last days he had some sickness in his eyes and had to undergo painful surgery, but he suffered it with great patience. He was very particular in keeping rigorous fasting and penance required of the Constitution and his daily food was very simple and he was very much austere in his food habits. He practised the discipline of flagellation three times a week according to the Constitution. In his ascetical life he

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63 CCC, 1809.



modelled himself in conformity with Lord Jesus. Fr. Leopold Beccaro the spiritual director of Saint Kuriakose concludes his biography with the words: "let us who desire to die as did Fr. Prior, imitate his life full of virtues."<sup>64</sup>

### 3.4. Evangelical Counsels

#### 3.4.1. Obedience

Saint Kuriakose had almost his own original ideas regarding the three evangelical counsels. He preferred to name obedience as *cholwily*, chastity as *manavattituam* and poverty as *agathituam*. According to him to be a non-having and non-being person was not a negative concept but a very positive and creative relationship. When a person becomes a true destitute only God can fill that person with his choicest blessings and his own being-ness and that individual would be compelled to cling to the Lord of resources and riches for survival.<sup>65</sup>

The life of Saint Chavara was indeed a life of obedience and it remains a true witness and challenge to the people who embrace religious life today.<sup>66</sup> 'God's will in everything' was his motto. This attitude helped his obedience easy even in difficult situations. As the Book of Proverbs says, 'the will of the Lord is my fortune' he could say, "May the holy, supreme and true will of God be praised now and forever."<sup>67</sup> His readiness to do the will of God is amply evident in his prayer: "Do with me whatever you wish. I am fully resigned to your holy will. Lord, grant me the grace never to waver from this resolution until my death."<sup>68</sup> His obedience was such that he was a model for everyone. He could achieve such

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64 Leopold Beccaro, *Short Biography of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 15.

65 Paul Kalluveetil et. al., *Women TOCD Facts versus Fabrications*, Aluva: CMC Publications, 2013, 256-257.

66 Paul Kalluveetil et. al., *Women TOCD Facts versus Fabrications*, 275-277.

67 CWC, Vol. III, *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 37.

68 CWC, Vol. III, *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 34.

a heroic height in obedience because he fully abandoned his own will and obeyed everybody. His spiritual daughters at Koonammavu were greatly impressed by his obedience and commented:

...This father was obeying all like a little child. The good example which he showed us till his death is something that everyone marvels at. Is it not right and lawful then that all of us learn from his good example and live accordingly? As he was the prior and the head of all the monasteries (...) all were bound to obey his command. Still he obeyed all like a child. This he did in order to give up his will completely and thus set a good example for all.<sup>69</sup>

In the opinion of Fr. Louis Manjummel Fr. Prior was first in the observance of all rules, and always obedient like a novice. In the testament he gives the true meaning of obedience and how it should be practised. We have already seen his obedience as an expression of his life of faith. There were several occasions in which his obedience to authority was severely tested, but he was very submissive to the superiors and obeyed instantly. Thus he was practising a heroic sense of obedience by negating totally his will as though he has no eyes and ears of his own. More details with examples regarding his obedience we shall discuss in the subsequent chapter.

### **3.4.2. Chastity**

The love of Saint Kuriakose for this virtue is clearly reflected in his preoccupation to educate the faithful in modesty. In his exhortation to the sisters he used to remind them of the dignity of their call as queens and spouses of Jesus Christ. He considered the sublime status of a consecrated sister as a spouse of Christ. He begins his reflection with a citation

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69 *The Chronicles of Koonammavu Convent*, Vol. II, Aluva: CMC Publications, 2002, 13.

from Saint Augustine: "Oh consecrated, Oh blessed sister! You have a Bridegroom who is the most sublime above the glories of heaven and earth. He has chosen you from among the virgins, in order to make you his own and to elevate you as His bride. Don't you know that you are granted the pledge of love? It is then proper that you should have the greatest love for him."<sup>70</sup> In his written reflections on the status of the consecrated ones, he eulogizes the spousal dignity of the sisters. He articulates his inner feelings when he reads about the lofty status of the consecrated virgins. He confesses that he felt holy jealousy about the sisters whom he designates the great queens and spouses of Christ. His words seem to disclose his own mystical experiences of the graces of the consecrated life. He addresses: "Oh the great queens, the brides of my God."<sup>71</sup> They need not be worried and sad because the heavenly Bridegroom is ever compassionate and is ready to claim them. He is constantly beside them and has given himself to them. Saint Kuriakose trained the early members of the community of the sisters to live in the ever abiding presence of the Lord and to keep constant communion and communication with him. The above examples give ample proof of the mystical personality of Saint Kuriakose and his understanding of vowed life. He lived his vowed life perfectly well and spent himself fully for God and his people.

### **3.4.3. Poverty**

According to Saint Kuriakose poverty is the complete trust and dependency in the divine providence. He used to exhort his confreres not to lose even one drop of the reward of poverty. So the first community of sisters at Koonammavu convent were trained by him had evolved a spirituality of trust in their religious life. His spirit of poverty is very much obvious in his motto itself: 'the Lord is my portion'

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70 CWC, Vol. IV, *Letters*, VII/12.

71 CWC, Vol. IV, *Letters*, VII/12.

and he lived up to it until his death. He was aware that apart from Jesus he is nothing and he has nothing. With this understanding he was totally and utterly depended on God for anything and everything. One of the basic aspects of the practice of evangelical poverty is the voluntary renunciation of the right of private property so that the religious have everything in common and nothing in private. So whatever a religious may acquire as salary, gift etc. automatically goes to the common funds from which he/she may meet his/her needs.<sup>72</sup> By giving up his family inheritance Saint Kuriakose was making himself financially insecure thereby literally following the words of Jesus “if you wish to be perfect, go, sell all your possessions, give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, and follow me” (Mt 19:21). Thus responding to the prompting of the Spirit, he professed the evangelical counsel of poverty.<sup>73</sup> He kept his accounts so meticulously. Regarding his spirit of poverty the testimonies of Fr. Leopold Beccaro, Fr. Louis Manjummel and Fr. Marceline are noteworthy. He was convinced that the Lord will provide for their necessities. Even before becoming a religious priest he started practising the spirit of poverty. He had no private possessions and for everything he depended on God and remained satisfied with the minimum necessary things of use. “Apart from me you can do nothing” (Jn 15:5). He understood and practised this Word of God in his life and committed himself totally to God and utterly depended on him.

By the profession of these evangelical counsels he dedicated himself totally and fully for God and his people thereby made himself available for all.

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72 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 146.

73 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 144.

#### **4. Kenosis – Limits and Beyond**

In early Christianity, those tortured and martyred Christians were viewed with reverence by the Church. The concept kenosis has been much associated with the devotion and reverence to martyrs, consequently the understanding of Christian discipleship in ecclesial history as well. However, Christian spirituality, operating in accordance with the idea that we should model our lives after Christ, has used words like self-surrender, mortification, indifference, and apatheia, to describe a specific experience of emptying that takes place within the Christian discipleship. Jesus' earthly life was an expression of deep kenosis, a full self-surrender in love towards the father and towards humanity.

Hans Urs von Balthasar views Jesus' earthly activity is unified with the father and the Spirit. According to him, kenosis (characteristic of any true love) should be presupposed in the eternal love relationship of the divine Persons.<sup>74</sup> Creation itself is a manifestation of this internal kenosis of God and therefore God's relationship with his creatures is a sign of his self-emptying. According to Jürgen Moltmann, kenosis began at the primordial moment of God's creative determination, with a divine self-restriction; it will cease at the eschatological moment of God's redemptive resolve, with a divine de-restriction of self.<sup>75</sup> The mission of the Church or as the personal call one receives from God should embody God's kenotic mission. Our kenosis is an expression of God's principle of love, if so all our human and technological activities will be a participation in God's kenotic mission.<sup>76</sup>

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74 Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale, in Mysterium Salutis III*, Benzinger: Einsiedeln, 1969, 4.

75 Manuel G. Doncel, "The Kenosis of the Creator, His Creative Call and the Created Co-Creators," *European Journal of Science and Theology*, Vol. 2, 4 (2006) 13.

76 Manuel G. Doncel, "The Kenosis of the Creator, His Creative Call and the Created Co-Creators," 11.

Assuming the human condition meant that he inherited the human condition from Adam and Eve. But what is meant by the words he emptied himself? This emptying, first, meant self-limitation. Gerard O' Collins says that the choice of God is to embody a human condition: necessarily involved the willingness to assume certain limitations. By taking human form, he was sharing in the limited powers and limited way of acting of human beings. Physically he had to depend on others, especially on his mother, for his growth. His death, too, was a limitation to which he assigned himself because in death he showed his powerlessness under the impact of human violence and sin.<sup>77</sup>

#### **4.1. Kenosis and Suffering**

Walter Kasper in his exploration on the nature of Jesus' divine Sonship, suggests that we approach kenosis from his death on the cross and not merely from his birth as with a Logos-Christology alone. Saint Athanasius says: If God is born and if he dies, it is not because he is born that he dies, but it is to die that he is born.<sup>78</sup> God would not have been fully human had he not entered into death completely. The point of departure, therefore, of any Christological reflection is kenosis, the giving of the Son by the father and the self-giving of the Son to the father (and for the many).<sup>79</sup> Jüngel concurs emphasizing that the special and unique event, of the identification of the divine God with the historical man Jesus, is the revelation of the eternal being of God.<sup>80</sup> This is articulated by Paul in his question if God is for us, who can be against us? (Rom 8:31).

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77 Gerard O' Collins, *Incarnation*, 60.

78 Lossky, *Orthodox Theology*, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1978, 110.

79 Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 189.

80 Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World: On the Foundation of the Theology of the Crucified One in the Dispute between Theism and Atheism*, trans. Darrell L. Guder, Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd., 1983, 221.

Kenotic theme places the suffering and sacrifice of the cross directly in contact with the divine being itself, leading some theologians to claim God suffers in solidarity with the suffering humanity.<sup>81</sup> Kenosis is an image that speaks to the core of Christianity and reoccurs in many different contexts. The “broad assertion” is that God’s relationship to sinners is characterized by his infinite and continual self-gift. It is infinite because God’s resources are, of course, unlimited. It forms the central piece of the Eucharist and other liturgical practices. It informs our ethics and our decisions about what a good life might look like.<sup>82</sup>

Gerard O’ Collins says that God has to become equal with human beings if he is to love them. Equality with human beings becomes a condition of, and a requirement for, God’s self-gift in love. In the case of incarnation, his human form or “his ‘servant-form is not mere outer garment’.” The Son of God “must suffer all things, endure all things, make the experience of all things. He must suffer hunger in the desert, he must thirst in the time of his agony, he must be forsaken in death.”<sup>83</sup> This is to state and to emphasize that in the incarnation Christ became truly human to live the life of human beings. Saint Kuriakose acknowledged this truth of the incarnation of Christ and therefore he lamented that as the servant of Christ, he could not attain the perfection in his suffering. He sought the intercession of Mother Mary, with the freedom of a son, to help him to become a servant and in his *Compunction of the Soul*, he pleads twenty times that he is a servant of God.

Saint Kuriakose was left alone after the death of *Malpan Palackal* in 1841 and Fr. Porukkara in 1846. The task of guiding

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81 Ronald Goetz, “The Suffering God: The Rise of a New Orthodoxy,” *Christian Century*, April 16, 1986, 385-389.

82 Timothy J. Yoder, *Hans Urs Von Balthasar and Kenosis: The Pathway to Human Agency*, Chicago: Loyola University, 2013, 11.

83 G. O’ Collins, *Incarnation*, 57.



the young religious congregation fell on his shoulders. About this, Fr. Kuriakose Porukkara mentions in his short biography of Saint Kuriakose that both entrusted everything in the hands of the prior (Kuriakose Elias Chavara). He was grief-struck at their departure and at the heavy burden of the work, which he inherited. But in extreme humility, trusting in God and with the intercession of the Blessed Mother and Saint Joseph he began to walk in the path of his predecessors, carrying their burden.<sup>84</sup>

The experience of rejection and humiliation were not foreign to the life of Saint Kuriakose. For instance, as a social reformer, he wanted to reach out to the people through his literature. So, he wanted to set up a press, so that he could communicate people with Christian doctrine and values through the print media. As we have seen he went twice to Kottayam to a press to learn about the setting up of a press. But he was not welcomed there, and Saint Kuriakose bore with calmness the rejection at the hands of the people at Kottayam. However, he did not give up his desire, although with great inconvenience, he went to Trivandrum to visit another press. He took the pain happily to learn the working of the press there in Trivandrum for his mission.<sup>85</sup>

He had a similar experience at *Kalari*, the preliminary education centre of his time. He was forced to up bring his childhood, not in a very modest atmosphere, which made him very depressive. In addition to all that Saint Kuriakose began to suffer physically from obstructive elephantiasis from his seminary days. Besides rheumatisms with occasional fever soon became a lifelong companion. The very painful maladies, especially the loss of vision, also had affected him towards the end of his life. The deep suffering

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84 Palathara, ed., *SthaapakaPitaakkanmaar* (Founding Fathers) Mannanam: St. Joseph's Press, 1995, 26.

85 John Mannarathara, ed., *The Life and Legacy of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 12.

he experienced when he was isolated and compelled to live outside the cloister. His sorrow, when many members of the community became discouraged by the severity of rules and withdrawn from the community. As all other saints, Saint Kuriakose also welcomed all kinds of sufferings with faith and courage.<sup>86</sup>

In his old age, in order to comply with the desire of the Vicar Apostolic Baccinelli he left the monastery at Mannanam where he lived from 1831 onwards and moved to Koonammavu for the last six years of his life until his death. When we closely observe his life, we can easily realize that he was not only a man of deep sufferings but also a man of humility and perseverance. His deep faith in God enabled him to accept all his good and bad experiences graciously. He proved that to please God we need not do extraordinary activities, rather doing our little things happily is enough to please God. Thus, Chavara proved the true nature of a contemplative person is to accept everything with a profound sense of humility and calmness.<sup>87</sup>

#### **4.2. Cost of Suffering**

God entered into human history in the form of a slave, without exercising the immense power to transmit or rebound the evil found in humanity, but rather in the process of emptying, to absorb that which was not deserved or merited. "Not to exercise all the power at one's disposal is to endure the void. This is contrary to all the laws of nature. Grace alone can do it."<sup>88</sup> Forgiving is the only reaction which does not merely re-act but acts anew and unexpectedly, unconditioned by the act which provoked it and therefore freeing from its

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86 Mathias Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Second Edition, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2020, 426.

87 Thomas Kochumuttom, "A Contemplative in Action," 136.

88 Simon Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, trans. Emma Crawford and Mario von der Ruhr. London: Routledge, 2002, 10.

consequences both the one who forgives and the one who is forgiven.<sup>89</sup>

To suffer for the sake of love is an inevitable result of kenotic action. The mystery of God's love for humanity is situated within the movement of divine emptying and absorbing evil. Moving beyond these considerations, kenosis and suffering no longer have the last word; the last word belongs to exaltation and transfiguration through and in the Spirit. The unfathomable depth of God's love is clearly realized when we come to know and believe that Christ as the Son of God emptied himself and became obedient to the point of death on the cross. "Christ's kenosis and abnegation must be understood not as a partial, but as complete and thorough going."<sup>90</sup>

The suffering of Jesus on the cross was an embodiment of the full viciousness of the ego, which is the foundation of human evil. The resurrection is God's response to the crucifixion, which means human evil desires do not have the last word. No matter what happens, no matter what evil might occur, God always has and always will get the ultimate final word; in time, all will be well. It will be glorious, just as Jesus' resurrection.<sup>91</sup>

Saint Kuriakose accepted all the sufferings that he had to face in his life with the hope that God's will is the last word. With living a warm faith, he endured all his physical suffering and human misunderstandings. His contemporaries were surprised by his great patience and resignation, with which he faced his problems, particularly his sickness. With a cheerful face, he appeared and became a motivation for

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89 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998, 241.

90 Masao Abe, "Kenosis, Sunyata, and Trinity: A Dialogue with Masao Abe," 10.

91 Marianne Williamson, *Tears of Triumph: The Spiritual Journey from Suffering to Enlightenment*, San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 2016, 136.

others. All those who were close to him could understand that it was the grace of God that enabled him to bear all that disturbed him because he united his suffering with that of Christ.

## **5. The Saints and Kenosis**

The saints have imbibed different ways the kenosis of Christ, which enlightens the understanding of God's revelation in Jesus.<sup>92</sup> Balthasar says that the saints are the best option for constructing an apologetic for the Christian worldview.<sup>93</sup> This focus on the saints allows for a multiplicity of descriptions of the Christian life and it offers a more direct and concrete description of Christianity.

The spiritual way of Saint John of the cross emphasizes on radical darkness, and renunciation of earthly pleasures. In the Christian mystic tradition, the language of self-annihilation is best expressed by John of the Cross. For John of the Cross, renunciations are a way of prioritizing in his spiritual life. His priority is to reach the Trinitarian love of God. For him, this involves rejecting many legitimate good things in recognition and to desire something better. Such a kenotic attitude will bear with it a sense of loss since there are legitimate goods that are sacrificed (physical comfort, rest, family), but it is absolutely crucial to see that, for John, pain is not central to achieving his goal but a by-product of it. This is not to make light of his spiritual and physical suffering. For John, the pain involved in his spiritual journey is felt because the rejection of earthly things is the rejection of something profoundly good in favour of something deeper and greater.

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92 Mark A. McIntosh, *Mystical Theology: The Integrity of Spirituality and Theology, Challenges in Contemporary Theology*, Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998, 105.

93 Victoria S. Harrison, *The Apologetic Value of Human Holiness: Von Balthasar's Christocentric Philosophical Anthropology*, Norwell, MA: Kluwer Academic, 2000.

Saint Therese of Lisieux “understood the act of total surrender to the triune God as the highest possible form of engagement on behalf of the world’s salvation.”<sup>94</sup> As we have seen the ‘little way’ was the expression of Saint Therese to please God through her own little actions. “The ‘little way’ that Therese now constructs comes from renouncing everything in Christian love that seems to lend it greatness, power and glory. Love is brought to a state of weakness in which it learns the power of divine love, of littleness and darkness in which the greatness and glory of divine love are displayed. The basis of the little way, therefore, is one series of renunciations after another.”<sup>95</sup> Therese’s ‘little way’ is not an ascending spirituality but allowing oneself to be active in continuous renunciations with worldly pleasure. The little way expresses the kenotic motif in terms of the simple, hidden moments in life when one can minister to another. Therese’s kenotic expression is oriented toward serving others with small, concrete acts of kindness.

Saint Kuriakose was quite familiar with the teachings and the languages of Saint Teresa of Avila. Even his understanding of meditation is identical to hers.<sup>96</sup> It is true that Saint Teresa never lost sight of the difference between God the father and his Son Jesus Christ. But for Saint Kuriakose, even God the Son is his father especially in his *Meditation Colloquies*, he addresses Jesus Christ as “My dear Father” and as the prodigal son places himself at his pierced feet: “O my father dear, I cast myself on my knees before your throne of mercy. I am bent on clinging to your pierced but live feet until you speak to me words of forgiveness, as

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94 Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Two Sisters in the Spirit: Therese of Lisieux and Elizabeth of the Trinity*, trans. Anne England Nash Donald Nichols, and Dennis Martin. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992, 11.

95 Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Two Sisters in the Spirit: Therese of Lisieux and Elizabeth of the Trinity*, 272.

96 Thomas Kochumuttam, “A Contemplative in Action”, 150.

you did to Mary Magdalene and Mary of Cortoda.”<sup>97</sup> Even so in his *Compunction of the soul*, Saint Kuriakose is ever conscious of the ugliness of sin that pains the heart of the heavenly father.

## **6. Kenosis: A Spiritual Path**

Here we see the importance of the kenosis imagery within the realm of the spiritual journey. We seek to understand the spirituality as the relationship between human agency and its activity of self-surrender. It shall be investigated that the kenotic motif finds its depth on the Gospel as the unifying factor for Christian perfection in human relationships.

The spirituality of Saint Kuriakose was characterized by intense charity or love of God and fellow beings, ardent prayer, close communication with Christ, and love for the Church. He was a prayerful person, who achieved great things by virtue of his prayerfulness and close communication with Christ.<sup>98</sup> He was influenced by the spirituality of great mystics like Saint Teresa and Saint John of the Cross, and at the same time combined it with the burning zeal of Prophet Elijah for God’s Kingdom on earth. With the prophetic spirit he was pursuing a life of inner solitude and sacrifice for the mystical union with God.<sup>99</sup> He discovered through his closeness with Christ that the Lord is his portion. So, he developed a spirituality of an action-oriented mysticism which leaves him with a feeling of being always in the presence of Christ and being guided by Christ. He saw the provident hands of God at work in all what happened to and around him and, therefore, every experience, pleasant as well as unpleasant, he accepted with equanimity.

For Saint Kuriakose sin is the cause of division and separation while meditation or prayer is a process of love

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97 CWC, Vol. III, *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 5.

98 Mathias Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 436.

99 Mathias Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 441.

and union. He says: "God does not abide in a sinful heart."<sup>100</sup> Therefore his daily meditation in the oratory always consisted of a request for forgiveness of sins: "Repenting on my sins behold, I come into the presence of my Father in order to obtain forgiveness of my sins and peace of the soul."<sup>101</sup> Hence it is clear that to Saint Kuriakose, mourning over one's trespasses is a prerequisite for spiritual life. The genuine disposition for prayer demands a repentant heart. However, on his death bed he was able to declare that he had never tarnished the grace, which he received in baptism.<sup>102</sup> So, spirituality for him is a steadfast disposition of the heart, it is the discovery of God within the heart, where God dwells as in a temple and an affective union with him.

In his meditation he conceived two phases: In the first phase, the soul is perceiving the divine experience and his intense thirst to be with God by any means and constantly. In the second phase, the soul all set to unite itself with the eternal source of everlasting life and the perfection of all beauty and truth laments on its faults. Here the individual cries sincerely over his iniquities, for being one with the creatures, and asking forgiveness.

Despite his inner purity, we see him wailing over his incompetence to receive the Holy of Holiness into his heart. This simple and genuine gesture speaks volumes of his humble belief that he is incapable of practising greater virtues or of attaining high contemplation. He confesses that sins pose a big block to his loving chats with the heavenly bridegroom.<sup>103</sup> "A sinful heart is incompatible with God. Therefore... I must come to my saviour Jesus Christ my beloved Bridegroom, to beg pardon for my sins."<sup>104</sup>

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100 CWC, Vol. III, *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 1981, 1, 15.

101 CWC, Vol. III, *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 1981, 15-16.

102 Sebastian Mulloparambil, "The God-Experience of Bl. Chavara," 263.

103 Sebastian Mulloparambil, "The God-Experience of Bl. Chavara," 262.

104 CWC, Vol. III, *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 3.



Spirituality means growing in love and devotion to God. It is a way of approaching God and in his approach to God we can distinguish two predominant sentiments, namely, fear and filial love. His fear of God takes its origin from his sense of unworthiness. He takes care of this sentiment first by strengthening his conviction of God's love and mercy for all human beings, and secondly by deepening his faith in the communion of saints. It shows itself in him in two ways, namely, his belief that saints being conscious of the seriousness of sin will be of help to sinners in their struggle to holiness; and his belief that the spiritual riches they have gained make them worthy to be our mediators with God. His attitude in prayer can be compared to that of Moses on Mount Sinai; he was fearful, at the sight of Yahweh, but he returned from the mountain with joy, peace, and radiance. Against this background, we can understand his filial relationship (*appa*) with God.<sup>105</sup>

The way to God is Christ and one of the central aspects of Saint Kuriakose's prayer is his intense desire to see Christ. He tries to see Jesus in all the moments of his earthly life, from the moment of conception to his glorious resurrection. As we have seen prayer for Saint Kuriakose is a conversation with God. In his opinion friends, even though they do not know each other's language, communicate with each other. Such is the case with persons in prayer.<sup>106</sup> The awareness of the presence of God is the essence of prayer.

Saint Peter with the best of intentions tried to dissuade Jesus from carrying the cross. Scolding him sternly Jesus instructed that he should look at the cross "with thoughts from God, not from himself" (Mt 16:23). Those days the cross was the most cruel punishment that a criminal could be given. To impose it on Jesus who was the most innocent of all was humanly speaking the grave injustice. However,

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105 CWC, Vol. III, *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 26.

106 CWC, Vol. III, *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 14-15.

from God's side, it was a necessary part of the work of the redemption of humankind and, therefore, not something to be rejected but welcomed. Similarly, Saint Kuriakose looked at everything from a divine perspective and gracefully accepted it. It indeed is the key to explain his spirituality. He understood everything that happened in his life as God's will and nothing else. This realization, on the one hand, kept him humble and realistic and on the other hand made him grateful to and confident in God.

As Saint Teresa of Avila, Saint Kuriakose also was proud of the fact that he was a son of the Catholic Church. He received the inspiration to renew the life of the Church in India. Syrian Church was passing through a turbulent period as it came under the control of European missionaries, first under Padroado and later under Congregation for Propagation of faith. This situation was not at all conducive for the spiritual wellbeing of the Syrian Christians hence Saint Kuriakose contemplating the establishment of a *Darasanaveedu* (a house of vision), a house of prayer or a monastery to attain the spiritual renewal of himself as well as the faith-community to which he belonged. This was the first intension in his first holy mass.

Christ emptied himself taking the form of a servant, appearing in human likeness (Phil 2:6-7). Following Jesus the spirituality of Saint Kuriakose was the discovery of the Lord as his portion (Ps 16:5). It is in the experiential realization of God and concentrating his will on Christ in all apostolic activity and in feeling contact with Christ in an all-embracing manner. It is a Christ-centred, Christ oriented discovery of God at an indescribable plan of human consciousness. "Christ is all and in all" (Col 3:11). Therefore, Saint Kuriakose said, "Jesus Christ is my love, fortune, breath and food." Kenosis is not something that just happened once in Christ; it is something that has marked the whole history of God's dealing with human beings. The kenosis of Christ is the

ultimate expression of God's kenotic love for man, but it is not an example isolated from the rest."<sup>107</sup> The kenosis of God shows forth the two natures of Jesus Christ and discloses to us in a direct and accessible way how God wishes to be known in and through him. Kenosis is the characteristic of God's being and action in every respect. Kenosis is the key to the saving action of God. His characteristic act in salvation is not one of self-assertion but rather of self-negation. In contrast to all human attempts at self-salvation, God saves in a gesture of radical self-giving. God limits himself, taking upon himself the incompleteness, brokenness, and sin that separate humans from him. Free self-limitation is the characteristic of God's every act, indeed, of God's own person.

Following the path of kenosis is surely not an easy task, but the life of Saint Kuriakose shows that it is possible and that will be life giving both for others and for ourselves. It calls for greater intimacy and identification with the Lord, the *par excellence* of *kenosis*, which is the goal of all discipleship.

## **7. Biblical Understanding of Divine Kenosis and Humility**

The term kenosis and its cognates in Christological discussions are based on the Greek words *heauton ekenosen* in Philippians 2:7, translated as 'he emptied himself'. It is the classical text referring to the self-emptying of the Second person of the Trinity. Other passages, such as 2 Cor 8:9, Jn 3:13, 16:28, 17: 5 and Rom 15:3 are seen as parallels. This is a controversial and difficult passage, and according to many interpreters it originated as a pre-Pauline hymn in the context of early Christian worship. There are different ways of interpreting this hymn. However, to venture an extensive exegetical analysis of this passage is beyond the scope of

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107 Donald G. Dawe, *The Form of a Servant: A Historical Analysis of the Kenotic Motif*, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963, 195.

this work. Analysing the immediate social context in which the hymn is placed, one can infer that it is an exhortation to the Christian community in Philippi. Many contemporary exegetes support the ethical import of this passage. Paul appropriates this hymn as a basis for his ethical appeal to the Philippians, linking the self-emptying of Christ to the life of the Christian community.<sup>108</sup> In this text we have the most explicit reference to the humility and self-emptying of Christ. This hymn is an invitation to imitate Christ through humble unselfish living where one places the interests of others before their own needs. Paul is urging the believers to have the mind of Christ. What is to be stressed here is the radical altruism of Christ in setting aside the heavenly status by assuming the condition of the unworthy creatures.<sup>109</sup> The term *doulos* which is commonly translated as ‘slave’ refers not just to Jesus’ humble attitude while on this earth, but to the nature of the human condition to which Jesus entered, “to be a victim, a powerless slave to the ‘givens’ of life. This song affirms that Jesus entered into this human bondage.”<sup>110</sup> The spiritual reality of the term *doulos* we find in the life of Jesus because “he is the source and paradigm for radical discipleship.”<sup>111</sup> Some translate *doulos* as ‘servant’, alluding to the servant of Isa 53: 12.<sup>112</sup> But Brendan Byrne points out that such a translation nullifies the contrast between the extremities of lordship and slavery that seem to be the intention of the hymn’s setting.

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108 In developing this section, I rely mostly on my book Moly Thomas, *Christology in Context: Kenotic Perspectives*, 24-25.

109 Moly Thomas, *Christology in Context: Kenotic Perspectives*, 27.

110 M. Eugene Boring, *Truly Human/Truly Divine: Christological Language and the Gospel Form*, Saint Louis, MO: CBP Press, 1984, 56.

111 Sophy Rose, *Doulos: A Paradigm for Christian Discipleship and Mystical Path of Total Abandonment to God*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2021, 1.

112 R. P. Martin, *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians: An Introduction and Commentary*, London: Tyndale Press, 1959, 167-96.

The selfless attitude of Christ, shown in his original disposition to take on the slavelike, mortal human condition, continues in his human history. ... Throughout his whole life, Christ lived out perfectly the demands of human existence before God. Death was not simply the terminal point of his obedience; it was the inevitable consequence of being both fully human and totally obedient in a world alienated from God.<sup>113</sup>

Christ did not use his divine status for his own advantage or for purely selfish motives; but rather he gave up his divine status to take up a mode of existence that was not his, by accepting the condition of a slave that involved suffering and death.<sup>114</sup> From the context itself it is evident that the emptying is equivalent to humbling himself and taking on a lowly status and position. Although he was in the form of God, he emptied himself and took the form of a servant, humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross (Phil 2:8). According to Paul Christ humbled himself and came to live as a man giving up some of his privileges and honour as God which was his as God. It means the emptying includes role and status and not essential attributes or nature. It signifies his humble status. Paul presents Christ as the supreme example for them to imitate.<sup>115</sup> Paul persuaded them to be humble and put the interests of others first, taking on a lowly status and position.

The humiliation of Christ as we have seen in this hymn reaches its climax in the crucifixion. The crucifixion shows the extremity of his abasement because such a form of execution was reserved for slaves and those who had been stripped of

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113 Brendan Byrne, "The Letter to the Philippians," in Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer and Roland E. Murphy, eds., *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990, 795.

114 Brendan Byrne, "The Letter to the Philippians," 794.

115 Wayne Grudem, *Bible Doctrine: Essential Teachings of the Christian Faith*, ed., Jeff Purswell, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1999, 240.

all civic rights. Therefore “even death on the cross” indicates what is special of Jesus’ death, namely, it is not an ordinary death, but a death entailing intense shame and suffering.<sup>116</sup> Some scholars speak of a double kenosis in this passage, namely, a kenosis undergone by the pre-existent Son in the incarnation, and a second kenosis or a human self-emptying that culminated on the cross. What is of particular interest to us is the profound love and altruism unveiled in this act of kenosis and its consequent implications for our life. Jesus reveals a loving God who is really interested in humankind “that he cares for us that, once in history he entered into a dialogue with mankind; that at the climax of this intervention he came right down among us as a man to show us what he is like.”<sup>117</sup> Although the attitude of humility as seen in Christ and the actual humiliations that were experienced by him are intimately related, there is a nuanced difference between the two.<sup>118</sup>

### **7.1. Humility in the Songs of the Suffering Servant**

Among the various OT writings, the Songs of Suffering Servant have a special place regarding the theme of humility. They highlight the salvific value of humility as manifested in the Suffering Servant. Humility is so basic to the relationship of Yahweh and Israel. It is important to note that in the whole of the OT this basic response of humility before God is required of everyone (Mic 6:8), especially of kings, while the sin of pride is condemned. The OT is filled with numerous

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116 Charles M. Horne, “Let This Mind Be in You,” *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 3 (1960) 41.

117 Joseph Pathrapankal, *Critical and Creative: Studies in Bible and Theology*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1986, 15-16.

118 Francis George Pudhicherry, *Self-Love to Self-Emptying Love: The Divine Kenosis and Humility in the Foundational Experiences of the Society of Jesus and Chapter 4 of the General Examen*, Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Universidad Pontificia Camillas de Madrid, 2016, 29, n. 11. Humility is a virtue that refers to an attitude whereas humiliation is an experience that a person undergoes.



instances of many humble have been exalted by God and made use of them to fulfil God's mission while the result of humility was honour and exaltation and the consequence of pride was destruction. The right attitude of childlike humility is presented in the Wisdom Literature (Sir 3:17-24) and in Pslam131.<sup>119</sup> The Suffering Servant Songs in the book of Isaiah provide an important source of understanding regarding the theme of humility which has a great affinity to the humility of Christ. The four texts of the servant of the Lord hymns in the OT we find in Isa 42:1-4, 6-7, 49:1-7, 50:4-11, and 52:13-53: 1-12. Regarding the identity of the servant in the above mentioned hymns there are some debates. Some suggest the servant is identified with Israel, some others to a single person, or the faithful Israelites etc.<sup>120</sup> We do not deal with this part in detail because of the limited nature of our work. However, we wish to comment on the empowering nature of humility as seen in the suffering servant. This will help us to better understand the meaning and importance of humility in the Divine kenosis. They highlight the salvific value of humility as manifested in the suffering servant of the Lord. As noted the humility of the suffering servant has great similarity to the humility of Christ and many NT authors also indicate that the prophecy regarding the suffering servant in the book of Isaiah has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The servant songs of Isaiah had made a profound impression on the mind of Jesus. From these songs it was clear for him the role he had to fulfil. He saw himself as the true servant of the Lord, totally obedient to God and completely compassionate and empathetic to the needs of others. He found in the servant songs a pattern for his life. What is to be highlighted here is that this humiliation was for 'our transgressions' and by his 'bruises' we are healed

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119 Warren Dicharry, *To Live the Word, Inspired and Incarnate: An Integral Biblical Spirituality*, Bombay: St Paul Publications, 1992, 125.

120 Sebastian Athappilly, *Christology Today: Mystery and History of Jesus Christ*, Vol. 1, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2007, 137.



and the punishment endured by him made us whole (Isa 53:5-8). The humility presented in the suffering servant is empowering in nature and leads to participation in divine life. It is only through humility a person is led to God and only a contrite heart which is aware of its radical dependence on God can humble itself. This is further illumined in the humility of Christ revealed in the Gospels. In the humility of Christ we can see that true humility is rooted in God's gratuitous love and oriented towards the service of others. In the OT humility was a call to the people to submit oneself to God who is sovereign and demands righteousness.<sup>121</sup> This is clear in the main idea behind this title namely, his identity as someone existing 'for others', or his 'pro-existence'. The role of the servant is one of representative or substitutive.

## **7.2. Humility in the New Testament**

Humility in the NT is found in the very person of Jesus Christ. His example and teachings provide ample proof that, this virtue is essential for everyone. He emphasizes frequently his status as a servant and this is highlighted in the foot washing scene in the gospel of Saint John. From the Gospels we can infer that Jesus understood his life and death as service for others. Saint Paul in his Letter to the Philippians and Saint John in the prologue of his gospel speak about the incarnation of the Word. After insisting that the Word was God (Jn 1:1) and everything was created by him (Jn 1:3) Saint John proceeds to say that "The Word became flesh" (Jn 1:14) thereby saying how he assumed our complete human nature, including all our human weaknesses and limitations, with the possibility to be tempted, however to which he never gave the slightest consent (Heb 4:15). Saint Paul presented Jesus as the perfect model of humility in the Letter to the Philippians.

He started from the highest possible position, that of God Himself, and abased himself to the lowest possible position,

121 Francis George Pudhicherry, *Self-Love to Self-Emptying Love*, 35- 36.

not only becoming a foetus in Mary's womb, a helpless baby at her breast, and 'subject' to Mary and Joseph at Nazareth (Lk 2:51), but incredibly 'a worm, not a man' (Ps 22:6), 'struck down by God, and afflicted' (Is 53:4), 'stricken for the transgression of his people' (Is 53:8), namely all of us.<sup>122</sup>

His final self-abasement was as our very food and drink in the Sacrifice and Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (Jn 13:1). Moreover, Jesus is telling us to become like little children in order to enter the Kingdom of God. "Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 18:3-4). He emphatically points out that greatness is in littleness. It is worth mentioning here the recent Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis '*C'est la Confiance*' on confidence in the merciful love of God of Saint Therese of child Jesus on the occasion of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her birth published on 15<sup>th</sup> October 2023 where he highlights her 'little way' (n. 14). The way of spiritual childhood, the path of trust and love, and indeed this is the way the heavenly father reveals to the little ones (Mt 11:25). Pope is underlining her practice of charity in littleness in company with Virgin Mary from whom she learned that to 'love is to give everything' that is to say, 'to give oneself.' According to the Pope Mary was the first one who experienced the 'little way' in pure faith and humility (n. 36). As Therese testifies she is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven (cf. Mt 18:4), because she is the least and the one closest to Jesus in his abasement. For Saint Therese the point of departure of her little way is humility. The way of spiritual childhood is nothing but the reality of littleness. She got this idea of littleness from the Scriptures (Pro 9:4, Wis. 6:7, Isa 66:12-13). According to her in order to enjoy the goodness and merciful love of God one must humble oneself and acknowledge one's limitations and nothingness. She is convinced of the fact that her vocation is

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122 Warren Dicharry, *To Live the Word, Inspired and Incarnate*, 126-128.

love and “in order that love be fully satisfied, it is necessary that It lower Itself, and that It lower Itself to nothingness and transform this nothingness into *fire*.”<sup>123</sup> Therese’s ‘little way’ is not an ascending spirituality but allowing oneself to be active in frequent renunciations with worldly pleasure. The little way expresses the kenotic motif in terms of the simple, hidden moments in life when one can minister to another. The kenotic expression of this love of Therese is oriented towards serving others with small, concrete acts of kindness.

In an age where people focus more on themselves and their own interests Therese shows us the beauty of making our life as a gift to others. When superficial needs and desires are glorified she testifies to the radicalism of the Gospel. In an age of individualism she invites us to discover the value of love that becomes intercession for others. When everybody else is cast aside, she is inviting us to be concerned about others and responsible for them. She said she would spend her heaven doing good on earth.<sup>124</sup> She abandoned and submitted herself to the Lord expecting everything from him. She always took the lowest place along with the Son of God, who became a slave for our sake and humbled himself, becoming obedient, even to death on a cross (Phil 2:7-8). Moreover, in her life we can find an orientation towards others. When Jesus highlighted the little children as models he was exposing their qualities of innocence, surrender, total dependence, humility etc. So she wanted to be small always.

Humility is self-knowledge and truth. Therefore it encourages and enables us to recognize and acknowledge God’s gifts in us and to appreciate them precisely as God’s gifts. Holy Virgin Mary had such an attitude and she proclaimed: “for the Mighty One has done great things for

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123 John Clark, *Story of A Soul: The Autobiography of Saint Therese of Lisieux*, trans., Trivandrum: Carmel Publishing Centre, 1995, 195.

124 Pope Francis, *Ce’est la Confiance: Apostolic Exhortation*, Rome: Basilica of Saint John Lateran, 15 October 2023, n. 52.

me, and holy is his name" (Lk 1:49). She is the profound example of humility and spotless purity that she emptied of herself and by God's grace, was a worthy receptacle for the very Son of God himself. We will not be fully human unless we are truly humble.<sup>125</sup> All what we are, and what we have, all we can be, are God's gracious gifts to us, not as owners, but as stewards. Moreover, what we become with the help of God, how we develop and use our endowments of nature and grace, are our gifts to God. Significantly, the thought provoking parable of the tenants (Mt 25:14-30; Lk 19:11-27) is worth mentioning here.<sup>126</sup> Saint Paul is challenging us if you have received everything as gifts from God, "why do you boast as if it were not a gift?" (1 Cor 4:7). It is to be noted that we are living in an age of self-centredness and our most basic human instinct is self-preservation. It enables us to preserve and promote ourselves. Humility is the first and most basic virtue needed in the spiritual life and the final virtue which is necessary in our lifelong struggle against pride. It is the attitude proper to a creature before the creator, because human beings are insignificant compared to God and the right disposition for them is one of reverence and submission. Interestingly, although we recognize and acknowledge the truth of our total dependence on God, it is not easy to practise genuine humility towards our fellow beings.<sup>127</sup> Humility is not only an attitude before God, but also it should be reflected in our relationship towards others.

The humble origin of Jesus is very obvious from the Infancy Narratives. The choice of Jesus to be born in a humble state reveals a definitive option of God to share fully in the poor and fragile condition of the human person. Luke is narrating the poor and vulnerable condition in which he

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125 Warren Dicharry, *To Live the Word, Inspired and Incarnate*, 128.

126 Warren Dicharry, *To Live the Word, Inspired and Incarnate*, 131. The Lord is appreciating the ones who multiplied their talents.

127 Warren Dicharry, *To Live the Word, Inspired and Incarnate*, 129.

was born. "She gave birth to her first born son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place in the inn" (Lk 2:7). He was born in a manger along with cattle in the cattle shed. Throughout his life we can notice how he was so humble and simple. At the time of his baptism they could offer only a 'pair of turtle doves or two pigeons' as a sacrifice in the temple (Lk 2:4) which was the offering of the poor. The first persons who came to worship this Divine child were the poor and humble shepherds, according to what was communicated to them. The shepherds had the privilege of encountering the Divine in the form of a humble and vulnerable child in the manger. (Lk 2: 15-16) The fact that he was the son of a carpenter (Mk 6:3) and that he was obedient to his parents further indicates the humble settings in which he had grown up (Lk 2:51).

### **7.2.1. Greatness in Littleness**

The public life of Jesus is replete with exhortations and teachings on humility through his words, deeds and parables. The request of James and John, the sons of Zebedee, was an occasion for Jesus to speak about the importance of humility (Mk 10:35-45; Mt 20:20-28). He emphatically points out that the Kingdom he preaches is different from the one that was conventionally understood. Significantly he makes it clear that the greatness in such a Kingdom consists in being a servant or slave and serving in humility. He says: "whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all" (Mk 10:44-45). Jesus was well aware that the disciples were not grasping the core of his message. In this context Jesus indicates that there is a direct relationship between suffering, humiliation and a life of humility and service. Moreover, Jesus was asking James and John whether they would be able to drink the cup of his suffering which he was about to drink (Mk 10:39; Mt 20:22). While they continued to search for places of honour and pride Jesus took a child

(Mk 9:36) and told them to have the qualities of a child like humility, littleness, and insignificance.

During his public ministry even though he performed many extraordinary miracles and signs some people remarked that he was the 'carpenter Joseph's son' and his mother was the humble and poor woman 'called Mary' and his brothers were 'James and Joseph, Judas and Simon' (Mk 6:3; Mt 13:55; Lk 4:22). He was always in company with the poor, the sinners, the oppressed, the tax collectors and the marginalized people. He dined with them and offered salvation to them. He had contacts not with rich, powerful and influential people. In a banquet while some of the guests were searching for places of honour Jesus reinforced the centrality of humility in the new order he was ushering in. In this context Jesus said "for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted" (Lk 14:11). Jesus used the imagery of the banquet to indicate the new realm of his Kingdom where all are invited by the father. There is an inversion of standards and those who are inspired by the Spirit imitate the Son through a life of humility and self-emptying love will share the place of honour.<sup>128</sup> In a similar vein in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax-collector Jesus speaks about the centrality of humility. The final justification of the tax-collector indicates the attitude of humility is that finds favour with God, while that of pride has its downfall. Pride symbolized in the Pharisee and his spiritual justification is totally centred on himself and makes it extremely difficult for him to open up to the grace of God. On the other hand, the attitude of humility leads one to the mercy and love of God and leads one to encounter one's true self in the light of God's merciful love.<sup>129</sup>

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128 Francis George Pudhicherry, *Self-Love to Self-Emptying Love*, 39-40.

129 Francis George Pudhicherry, *Self-Love to Self-Emptying Love*, 40.



### **7.2.2. Humiliations and Rejections**

One cannot grow in humility merely by academic considerations, without undergoing humiliations. One can grow in humility only through experience of humiliations and rejections. In the life of Jesus we can find many such experiences especially during his public ministry. It is important to note that Jesus experienced humiliations and rejections not only from his own people but also from others such as the Romans and Samaritans. Although he was very much fruitful in his public ministry and performed lot of extraordinary signs and hailed as the Messiah many were humiliating him due to his humble origins. The frustration of Jesus is clear when he uses the popular sayings to show how 'prophets are dishonoured' (Mk 6:4, Mt 13:57) or 'no prophet is accepted in his home town' (Lk 4:24). He was not only humiliated but also the people in the synagogue were even 'filled with rage' (Lk 4:28) and wanted to 'hurl him off the cliff' (Lk 4:29). The low human origin of Jesus was used to insult and disregard him. Moreover, due to their unbelief he could not do many deeds of power at Nazareth, his home town (Mk 6:5, Mt 13:58).

Jesus had the experience of rejection of religious leaders and authorities, but now he is experiencing the rejection of his own people. He was denied by Peter, betrayed by Judas Iscariot and deserted by all of his disciples when he needed them most. Though he knew well that they would abandon him, still he loved them unconditionally to the end. All the evangelists are unanimous that Jesus knew already that he would be rejected by the disciples (Mt 26: 23; Mk14:20; Lk 22:32; Jn 13:24) but he did not keep any anger or grudge towards them. The humility of God is clear in the helplessness of Jesus in relation to the disciples. Despite the fact that Jesus knew the evil intentions of Judas, Jesus respected his freedom and allowed him to proceed with his plan. The attitude of Jesus towards Judas reveals the love, humility and suffering



of God that cannot be understood from a human perspective. The man who was to betray him was allowed to 'dip bread in the bowl with him' (Mk 14:20; Mt 26:23) and was permitted to kiss him (Lk 22:47). The gentleness, meekness and pain is evident in Jesus' question to Judas when he asked him if it was 'with a kiss that (he would betray the Son of Man? Lk 22:48). The pain would further be accentuated on the knowledge that Judas had finally given up, taken his life and thus frustrated the plan of God's love (Mt 27:5, Acts 1:18). However his inability to get out of the vicious circle of self love led him to have a proud and exaggerated opinion of himself where he believed that his sin was greater than God's mercy.

However, the ultimate sign that manifested the being of God was on the cross where the depth of God's self-emptying love was revealed in the utter humiliation, rejection and abandonment on the cross. Paradoxically the humiliation of Christ on the cross was the moment of his exaltation, the locus of eternal redemption.<sup>130</sup> The Centurion's confession is the climax of the crucifixion scene. He proclaimed Jesus to be the Son of God not because he witnessed any miraculous events or was impressed by any deeds Jesus performed, but because he witnessed the powerless death of Jesus, his kenotic service.<sup>131</sup> "In the cross of Christ, the Christian understands that God's *love* is total. Indeed, God's decisive self-manifestation is in the servant hood, suffering, and death of this Jesus who is no other than the Christ."<sup>132</sup> According to Paul, the crucified is precisely "the Christ" because at the moment of his death the power of God became manifest

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130 Francis George Pudhicherry, *Self-Love to Self-Emptying Love*, 41. See also Moly Thomas, *Christology in Context*, 131.

131 Moly Thomas, *Christology in Context*, 156.

132 David Tracy, "Kenosis, Sunyata, and Trinity: A Dialogue with Masao Abe," in John B. Cobb, Jr. and Christopher Ives, eds., *The Emptying God: A Buddhist-Jewish-Christian Conversation*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990, 153.

and evident. Thus God's power was revealed in weakness, but this weakness was proved to be no weakness at all, but strength far greater than that of humans.<sup>133</sup> It is indeed this aspect of the nature of Christ's kenosis -love -that seems most appealing. The life of Jesus reveals a loving God who has freely chosen to empty Godself in self-giving love. This self-emptying or self-giving is seen not as impoverishment but rather enrichment and growth; and this self-surrendering and commitment of Jesus to God and for the whole humanity is presented as the fulfilment of love. Thus, self-realisation and self-divestment are mutually reinforcing.<sup>134</sup>

Jesus takes away the sin of the world by taking it upon himself. All these are examples of his humility. In the humility of Christ we see that true humility is rooted in God's gratuitous love and oriented towards the service of others. Such humility glorifies God and exalts the human person. The incarnation, the words and deeds and even the very life of Jesus invite and demand us to live a life of humility. The Divine Kenosis as revealed in Christ responds to the deepest yearnings of human person and provides life with a sense of meaning and harmony. Only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. Such is the mystery of man, and it is a great one, as is seen by believers, in the light of Christian revelation. Through Christ and in Christ, the riddles of sorrow and death grow meaningful.<sup>135</sup> The imagery of the self-emptying love of God revealed in the incarnation, life and ultimate death on the cross provides Christians today with a fundamental

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133 Joseph Kottackal, *The Salvific Folly of God*, Kottayam: CMS Press, 1984, 152-53.

134 Moly Thomas, *Christology in Context*, 131.

135 *Gaudium et Spes, Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents*, ed., Austin Flannery, Bombay: St Paul Publications, 1991, n. 22-23.

understanding of the transformative power of love that always entails vulnerability.<sup>136</sup>

### **7.2.3. Baptism of Jesus**

The baptism of Jesus was an important moment when he identified with the sinful humanity by receiving the baptism of repentance from John the Baptist. In the baptism scene we can find Jesus humbling himself to receive the baptism of repentance which was meant for sinners thereby equalizing himself with the sinful humanity (Mt 3:13-17, Mk 1:9-11, Lk 3:21-22, Jn 1:29-34). All the evangelists highlighted this event to show its significance in Jesus' sharing the human condition. Although Jesus was not a sinner he received the baptism of repentance from John the Baptist for the forgiveness of sins. It was a symbolic action. By receiving this baptism he identified himself with the sinful humanity and took upon himself all the sins of the whole human race. He received baptism not for his own sins but for the sins of the whole world. He comes here for the sake of others. This vicarious role of the servant is reflected in the voice from heaven, "You are my beloved Son/Servant" (Mk 1:11; Isa 42:1).<sup>137</sup> He was 'made into sin' so that in him we might become the very holiness of God (2 Cor 5:21) for our sake. The relation of Jesus' baptism and his role as the servant is expressed in John 1:29 in a reverse order. John the Baptist refers Jesus as the 'Lamb of God' who takes away the sin of the world. He takes away the sin of the world by taking it upon himself. As "the wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23) he who took upon himself our sin, had consequently to take upon himself death. So he had to accept death in order to save humanity. On the cross he accomplished a second baptism that was his death. This is the culmination of his humility on the cross where the absolute manifestation of God's self-emptying love is revealed in a

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136 Lucien Richard, *Christ: The Self-Emptying of God*, Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1997, 8.

137 Sebastian Athappilly, *Christology Today*, 139.

most humiliating death. This second baptism on the cross (Lk 12:50, Mk 10:38) was the fulfilment of his first baptism in river Jordan. Jesus received the baptism of repentance in view of his death on the cross. The first baptism was with water and the second baptism by blood (Heb 9:22) and thereby he brought salvation to humanity. The humiliation of Christ reaches its climax in the crucifixion. The crucifixion shows the extremity of his abasement because such a form of execution was deserved for slaves and those who had been stripped of all civic rights. Therefore, "even death on the cross" indicates what is special of Jesus' death, namely, it was not an ordinary death, but a death entailing intense shame and suffering.<sup>138</sup>

The self-denying act of Jesus is rewarded by the active response of God, namely a subsequent exaltation. God in his fidelity vindicated and justified the Son by giving him the unique status of lordship over the whole universe beyond the exaltation of all the just.<sup>139</sup> Thus by the act of kenosis Christ became wholly the one for others, no longer living for himself.<sup>140</sup> As we have seen there is a radical altruism involved in the whole Christ-event. Jesus revealed the profound love and altruism of God who is really interested in humankind. This refers to the quality of divine love in becoming a human person for the sake of humanity, a love that gives itself for humankind, even to the point of accepting death on a cross. Contrary to our expectations,

The true nature of God is not to grasp or get or selfishly to hold on to things for personal advantage, but to give them up for the enrichment of all. This is demonstrated by Christ, who, because he shared the nature of God, did not hold firm to the high position that was his

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138 Moly Thomas, *Christology in Context*, 29.

139 Brendan Byrne, "The Letter to the Philippians," 794.

140 Moly Thomas, *Christology in Context*, 29.

by right, but rather stepped down from it. That is to say, he deliberately placed himself in the humblest of positions: he who was in the form of God became a man, a fully human being, a slave even so that he might serve others. In the self-humbling act of the incarnation God became man and thus set himself wholly to seek the advantage and promote the welfare of his fellows. It was never the interest of Christ to fight for his own honour and right and credit, but through self-surrender, self-renunciation and self-sacrifice to strive for the honour, right and credit for others. ... So radical was his obedience that he did not withdraw it even when he was faced with death—the most cruel of all deaths, death by crucifixion. He must somehow have known, though, that his death was not his alone, but once again an act that worked for the good of others.<sup>141</sup>

The divine kenosis involved in Christ's suffering and death expresses a love that gives itself and seeks nothing in return. The point of interest for us is this aspect of the altruistic kenosis of Christ for the sake of humanity, without any trace of self-concern. It is important to note that Jesus did not make his own self the all-absorbing and exclusive object of interest or concern, but he became absorbed in concern for others. This view is reinforced if we consider the various kenotic texts found in the New Testament. He always chose the path of self-emptying, the path of the servant, whenever such a demand was placed on him (Lk 4:5-8; Mk 10:45). Hence, what is significant in Jesus' personhood is his existence for others. According to Galot, "Jesus' own words indicate most effectively the altruistic meaning of kenosis," namely, to give his life "as a ransom for many." This shows

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141 Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Word Biblical Commentary: Philippians*, Vol. 43 Texas: Word Books, 1983, 95.

the ultimate meaning of kenosis, Jesus' concern for others and his intention to obtain the salvation of humankind. Galot contends that although the hymn closes with a picture of the triumph of Jesus, where he attains a glorious state where he is served, Jesus rejected any claim to be served by others.<sup>142</sup>

### **7.2.5. Foot-Washing: An Expression of the Humility of Jesus**

Jesus knew that the hour of his humiliation was near and that was the hour of his glory. He was aware that he was going to God. It was at that time when God was nearest to him that Jesus went to the depths and limits of his service to others. Washing the feet of the guests at a feast was the duty of a slave. The disciples of the Rabbis were supposed to render service to their masters but this kind of service they could never expect. The wonderful thing about Jesus was that his nearness to God instead of separating him from them brought him more close to them. It is always true that those who are close to God will be close to people. Jesus was well aware that he was the Lord of all, and yet he washed the feet of his disciples. He was also conscious that he was about to be betrayed. Such knowledge might have caused him bitterness and hatred. But in the case of Jesus, he was filled with greater love than ever; the more they hurt him, the more he loved them. "Jesus met the greatest injury and the supreme disloyalty, with the greatest humility and the supreme love."<sup>143</sup> Jesus' act of washing the feet of the disciples (Jn 13:5-17) symbolizes his salvific death and the example of his life of service and humility. It is an explanation of his words: "For the Son of Man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk 10:45; Mt 20:28). He shows his role as a servant here and it is an expression of

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142 Jean Galot, *Who is Christ? A Theology of the Incarnation*, Translated by M. Angeline Bouchard, Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1981, 186.

143 William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible, The Gospel of John Volume 2 Chapters 8-21*, Revised Edition, Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1975, 138.

his love.<sup>144</sup> There was a dispute going on among them in the background at this time which we read in the gospel of Luke 22:24 who were the greatest among them.<sup>145</sup> Even within the sight of the cross the disciples were still arguing about their own prestige and precedence. This very argument created the situation for Jesus to act as he did. The washing of the feet was presented as an act of humble service and love and Jesus told his disciples that they must follow his example in their lives (Jn 13:14-15). Jesus gave them the pattern of his own life-giving service. What is demanded of them was to repeat this humble self-less service of one another after the model of Jesus. The life of a Christian should be hallmarked by detachment and separation, detachment from too much of worldly distractions and vain glory. What is needed is a total focus on the Lord, who gave up his life in service and complete commitment to the Kingdom of God which calls for a humble way of living. To be a Christian is to live a life of simplicity and modesty. It is important to note that Saint Kuriakose was such a person who always focused on God and doing the will of God.

#### **7.2.6. Passion and Crucifixion**

The climax of Christ's humility can be seen in the total self-emptying during the passion, crucifixion and death at Calvary. In this context in the gospel of Luke we see the discussion about greatness and immediately after the Last Supper Jesus defines his true identity as being opposed to the standard of the world by stating that he who is their 'Master

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144 Michael Naickanparampil, *Faith and Life in Saint John: The Spiritual Orientation of the Fourth Gospel*, Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2011, 102.

145 Jesus asked them "For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves." (Lk 22:27) Here Jesus makes it clear that his role is that of a servant. He always does the role of the servant. Moreover, in the gospel of John we find him preparing breakfast for the disciples and serving them. See Jn 21:9-13.



is among them, as one who serves' (Lk 22: 27). This aspect is presented in the gospel of John in the foot washing scene. While washing the feet of his disciples Jesus indicates that the very being of God is one of humility. By voluntarily choosing to give himself for others Jesus underlines the centrality of humble service in God's redemptive work. The Last Supper is a special moment in Jesus' manifestation of self-emptying love. During the Last Supper Jesus offered himself totally to his disciples in the form of bread and wine that is 'blessed, broken and poured out for all'. The self-emptying of Christ in this Pass over meal is indeed a moment that transcends time because through this gesture Christ institutes the Eucharist which is the eternal symbol of God's humility and total self-emptying. He asked his disciples to continue this symbol of self-emptying love in remembrance of him (Lk 22:19, 1 Cor 11:24). It is to be noted that the Eucharist is not merely the commemoration of an historical event but it is a reality that is present every day.<sup>146</sup>

### **7.2.7. Cross and Glory**

During his life time Jesus was speaking of Cross as the glory of his life and the way to the glory of eternity. As we have noted cross was the climax of his humility. It is to be noted that indeed the theme of divine kenosis is very vast and it encompasses various fields, it needs to be highlighted. However, considering the scope of this work is limited to the dimension of the humility of Christ and the concrete humiliations accepted by him in the divine kenosis we do not elucidate it in detail. Christ is the prototype of radical humility and Paul in his letter to the Philippians invites the believer to have the mind of Christ. Significantly, "the nature of God revealed in total self-emptying and humility motivates a Christian to live a life of selfless love and service."<sup>147</sup> The basic motivation behind most kenotic interpretations is clearly to

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146 Francis George Pudhicherry, *Self-Love to Self-Emptying Love*, 43.

147 Francis George Pudhicherry, *Self-Love to Self-Emptying Love*, 28.

provide a pattern of thought in which one take seriously the actual lowliness, condescension and humiliation of Christ.<sup>148</sup> In the letter to the Romans (Rom 15:3), Paul is asking the Christians to imbibe their example, inspiration and dynamic from Jesus Christ. Being the Lord of glory, he did not please himself, instead he chose to serve others bearing the cross. He set up a pattern for his followers to accept.<sup>149</sup>

In the Philippian context, Paul is urging the Corinthians to practise this type of unselfishness and humility. In order to illustrate this, he turns to the supreme example of Christ: "Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men" (Phil2:5-7).<sup>150</sup> He did not give up his deity, but he gained humanity. They should have the mind of Christ namely filled with humility rather than lording it over one another. Christ chose to have the role of the servant. Kenosis emphasizes the free, voluntary act of the

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148 Wayne E. Ward, *The Person of Christ: The Kenotic Theory, The Concept of Kenosis as Christ Pouring out*, Accessed on 3 October 2023.

149 William Barclay, "The Letter to the Romans," *The Daily Study Bible*, Revised Edition, Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1975, 197. However, there are authors who object to this view. According to Kasemann, such an interpretation of the passage would reduce the work of Christ to merely representative of humankind, generally a valid norm of conduct and the soteriological significance of Christ would be lost. See L. W. Hurtado, "Jesus as Lordly Example in Philipppians 2:5-11," Peter Richardson and John C. Hurd, eds., *From Jesus to Paul: Studies in Honour of Francis Wright Beare*, Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1984, 115. cf. Ernst Kasemann, "A Critical Analysis of Philipppians 2:5-11," *God and Christ: Existence and Province*, JTC 5 New York: Harper and Row, 1968, 50, 57. At the same time Hurtado suggests that there are strong evidences in this passage for its ethical importance. See page 123.

150 [https://www.academia.edu/39812573/he\\_concept-of\\_Kenosis\\_as\\_Christ\\_Pouring\\_Himself\\_out\\_in\\_Origen\\_Athanasius\\_and\\_Cyriil\\_with\\_its\\_reflection\\_on\\_Balthasar\\_and Barth\\_Christologies](https://www.academia.edu/39812573/he_concept-of_Kenosis_as_Christ_Pouring_Himself_out_in_Origen_Athanasius_and_Cyriil_with_its_reflection_on_Balthasar_and Barth_Christologies), Accessed on 3 October 2023.

pre-incarnate Son in choosing the path of humiliation. He did it not out of necessity, but out of the sovereign choice of love, he gave up heaven's glory for the way of the cross. We can say that in becoming a human being, he emptied himself not his divinity or divine attributes, but his glory and privileges. He willingly concealed his glory under the veil of human nature. It does not mean that he stop to be divine to become human. It is as what happened at the time of transfiguration. The invisible divine nature broke through and become visible and Jesus was transfigured before the eyes of his disciples (Mt 17:1-13). But for the most part, Jesus concealed his glory from human perception. According to Paul this is an example for us to imitate. We should have the willingness to relinquish our own glory, privileges and prerogatives.<sup>151</sup>

Saint John in his prologue (Jn 1:1-2) and Saint Paul in his letters speak about the pre-existence of Christ, namely, Word and Word's existence "before the world was made." Saint Paul is more explicit in his statement: "When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law" (Gal 4:4). Saint Paul while depicting the pre-existent Christ as being sent by the father, states the nature of God becoming man, namely becoming poor (2 Cor 8:9), emptying himself, taking the form of a slave and being born in human likeness (Phil 2:7). Being 'born in human likeness'<sup>152</sup> means acceptance of actual humanity, the humility in this

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151 R. C. Sroul, "How Could Jesus Be Both Divine and Human?" [monergism.com/how-could-jesus-be-both-divine-and-human](http://monergism.com/how-could-jesus-be-both-divine-and-human) Kenosis Links Contemporary writings. Accessed on October 17, 2023.

152 In this context it is worth mentioning Rom 8: 3. This passage is similar to the kenotic hymn in Philippians 2. It is placed in the context of an invitation to the believers to live a life in the Spirit. The believers are unable to fulfill the law because they are living a life in the flesh. Moreover, Paul is showing the contrast between the two and the consequences (Rom 8: 5-7). In order to fulfill the law one has to be led by the Spirit. Only the power of the Spirit could transform the person to live as children of God (Rom 8: 14-16).

process of self-emptying is seen as in the fact that Christ not only condescends to become human but accepts the form of a slave. The phrase 'taking the form of a slave' resonates with the episode of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples. It shows that self-emptying had as its ultimate goal the revelation of God's universal love and service.<sup>153</sup> As the Word incarnate, he is the perfect and definitive revelation of God. He says, "for us there is one God, the father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist" (1 Cor 8:6). Here the humility includes a two stage process, namely, incarnation and death on the cross. Both of them are salvific acts. The death on the cross is the climax of the redemptive work of Christ. Here we can find a descent of Christ from a highest point to a lowest point. That is to say, the Creator God coming down to the lowest level of a creature.

Saint Paul's letter to the Philippians speaks of the mind of Christ in his incarnation (Phil 2:6-11), that although he was equal to God, did not claim his rightful privilege and power but rather gave it up for the good of humanity even to the point of being crucified on the cross. Phil 2:6-8 is about Christ's voluntary self-humbling. It sets forth his status, disposition, and activity. That is, verses 6-8 assert Christ's equality with God and narrate, both positively and negatively, his disposition toward that equality and the action he takes regarding it.

Phil 2:7-8 recounts Christ's two-step alternative to selfish exploitation of his equality with God. The first step "down" is his voluntary incarnation (self-emptying), the second his voluntary humiliation (self-humbling) and obedience that led to death on a cross. Much could be said about these two verses. It is important to note, however, is the similarity in

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153 William Barclay, "The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians," *The Daily Study Bible*, Revised Edition, Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1975, 43.

the two acts narrated and expressed by the two main verbs, “emptied himself” and “humbled himself.” The phrase “emptied himself” in 2:7 should not be read as a reference to the divestiture of something (whether divinity itself or some divine attributes), or even as self-limitation regarding the use of divine attributes, but “figuratively,” as a strong metaphor for total self-abandonment and self-giving, further explained by the attendant participial phrases “taking on the form of a slave” and “being born [found] in human likeness.” That is, he “poured himself out,” probably an echo of the suffering servant. The language of “the form of a slave” is an antithesis to “the form of God” in 2:6. It is reminiscent not only of the suffering servant of Isaiah but also of the plight of those in slavery, “the extreme in respect of deprivation of rights.” The parallel phrases “form of God” and “form of a slave” mean to the extent that this one really took on the form of a slave, he also really was in the form of God and vice versa.<sup>154</sup> Richard Bauckham argues that this text asks whether “the cross of Jesus Christ actually can be included in the identity” of the exalted God of Israel, and answers that Christ’s “humiliation belongs to the identity of God as truly as his exaltation does.”<sup>155</sup>

Gerald O’ Collins distinguishes the self-emptying of Jesus Christ as Son of God in a threefold exercise of powers in his earthly life. Firstly, the Son exercised his divine powers together with the other persons of the Trinity, for example, in the conservation of the created universe. Secondly, the Son exercised his divine powers, even as he acted in a fully human manner, for example, in miracles when he healed the sick by touching and by speaking with authority. Finally, there were some actions which involved only the exercise of Jesus’

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154 Michael J. Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul’s Narrative Soteriology*, Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009, 21-22.

155 Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament*, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1998, 61.

human powers, for example, his eating, drinking, weeping, falling asleep, which highlighted Jesus' self-emptying and taking the role of a humble servant.<sup>156</sup> Here the kenosis of Jesus implies in the exercise of the divine and the human powers in the life of the earthly Jesus.

Saint Kuriakose Elias embodied this challenge of self-emptying love through his way of life. Having discerned that he had a God given mission, he completely submitted himself totally to God and dedicated himself fervently for the social, cultural, and educational uplift of his fellow beings. He was a man of deep vision who thought and acted far ahead of his times. He had a sure grasp of spiritual verities as well as social realities. Throughout his life, he laboured zealously for the spiritual and temporal welfare of the Church. Since all his apostolic services had the endorsement of his mystical experience, his vision and teaching remain relevant for the Church and society until today. The following chapter seeks to explain how the ministry of Saint Kuriakose made him a person of kenotic love, and how his personality continues to inspire many to commit for the cause of Kingdom of God.

The concept kenosis is a Pauline dictum used to demonstrate the way of God's action in Christ's incarnation namely, Christ, who had the nature of God renounced the privileges and took the form of a human servant of God, demonstrating obedience to God that extended to the willingness to die and the most sordid of death at that.<sup>157</sup> The concept of kenosis, which refers to the self-emptying or self-humbling of Jesus Christ, has been discussed by several early Church Fathers. Although they have not explored and discussed this notion very explicitly, it is rooted in their writings. Some of them are the following: Saint Paul, although not a Church Father in the traditional

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156 Gerald O' Collins, *Incarnation*, London: Continuum, 2002, 63.

157 Howard Marshall, *New Testament Theology*, Illinois: Inter -Varsity Press, 2004, 348.



sense, in his writings especially in Philippians 2:5-8 we can find a significant discussion on Christ's self-emptying. His writings constitute the earliest references to the theme of kenosis. In his letter to the Philippians he speaks about the self-emptying of Christ and taking on the form of a servant, becoming obedient even to death on a cross. This passage is considered a foundational text for the kenotic understanding of Christ's humility and self-sacrifice. According to Saint Paul analysing the immediate social context in which the hymn is placed, one can infer that it is an exhortation to the Christian community in Philippi. Many contemporary exegetes also support the ethical import of this passage. Paul appropriates this hymn as a basis for his ethical appeal to the Philippians, linking the self-emptying of Christ to the life of the Christian community.<sup>158</sup> Whatever be the interpretation, according to many, the immediate concern for Paul was ethical where he invited the Christian community to have the attitude of humility towards one another to foster unity and love. It is very much clear in the verses 5, 7 and 8. The invitation to a life of self-emptying and humility is presented in a positive context. Kenosis did not mean abandoning the divine nature or substance. Rather it entailed accepting the limitation of a human existence that in fact ended with the utter humiliation of death on the cross.

The 'emptying' is supposed to have been accomplished by 'taking the form of a servant.' Thus Christ's self-emptying was achieved by taking, that is to say, by becoming what he was not before, becoming in the likeness of human beings. What is stressed here is the self-surrender of the Son of God to assume the likeness of humans with all of its attendant limitations, and this self-humiliation and obedience reached even to the point of death on the cross.<sup>159</sup> He gave up willingly the glory of his divinity to become man. He has assumed our

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158 Moly Thomas, *Christology in Context: Kenotic Perspectives*, 24.

159 Moly Thomas, *Christology in Context: Kenotic Perspectives*, 26.



humanity with all its limitations, sufferings, vulnerabilities and even mortality. He became like us in everything except sin (Heb 4:15). The expression 'even death on a cross' seems to be the core of the hymn, where Christ's kenosis is most fully clarified and revealed in its depth.

The hymn begins by affirming that Christ, who existed in the form (*morphe*) of God and shared his glory, did not consider this existential equality with God as something to be held on for his own advantage or for purely selfish motives. He gave up this divine status to take up a mode of existence that was not his, by accepting the condition of a slave that involved suffering and death.<sup>160</sup> Here the interpretation given by William Barclay is worth mentioning. Paul makes the statement that "although Jesus was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor" (2 Cor 8-9). Here Paul speaks about the kenosis of the eternal Son because it implies both the pre-existent state and the incarnation. It refers to his choice of giving up his royal status and taking the humble state of a slave. He gave up his divine state and became poor by accepting the fragility and vicissitudes of the human nature. In this passage Paul is advising the Corinthians to contribute generously and help the poor by showing the 'archetypal example' presented by the 'gracious act' of Lord Jesus Christ. Ultimately the reason behind this generosity towards others is that Christ voluntarily gave himself for the benefit of others. He emphasizes that they have been enriched by the grace of Christ.<sup>161</sup>

In the Philippian passage Paul is "pleading with the Philippians to live in harmony, to lay aside their discords, to shed their personal ambitions and their pride and their desire for prominence and prestige, and to have in their hearts that humble, selfless desire to serve, which was the essence of

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160 Moly Thomas, *Christology in Context: Kenotic Perspectives*, 28.

161 Francis George Pudhicherry, *Self-Love to Self-Emptying Love*, 57-58.

the life of Christ."<sup>162</sup> Here the aim of Paul was to persuade the Philippians to live a life in which disunity, discord and personal ambition had no place. To reinforce it Paul is bringing the example of Jesus who humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. It shows the depth of his humiliation. He did not desire to dominate them but only to serve. He was not living according to his own way, but according to the will of the father. He never exalted himself but he renounced all glory for the sake of the humanity. The New Testament is always emphasizing the fact that those who humbles himself/herself will be exalted (Mt 23:12, Lk 14:11; 18:14). So a follower of Christ should always think about others not of oneself, not of one's own glory, but of the glory of God. Indubitably this was the lifestyle practised by Saint Kuriakose throughout his life time. Humility, obedience and self-renunciation were the supreme characteristics of the life of Jesus. These should also be the hall-marks of a Christian. Selfishness, self-seeking and self-display will destroy our likeness to Christ and our fellowship with each other.<sup>163</sup> It is true that the aim of Jesus was to serve others, no matter how much self-renunciation and service that might involve. As a consequence of the self-renunciation and sacrificial love of Jesus Christ, God highly exalted him and given the name above every name. Every living creature in all universe, in heaven, in earth and even under the earth would worship him. According to the Biblical understanding giving a new name signifies a new stage in one's life. Thus Jesus became the Lord of all.<sup>164</sup>

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162 William Barclay, "The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians," 34-35.

163 William Barclay, "The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians," 38.

164 William Barclay, "The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians," 40.

## **8. An Overview of the Understanding of the Church Fathers**

The idea of self-emptying has been a topic of theological reflection and discussion in the history of the Christian Church. It has been a central theme in the writings and teachings of several early Christian theologians and Church fathers. They contributed to the development of the theological understanding of the concept of kenosis and the incarnation in Christian theology. They highlight the profound theological implications of Christ's self-emptying for the salvation of humanity. They played a crucial role in shaping Christian doctrine and teaching in the first centuries of Christianity. Although they have not developed this theme extensively, their writings and teachings continue to be important sources in exploring these topics until today. The discussions on the self-emptying of Christ and the nature of the incarnation were ongoing and involved various theologians in the early centuries of Christianity. Different theologians approached these topics from slightly different perspectives. We do not explore the concept of kenosis according to the early fathers of the Church in an extensive way because it is beyond the scope of this work. We will discuss only some of the important Church fathers who have developed this theme but not comprehensively.

The Eastern Syrian Fathers are also known as Syriac Fathers, who were influential Christian theologians and writers, lived in the Eastern regions of the Roman and later Byzantine Empire. It is important to note that they contributed significantly to the development of Christian theology and spirituality. They played a vital role in preserving and transmitting the Christian faith in the Syriac-speaking communities of the Eastern Church. Their theological writings, hymns, and spiritual reflections continue to be

influential in the Eastern tradition.<sup>165</sup> In this section we deal with some of the famous Syriac fathers.

### **8.1. Saint Aphrahat the Persian Sage (c. 270-345 AD)**

Aphrahat is considered the first Syrian church father. He was a Persian convert to Christianity. He was a Persian Christian monk and theologian. His most famous work is known as 'Demonstrations' or 'Expositions' that are pastoral in nature and deal with various topics of faith and practice. It consists of twenty three essays on various theological and moral topics and it is one of the earliest systematic theologies in the Syrian tradition. He deals with apocalyptic themes and uses biblical commentaries to elucidate many of his teachings. His writings cover a wide range of themes like charity, fasting, prayer, penitence, humility, preaching, persecution, virginity and resurrection, Jesus as Messiah and the last days.<sup>166</sup> His writings expose a deep concern for monastic life, asceticism and pursuit of holiness. It had a significant impact on the development of Syrian Christian tradition and literature. His theological perspective is grounded in the Nicene Creed and he affirms the divinity of Christ. Moreover, his writings engage with various theological issues of his time like discussions about the Trinity and the nature of Christ.

It is to be noted that Aphrahat did not explicitly use the term 'kenosis' in his writings, however, his reflections on the incarnation and humility of Christ resonate with broader themes related to kenotic theology. He emphasizes the voluntary nature of Christ's decision to take on the human flesh.<sup>167</sup> His idea of kenosis is almost consistent with the broader Christian tradition. He affirmed the idea that in

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165 <https://chat.openai.com/c/668be177-9ab6-4f9e-bb9d-eb02d0835717>, Accessed on 25 November 2023.

166 <https://slmedia.org/blog/deacon-structuring-church-fathers-part-4>, Accessed on 23 November 2023.

167 <https://chat.openai.com/c/f5fec1a1-7108-4153-a0bf-03270781da33>, Accessed on 27 November 2023.

the incarnation the divine Logos took on human flesh while retaining his divine nature. This involved a self-emptying, where Christ relinquished certain aspects of his divine glory and power to experience genuine human existence. Significantly he emphasized the humility and self-sacrificial love of Christ entailed in this kenotic act. Through the incarnation Christ not only identified with the humanity but also provided an example for humility and obedience. His teachings on the kenosis of Christ contribute to the broader understanding of the mystery of the incarnation within the early Christian theological tradition.<sup>168</sup>

## **8.2. Saint Ephrem the Syrian (306-379 AD)**

Saint Ephrem was a fourth-century theologian, a gifted poet and prolific hymnographer. He was Confessor, doctor of the Church and teacher of faith. He was a strong defender of Christian Orthodoxy. He was a master of music and is known as the 'harp of the Holy Spirit.' Hymns became one of his most effective weapons against heresy. He is venerated as a saint by all traditional churches. He was born in Nisibis, which was the centre of learning in the later centuries of the Church of the East. He was popularly credited as the founder of the school of Nisibis. He served as a deacon and later lived in Edessa.<sup>169</sup> He is known for his defence of Nicene Orthodoxy against various heresies. He is one of the remarkable hymn writers of Eastern Christianity, and there are more than four hundred hymns to his credit. He used to write hymns against heresies which were filled with doctrinal messages. He wrote many biblical commentaries as well as biographies of saints. He was an ascetic and very much zealous in writing and preaching against heresies of his time.<sup>170</sup> He did not explicitly

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168 <https://chat.openai.com/c/0690a5e2-b32b-4954-a4f4-d76d22daf89e>, Accessed on 27 November 20223.

169 [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ephrem\\_the\\_Syrian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ephrem_the_Syrian), Accessed on 12 November 2023.

170 <https://slmedia.org/blog/deacon-structuring-doctors-of-the-church->

use the term 'self-emptying' as it is often associated with the concept of kenosis in the Philippians 2:7. However, he is known for his profound reflections on the incarnation and the nature of Christ. Significantly, his theological works and hymns focus on the mystery of incarnation emphasizing the humility and condescension of Christ in taking on human flesh. As noted already even though he is not using the specific language of 'self-emptying' his writings convey a deep understanding of the voluntary and humble nature of Christ's incarnation. In his hymns and poetry we can find themes related to the dual nature of Christ, the Word of God taking on human form, and the salvific significance of Christ's life and death. He used to employ rich and vivid imagery to convey theological truths and sought to inspire devotion and worship through his writings. As many of the early Church fathers his contribution to the Christological thought is that his focus on the unity of the two natures in Jesus Christ without confusion or division. His theological reflections also support the broader Christian understanding of incarnation as a divine act of love and redemption. Although we do not find explicit theological exposition on the theme of kenosis in his writings, it provided the foundation for later theological discussions of this theme.<sup>171</sup>

It is to be noted that kenosis becomes the ability to see the glory of Christ most clearly because it is precisely at this moment of emptying and losing his life that our salvation and union with him is accomplished. Our salvation was possible because he was true God and true man. Through incarnation by becoming a human being he had undergone all the conditions of a human being except sin, including suffering and death. However, we should keep in mind that in every moment Christ maintained his divinity. It is

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pat-4, Accessed on 23 November 2023.

171 [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ephrem\\_the\\_Syrian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ephrem_the_Syrian), Accessed on 12 November 2023.



important to note that Ephrem stresses the fact that even at the moment of his (Jesus) suffering as a man he was sinless.<sup>172</sup> Moreover, he emphasizes the quality of his offering on the cross as a perfect offering because he was a spotless Lamb of God (1Pet 1:19). This perfection depends not only on the death on the cross but also as a sinless human being. The Letter to the Hebrews 4:14-16 testifies to this fact. "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin". He was purified in his humanity and lived a perfectly pure life that was fully human. Thus, "holding to Christ as sinless is not merely a point of dogma, but is critical to bringing about completeness to our salvation."<sup>173</sup> According to Saint Ephrem one of the great mysteries of Christian theology is the humility of God. He emphatically points out that God loves us so much that he wills to empty himself in order to serve us.<sup>174</sup> In one of his hymns on the Nativity of Christ he expresses his idea of kenotic theology and says: "Behold, our freedom forced our Lord to be a servant." Hymns p. 181. "God is willing to serve our needs, and to even humble himself to become a servant, a slave who works for our salvation." God's humility and his willingness to serve us are true because he is love. God becoming human in Jesus Christ is the incarnation of love. God created human beings with freedom and God was well aware that they might choose against him. Saint Ephrem emphatically points out that the freedom we enjoy carries with it its implication that God would have to become our servant in order to save us. Thus our freedom forced God to be our servant. He is of the opinion that God shows his love

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172 <https://prayerofsaintephrem.blog/2016/12/20/kenosis-christmas-and-christians/>, Accessed on 18 November 2023.

173 <https://prayerofsaintephrem.blog/2016/12/20/kenosis-christmas-and-christians/>, Accessed on 18 November 2023.

174 [frted.wordpress.com/tag/St-ephrem/page/3/](https://frted.wordpress.com/tag/St-ephrem/page/3/), Accessed on 20 November 2023.



and mercy towards us by overlooking our sins and inviting us to worship him despite our sinful nature because God wishes our salvation and not our damnation.<sup>175</sup> Christ died for us while we were still sinners (Rom 5:8).

### **8.3. Saint John Chrysostom (c. 349-407 AD)**

Saint John Chrysostom was the archbishop of Constantinople, known for his eloquence in preaching and public speaking. He is honoured as the 'golden mouthed.' He is often associated with Byzantine tradition, but he spent a significant part of his life in the eastern city of Antioch, which was a centre of Syriac Christianity. His writings and homilies had an enduring influence on the Christian tradition.<sup>176</sup> In his homilies and commentaries he discusses the theme of kenosis in relation to Christ's humility and sets it as an example for the believers. He emphasizes the self-emptying of Christ and how his humility and sacrifice exemplify the path to true Christian life. The early Church Fathers contributed to the development of Christological theology and the understanding of how the divine and human natures interacted in Christ including his self-emptying for the sake of humanity. Chrysostom reminds us to consider how Jesus Christ teaches us to be humble, by making us see that our virtue does not depend on our work alone but on grace from on high. He highlights Christ who was God incarnate, willingly lowered himself for the sake of humanity. He encourages his listeners to emulate Christ's humility in their own lives.

Although Chrysostom does not provide a comprehensive discussion on kenosis his sermons and writings contain many passages and teachings that reflect the spirit of kenosis, namely the self-emptying and self-sacrificing love of Christ for the salvation of humanity. He emphasized how

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175 <https://prayerofsaintephrem.blog/2016/12/20/kenosis-christmas-and-christians/>, Accessed on 18 November 2023.

176 <https://chat.openai.com/c/668be177-9ab6-4f9e-bb9d-eb02d0835717>, Accessed on 25 November 2023.

the humility and self-sacrifice of Christ served as an example for the believers. According to him, Christ's incarnation and crucifixion are the ultimate example for humility and love for humanity. He emphasizes the humble attitude of Jesus as an example for us to imitate. In his homilies the author wants to persuade his listeners to preserve a humble attitude, warns them against avarice and indicates inception of heresies of their times and convincing them to accept orthodox Catholic faith.<sup>177</sup> His speeches have an advisory nature and they have a future relevance. He wants that the audience should adopt his admonitions. His advices are meant to influence the morality of the audience and consequently to improve the condition of the Church. The initial part of the homily discusses the manner in which Jesus and Paul encouraged their audiences to be humble. Thus the primary focus of his homily is insistence on humility. Jesus persuaded his disciples to be humble as himself and his father.<sup>178</sup> Although Saint John Chrysostom had not provided an extensive theological treatise on kenosis, in his sermons and writings we can see certain inklings that reflect the spirit of kenosis. His moral and ethical teachings, rooted in the Gospel, continue to inspire Christians to strive for humility, selflessness and love in their lives.

#### **8.4. Saint Isaac the Syrian (c. 613-700 AD)**

Isaac the Syrian was a seventh century monk who lived in Qatar, on the Western shore of the Persian Gulf. He was a Syriac Christian bishop, mystic and theologian. He is also known as Saint Isaac the Syrian, Isaac of Nineveh, Isaac the Solitary, Abba Isaac and so on. He is best remembered for

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177 Zofia Latawiec, "The Rhetorical Structure of John Chrysostom's Seventh Homily on Philippians in Relation to the Kenosis Hymn," *academia.edu/37095382/The\_Rhetorical\_Structure\_of\_John\_Chrysostoms\_Seventh\_Homily\_on\_Philippians\_in\_Relation\_to\_the\_Kenosis\_Hymn, Classica Cracoviensia* Vol. XX (2017) 58.

178 Zofia Latawiec, "The Rhetorical Structure of John Chrysostom's Seventh Homily on Philippians in Relation to the Kenosis Hymn," 58-59.

his written works on Christian asceticism. He also focuses on monastic life, and the mystical journey towards union with God. He was a prolific writer in the Oriental Orthodox Church. He stands in the tradition of the Eastern mystical saints. He gives considerable emphasis to the work of the Holy Spirit. Although he did not use the term kenosis explicitly, his teachings are often associated with the concept of self-emptying and humility.<sup>179</sup> He highlights that God in his infinite love and humility descended into the level of humanity in order to elevate and redeem them. This key aspect is resounded with the theme of self-emptying of Christ for the sake of others as described in Philippians. His teachings on themes like humility, repentance and the abundant mercy of God reflect a deep contemplation on the nature of Christ's sacrifice and the spiritual life of believers.

In one of his famous writings, 'The Ascetical Homilies' Isaac emphasizes the transformative power of humility and the imitation of Christ's humility. He elucidates the divine paradox where God, in his humility, exalts humanity: "The more you flee from the glory of men, the more you become glorious in God's eyes."<sup>180</sup> Although we do not find any comments of Saint Isaac specifically on the Philippian passage in his surviving works this theme resounds in his writings with the self-emptying aspect of kenosis. However, his broader theological themes, especially themes related to humility, self-emptying and the transformative power of divine love are in harmony with the concepts found in the Philippian passage. He explores themes related to God's love, mercy, and the transformative power of divine grace in the lives of believers. Isaac's emphasis on humility and infinite condescension of God in reaching out to humanity,

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179 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isaac\\_the\\_Syrian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isaac_the_Syrian), Accessed on 28 January 2024.

180 <https://www.theway.org.uk/back/21Brock.pdf>, *Divine Call and Human Response*, "The Syriac Tradition II: Isaac of Nineveh," 70, Accessed on 28 January, 2024.

taking on the limitations of human nature to elevate and save them is conceptually related to the idea of kenosis that involves a voluntary lowering or emptying oneself for the sake of others.

Syriac tradition always had great emphasis on taking up of the cross as an essential part of Christian life which demands them to imitate Christ. It involves afflictions and sufferings. According to him, love of God cannot be kindled in a heart that loves comfort. Crucifixion of the self is confined to ascetical practices which also involves compelling ourselves perpetually to be inwardly full of mercy towards all rational beings at all times.<sup>181</sup> Moreover, he encourages us to show honour to our fellow beings. He opines that renunciation of the inner world of self is essential for a person who wants to draw near to God. It entails a radical re-orientation of one's life and attitude. This is what Christ demanded from his disciples to deny. Abandonment of the world is only one part and it should be accompanied by self-abandonment to God's care. It involves a perpetual consciousness of his presence. The sign of the presence of real love and knowledge is a profound humility that comes from the inner mind. To achieve such a state of true compassion we need to have a self-emptying in imitation of the self-emptying of Christ (Phil 2:7), the Word became man who was clothed himself in such a humility.<sup>182</sup> According to Isaac humility is the very garment of divinity and he emphasizes that whoever wants to imitate Christ should be wrapped oneself in humility (1 Pet 5:5). He suggests that this kind of humility implies a three-fold end, namely, repentance, purity and perfection.<sup>183</sup> According to him, a Christian should strive

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181 <https://www.theway.org.uk/back/21Brock.pdf>, *Divine Call and Human Response*, "The Syriac Tradition II: Isaac of Nineveh," 68, Accessed on 28 January, 2024.

182 <https://www.theway.org.uk/back/21Brock.pdf>, *Divine Call and Human Response*, 68-69, Accessed on 29 January, 2024.

183 <https://www.theway.org.uk/back/21Brock.pdf>, *Divine Call and Human Response*, 71, Accessed on 29 January, 2024.

for such humility, however, he opines that although such humility should be striven for ultimately it is a gift from God. Humility is a power full of mystery which the perfect saints receive once they have fulfilled the goal of their way of life. It is a virtue that embraces everything.<sup>184</sup> Repentance is abstaining from former sins and suffering on account of them. Purity is a heart that feels compassion for all created beings and perfection is profound humility that consists in the abandonment of everything visible and invisible. Visible comprises everything to do with senses and invisible means all thoughts on such subjects. In short, it is the embracing of a voluntary mortification with respect to everything.<sup>185</sup>

### **8.5. Saint Gregory of Nazianzus (c. 329-c. 390)**

Gregory of Nazianzus was a prominent Christian theologian in the 4<sup>th</sup> century and bishop of Constantinople. He is also known as Gregory the theologian who wrote about Christ's voluntary humiliation and self-emptying as part of his theological works. His theological Orations are a set of influential theological discourses delivered by him. These Orations are some of the most significant works of early Christian theology and played a vital role in the development of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>186</sup> In his fifth theological oration he emphasizes the need for humility and reverence in theological discourse and encourages a contemplative approach to understand God. He played a significant role in the development of Nicean orthodoxy affirming the equality and consubstantiality of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Although he did not use the term kenosis explicitly in his writings, he addresses Christ's self-emptying and

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184 <https://www.theway.org.uk/back/21Brock.pdf>, *Divine Call and Human Response*, 72, Accessed on 29 January, 2024.

185 <https://www.theway.org.uk/back/21Brock.pdf>, *Divine Call and Human Response*, 71.

186 Gregory of Nazianzus on Kenosis, Accessed on 4 October 2023, <https://Chat.openai.com/c/500620b-0-257-4ffe-bcbd-d16b8da1d227>.

the incarnation in his theological works. According to him, incarnation was a divine condescension where the Son of God took on human nature to redeem humanity. He emphasizes the humility of Christ as the central aspect of incarnation. He saw Christ's voluntary descent from divine glory to human vulnerability as an act of humility and self-emptying. This humility was exemplified by Christ's birth in a lowly manger and his willingness to take on the limitations of human existence. According to him Christ's incarnation involved a genuine identification with humanity. He believed that Jesus experienced the full range of human experiences, including suffering, temptation and death. According to him this was necessary for our salvation. Gregory saw the incarnation as the means through which God reconciled humanity to himself. By taking on human nature and suffering on the cross, Christ redeemed humanity from sin and death. This redemptive work demonstrated divine love and divine kenosis. In his opinion Christ's humility and self-emptying in the incarnation served as a powerful example for Christians. He encouraged them to imitate Christ's humility and self-sacrifice in their own lives. Although Gregory did not formulate a systematic doctrine of kenosis explicitly, his writings clearly reflect the themes and ideas related to the idea of kenosis.<sup>187</sup> His writings and theological insights laid the foundation for later theologians to explore and expand the concept of kenosis. His focus was on the mystery of incarnation and the dual nature of Christ-fully God and fully man. He emphasized the unity of the person of Christ despite having two natures. He stressed Jesus was not a mere human being who indwelt by the divine, nor was he a divine being merely appearing as a human. He defended the idea of Christ as one person having two distinct natures. He believed that through the incarnation, Christ sanctified and elevated human nature, making it possible for them to participate in

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187 [Chat.openai.com/c/500620b-0-257-4ffe-bcbd-d16b8da1d227](https://chat.openai.com/c/500620b-0-257-4ffe-bcbd-d16b8da1d227).



the divine nature.<sup>188</sup> He acknowledged Christ's humility and sacrifice as exemplified in Philippians 2. He emphasized the humility of Christ in becoming incarnate and his suffering for the sake of humanity.

### **8.6. Saint Gregory of Nyssa (c.335-395 AD)**

Gregory of Nyssa was a remarkable Christian theologian and bishop in the Eastern Orthodox Church during the 4<sup>th</sup> century, who contributed to the development of the doctrine of the Trinity. Although he did not use the term kenosis explicitly in his writings, he discussed the concept of kenosis as part of the redemptive work of Christ. His works contain theological themes and insights that are relevant to the concept of kenosis. As his contemporary Gregory Nazianzus he also made significant contributions to early Christian theology including the development of theological ideas related to the incarnation and the nature of Christ. His emphasis on Christ's self-emptying and theosis has had a lasting impact on Eastern Orthodox theology. According to him, incarnation was a profound act of divine love and humility.<sup>189</sup> His writings reflect the idea that Christ willingly emptied himself for the sake of humanity. In his opinion in becoming incarnate, Christ voluntarily laid aside the divine glory and condescended to the human condition to redeem and save humanity. His theology was deeply influenced by the idea of salvation and the restoration of humanity to its original state. He emphatically speaks about the idea of theosis by which humans are called to participate in the divine nature through union with Christ.<sup>190</sup>

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188 <https://Chat.openai.com/c/44a30031-d9d2-47f4-bb3c-08f0e88abf39>, Accessed on October 5, 2023.

189 [Chat.openai.com/c/44a30031-d9d2-47f4-bb3c-08f0e88abf39](https://Chat.openai.com/c/44a30031-d9d2-47f4-bb3c-08f0e88abf39), Accessed on October 5, 2023.

190 [https://Accessedon October 5, 2023, Chat.openai.com/c/44a30031-d9d2-47f4-bb3c-08f0e88abf39](https://Accessedon%20October%205%2C%202023%2C%20Chat.openai.com/c/44a30031-d9d2-47f4-bb3c-08f0e88abf39).



### **8.7. Saint Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD)**

Augustine was one of the most influential theologians and important Christian thinkers in the Western Christian tradition. He made significant contributions to Christian theology in the Latin-speaking West. Although he is not explicitly using the term 'kenosis' but he discussed Christ's humility and incarnation in his various works. He extensively addresses the nature of Christ and the incarnation in his writings. In his book on the Trinity he speaks about Christ taking upon himself the form of the servant. He became man so that we may become divine.<sup>191</sup> Here Augustine speaks even though Son of God took upon himself the form of a servant he was of same grade and nature of his father. The subordination in this case is due to his voluntary condescension for the purpose of the redemption of sinful humanity. It is the status of humiliation by reason of the incarnation. Although Augustine did not explicitly develop the concept of kenosis in his writings his theological ideas influenced later Christian thinkers to explore and develop this important concept of Christian doctrine in relation to the incarnation of Christ. It is important to note that his "emphasis on the incarnation and the nature of Christ's sacrifice played a significant role in shaping later theological discussions on the topics like hypostatic union and the implications of Christ's self-emptying for the salvation of humankind."<sup>192</sup> According to him all human beings born of Adam are under condemnation and only by the blood of Christ they would be freed from condemnation and become newborn. Christ was not regenerated by the baptism from John the Baptist but he submitted to it in order to give us an example of humility. Likewise he submitted to death not as a punishment of his own sins, but to take away the sin of the world, not only the

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191 Philip Schaff, NPNF (VI-03) Book II, Chapter 1, para 28-29. No. 212.

192 [chat.openai.com/c/f5fec1a1-7108-4153-a0bf-03270781da33](https://chat.openai.com/c/f5fec1a1-7108-4153-a0bf-03270781da33), Accessed on 25 November 2023.

original sin but all the sins added to it.<sup>193</sup> Moreover, while speaking of the kenosis in the incarnation, he argues that the Logos did not lay aside the form of God rather he just humbled himself to unite with humanity. So he did not cease to be God by taking the form of a servant. "Therefore, the form of God took the form of a servant, both is God and both is man; but both God, on account of God who takes; and both is man, on account of man who is taken. For neither by that taking is the one of them turned and changed into the other: the Divinity is not changed into the creature, so as to cease to be Divinity nor the creature into Divinity, so as to cease to be creature."<sup>194</sup>

### **8.8. Saint Cyril of Alexandria (376-444 AD)**

One of the remarkable Church fathers who discussed the concept of kenosis is Saint Cyril of Alexandria. He wrote about the self-emptying of Christ in his theological works, particularly in the context of the incarnation. According to Cyril of Alexandria incarnation and kenosis are essential for the salvation of human race. Through incarnation humanity was united with divinity, and the self-emptying of Christ was an act of love and condescension to lift humanity up to God. He highlights the profound theological implications of Christ's self-emptying for the salvation of humankind. He was a prominent early Christian theologian and the bishop of Alexandria. He was defender of early Christian theology, especially in the context of Christology-the study of the person and nature of Jesus Christ. He played a significant role in the Christological controversies of his time, particularly, the debates related to the divine and human natures of Christ.<sup>195</sup>

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193 [https://archive.org/stream/OnHolyTrinityAugustine/On%20Holy%20Trinity%20Augustine\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/OnHolyTrinityAugustine/On%20Holy%20Trinity%20Augustine_djvu.txt) Accessed on 1 December, 2023. Nos, 532-534.

194 <https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf103/npnf103.iv.i.xv.xvii.html>. NPNF1-03, On the Holy Trinity; Doctrinal Treatises; Moral Treatises by Philip Schaff Accessed on 2 December 2023.

195 Chat.openai.com/c/f5fec1a1-7108-4153-a0bf-03270781da33.

In his Christological writings he emphasized the unity of the divine and human natures in Christ and the significance of the incarnation for human salvation. He did not use the term kenosis in an explicit manner however his teachings are in line with the idea of Christ's self-emptying. He is of the opinion that Christ voluntarily embraced human limitations and sufferings in order to save humanity.<sup>196</sup> He argues that the divine Logos taking on the human flesh did not undergo any changes in his divine nature. His emphasis was on the union of the two natures rather than on a literal 'emptying' of divine attributes. This understanding preserves the integrity of both the divine and human natures of Christ. He defended the full divinity and humanity of Christ and wrote extensively on the incarnation and its implications. He was the patriarch of Alexandria. He played a significant role in the council of Ephesus in 431.

### **8.9. Saint Athanasius of Alexandria (c. 296-373 AD)**

Saint Athanasius was a prominent early Church Father and a strong defender of Nicene orthodoxy. He was the 20<sup>th</sup> Patriarch of Alexandria, in Egypt, also known as Saint Athanasius the Great or Athanasius the Confessor. He was one of the greatest thinkers of the early Church. He was a remarkable Egyptian Christian leader of the fourth century.<sup>197</sup> He was a strong supporter of the divinity of Christ in the face of Arian heresy. He was the greatest champion of Catholic belief on the subject of the incarnation and he earned the characteristic title of 'Father of Orthodoxy.' In the words of Saint John Henry Newman he was "a principal instrument, after the Apostles, by which the sacred truths of Christianity have been conveyed and secured to the world." His emphasis was on the significance of incarnation wherein he speaks of

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196 Chat.openai.com/c/0e0ad38c-b9a2-44dc-b8be-c1fc47fd5709.

197 [https://en-m-wikipedia.org.translate.goog/wiki/Athanasius\\_of\\_Alexandria?\\_x\\_tr\\_sl=en&\\_x\\_tr\\_tl=ml&\\_x\\_tr\\_hl=ml&\\_x\\_tr\\_pto=sc](https://en-m-wikipedia.org.translate.goog/wiki/Athanasius_of_Alexandria?_x_tr_sl=en&_x_tr_tl=ml&_x_tr_hl=ml&_x_tr_pto=sc), Accessed on 6 February 2024.

the divine Word (Logos) took on human flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. He contends that Jesus Christ being fully God voluntarily relinquished aspects of glory and power in order to become fully human. This self-emptying act was essential for Christ to identify with humanity, experience human life, suffer, and ultimately redeem humanity through his sacrificial death on the cross.<sup>198</sup> According to him, this self-emptying was not a diminishment of his divine nature but rather an expression of divine love and humility. Through incarnation and kenosis Christ bridged the gap between God and humanity and reconciled them and offered the possibility of salvation to all. This understanding of kenosis played a central role in his theological framework and influenced subsequent Christian thought on the nature of Christ.<sup>199</sup>

He was exiled five times for his fidelity to the Catholic Orthodoxy, and it is a best proof of his dedication. The Athanasian corpus as a whole is soteriologically focused and it is concerned with demonstrating the existential and salvific implications of the Christian message.<sup>200</sup> In his writings against the Arian heresy, he emphasized the divine nature of Christ and how the Son of God willingly emptied himself to take on human form. His famous work 'On the Incarnation' he explores on the theme of kenosis as an essential part of the eternal Son's act of becoming human for the sake of humanity.<sup>201</sup> He argued that Christ, being the Son of God was of the same substance as that of the father. He was not a created being and according to

198 <https://chat.openai.com/c/a2ab14e5-b271-4af4-af6d-55274722fc83>, Accessed on 20 February 2024.

199 <https://chat.openai.com/c/a2ab14e5-b271-4af4-af6d-55274722fc83>, Accessed on 20 February 2024.

200 Philip Kariatlis, "Soteriological Insights in Athanasius' On the Incarnation," *Phronema* Vol. 28 (2) 2013, 25.(21-34) [https://academia.edu/66440558/Soteriological\\_Insights\\_in\\_St\\_Athanasius\\_On\\_the\\_Incarnation](https://academia.edu/66440558/Soteriological_Insights_in_St_Athanasius_On_the_Incarnation), Accessed on 10 September 2023.

201 Fathers of the Church on Kenosis, [Chat.openai.com/c/89301715-a1db-44483-922a-695032985-f66](https://chat.openai.com/c/89301715-a1db-44483-922a-695032985-f66).

Athanasius, incarnation involved a voluntary self-emptying or humiliation of the Son of God for the salvation of human race. The concept of kenosis refers to the self-emptying or self-humbling of Christ, who, despite being divine, took on human form and suffered for the salvation of human race. Saint Athanasius played a significant role in shaping early Christian theology through his writings, especially regarding the nature of Christ and incarnation. Athanasius contends that due to the sin and corruption of humanity God did not want them to be perished. God, out of his goodness and love, chose to become incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ to redeem and restore humanity, reversing the effects of sin and death through the divine act of the incarnation. This is a central theme in his work on incarnation. The term 'kenosis' was not coined by him, but it was associated with the biblical passage from Philippians and later theological developments.<sup>202</sup> Athanasius was of the opinion that there was a 'divine exchange' taking place in the incarnation. By becoming a man, the Son of God shares the suffering and mortality of humanity so that humanity, in turn can share in his divinity. His famous dictum states: "God became man so that man might become God."

According to him, the word of God took flesh in order to heal and renew humanity showing a form of self-emptying for the salvation of humanity. He argues that the incarnation and cross cannot be separated. They have to be understood together in view of salvation.<sup>203</sup> He incorporates the entire life and work of Christ into his soteriological plan thereby presenting it in a wider scope. His vision of salvation is multidimensional thereby opening up new horizons for more holistic and inclusive vision of soteriology. In his theological writings he emphasizes the salvific significance of the Christ

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202 [Chat.openai.com/c/3b614555-4565-b66a-0d5caa81f331](https://chat.openai.com/c/3b614555-4565-b66a-0d5caa81f331)

203 Philip Kariatlis, "Soteriological Insights in Athanasius' On the Incarnation," *Phronema* Vol. 28 (2) 2013, 27-28 (21-34) academia.edu/66440558, Accessed on 22 September 2023.

event. This is specifically obvious in his earliest major work 'On the Incarnation' which is considered today as a classic Christian literature. His soteriological sensibilities are more evident in it than anywhere else. His vision of salvation is presented with clarity, coherence and comprehensiveness. He opines that salvation was not effected merely through the conception and birth of the Son of God by Mary, but included Christ's entire life, namely his 'divine manifestation' culminating with the cross and resurrection. It is important to note that cross was the most humiliating event during Christ's earthly ministry. He presents incarnation and cross together emphasizing their inseparability for salvation. His vision of salvation is best appreciated when they are seen together. His use of the term 'degradation' twice, first with reference to the incarnation and secondly with reference to the cross further makes the connection and interdependence between the two events even more clearer.<sup>204</sup> As noted already one has to understand his vision of salvation from the perspective of Christ's entire economy of salvation. The cross of Christ is presented as highly significant because it made manifest the divinity of Christ in a most perfect way. According to him, the more humiliating the events related to his life were, the clearer it paradoxically became to discern the glory and divinity of Christ, a glory and divinity which he had from all eternity with the father. Seen in this light the cross became the most perfect act of salvation since it was surely the most humiliating event of Christ's earthly ministry.<sup>205</sup> The concept of kenosis played a crucial role in Christological discussions but the primary contribution of Athanasius was the defence of full divinity of Christ in the

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204 Philip Kariatlis, "Soteriological Insights in Athanasius' On the Incarnation," *Phronema* Vol. 28 (2) 2013, 29 (21-34) academia.edu/66440558/Soteriological\_Insights\_in\_St\_Athanasius\_On\_the\_Incarnation, Accessed on 22 September 2023.

205 Philip Kariatlis, "Soteriological Insights in Athanasius' On the Incarnation," *Phronema* Vol. 28 (2) 2013, 30.



face of various theological challenges.<sup>206</sup> According to him, Jesus in his incarnation willingly emptied himself of certain divine prerogatives to take on human form and undergo the human experience. He did not develop extensively on the idea of kenosis but his theology was centred on defending the full divinity of Christ. He argued that Jesus, the Son of God, was fully divine and co-eternal with God the father. He emphasized the paradox of the incarnation, where the eternal Word of God, took on human nature without diminishing his divine nature. Therefore the Son of God did not cease to be God when he became incarnate, but rather, fully united to divine and human natures in his person.<sup>207</sup> By coming to the human realm, by taking a mortal body, he had taken away the consequence of our sin, namely death and thereby he offered us salvation.<sup>208</sup> “For by the sacrifice of his own body, he both put an end to the law which was against us, and made a new beginning of life for us, by the hope of resurrection which he has given us.”<sup>209</sup> The divine kenosis consists in becoming a human person and in the process of self-emptying, divinized the human person and restored the dignity which had been lost.

From the above discussions we can come to certain observations. First of all none of the early Church fathers take kenosis to imply that Christ actually gave up or lost his divine nature or attributes. According to them this emptying meant a lessening of his glory or a kind of hiding of his divine power and majesty from human perception. Secondly, all of them have tried to maintain both ‘poles’ of

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206 “Athanasius on Kenosis,” chat.openai.com/c/co7fe903\_bc02\_4331\_bec8\_f29091ac79e.

207 “Athanasius on Kenosis,” chat.openai.com/c/co7fe903\_bc02\_4331\_bec8\_f29091ac79e.

208 Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation*, (*Athanasius De Incarnatione*) Trans. Archibald Robertson, Second Edition, Revised and Enlarged, London: D. Nutt, 270-271STRAND, 1891, 15-16.

209 Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation*, 18.



the mystery of incarnation. They all affirm the full divinity and full humanity of Christ, existing simultaneously in the one person neither doing damage to the other. For them what was most important was to maintain the equality of Christ and the father which required him to be identical with the father in every respect. Moreover, the equality of Christ to the “form of a slave” should be equally preserved. Therefore the consensus of the patristic exegesis is perfectly in line with Chalcedonian Orthodox Christology that tries to maintain both poles intact.<sup>210</sup>

In this chapter we were discussing the biblical basis for the self-emptying and humility of Christ and how he was a man for others. We have seen the foundational passage of kenosis in the Letter to the Philippians 2:5-11 and other related biblical texts. Moreover, we have explored the exposition of some of the major Church fathers and their understanding of this theme. Following this example of Christ Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara dedicated his life totally and wholeheartedly to God and his fellow beings. In the following chapter we shall see how he, being a religious made himself available for God and his people through his various ministries or apostolic activities and the various perspectives of kenosis involved in his life.

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210 Dennis Johnson, “A Survey of Exegesis of Philippians 2:5-11 in the Patristic Period,” NT515-Philippians 12.04.2009, Accessed on 25 November 2023.

## **CHAPTER 03**

### **KENOTIC PERSPECTIVES IN SAINT KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA**

Saint Kuriakose was a pioneer in various daring and epoch-making initiatives which were made possible due to his burning zeal for the Lord. His thirst for knowledge, insatiable yearning for the vision of God, and the variety of new steps taken in view of the spiritual, intellectual, and social development and growth of the Church and society made him a *karmayogi*. He was truly a yogi who was concentrating on God in Jesus Christ and longing for mystical union with him. At the same time his intense love of Jesus and his heart's desire to conform himself to the mind of Jesus made him a person totally dedicated and fervently devoted to his brothers and sisters and for their growth and welfare he spent himself without any reservation. His conviction that he was called by God is seen in his enthusiasm to respond to the invitation of *Malpan* Thomas Palackal to pursue studies for priesthood at Pallipuram Seminary. His seminary education broadened his vision on the larger family of the Church for whose sake Jesus the Lord had given up his life, suffering even the most humiliating death on the cross. Being a member of the family of God, he was aware of his great responsibility to the wider human family which prompted him to dedicate his life for the integral growth of the Church and society even risking his life. His deep awareness of the adopted sonship of God was the spiritual foundation of his life and that urged him strongly to become a man of intense prayer and relentless action. To know the plan of God for him and for others it was indispensable for him to invest time and energy in prayer.

Let us see the God experience of Saint Kuriakose and how he was inspired to dedicate himself for God and his people. He had to undergo a lot of struggles, sufferings and kenotic experiences. However, he always remained a steady minded person.

### 1. A Christ Centred Personality

The essence of the New Testament spirituality is the experience of God who emptied himself his glory and power, the one who came down to this earth and the one who dwelt among human beings as Emmanuel. We can notice this conviction and experience of Saint Kuriakose reflected in his writings especially in the *Colloquies* and *Compunction of the Soul*. Our God is a personal God who relates with human beings in a special way. As we know this mighty God has assumed our human nature and identified with us as Emmanuel – a God with us. This incarnation involved kenosis and that reveals the depth of God’s love. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone believes in him may not perish but have eternal life” (Jn 3: 16). Saint Kuriakose addresses God as *appa* or *ente nalla appa* (my beloved father). It shows his deep *abba*-consciousness and childlike attitude towards God. It reveals the depth of his intimate relationship with God as that of father and he as father’s son. It is a very intimate word for him. When he called God or dared to address him as *abba* or *ente appa*, he did it with a great sense of pride and filial love. The term ‘*appan*’ is the most intimate word used to show the relationship between children and the father in a family. This term does not have any connotations of authority, power and control, as the word usually denotes. Rather it implies an all embracing and nurturing love that comes to us from our fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, friends etc. It expressed his trust, safety, belongingness, and intimacy. From his *abba* experience originates humility and gratitude which we often witness throughout his life. Saint Kuriakose adapted or appropriated Biblical themes

to his personal situations and he identifies himself with the characters of the Bible.<sup>1</sup> For example, he does not simply compare but identifies the chapel with Mounts Sinai and Zion (Ex 19: 24-30, 34; 40:34-38), himself with Zachaeus (Lk 19: 1-10); the lost sheep (Lk 15:1-7); the prodigal son returning home (Lk 15: 11-24), Mary Magdalene embracing the foot of the cross; one of the nursing babies shouting “Hosanna to the Son of David” and the good thief.

According to Saint Kuriakose the God of distance is made closer to us in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He saw the unity of the Holy Trinity in Jesus of Nazareth. Since God is love by nature, humiliation even unto death corresponds to God’s nature. Therefore, the self-limitation of Christ on the cross is an expression of the self-limitation within Godself. The very nature of God is self-emptying love. In Jesus he realized the mercy of the father, the greatest expression of love by his identification with the humanity and by his sufferings and death, and the indwelling presence of the Spirit in the Holy Eucharist.<sup>2</sup> The Holy Eucharist is the extension of the mystery of the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. In the event of incarnation, God became man, and was available for anyone of that place and time. Taking one more step further the same God becomes a piece of bread that is the Holy Eucharist. Through this second step his presence has been extended to every corner of the whole world. The self-emptying and self-sacrificing love of Jesus Christ knows no limit. He humbles himself further and further and gives himself as a gift to all. Here we see the unfathomable depth of the love of the Eucharistic Lord.<sup>3</sup> The life of Saint Kuriakose was an exemplary model of divine intimacy. In his opinion the only thing that can make our lives meaningful is to

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1 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 266-267.

2 Thomas Panthaplackal, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara: Great Soul of India*, 50.

3 Thomas Kochumuttom, *The Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 259.

have an intimate relationship and a living fellowship with Jesus, who is the true vine of God. He was filled with the sap of divine grace and therefore he could bear abundant fruits. The intimate fellowship with Jesus endowed him with inspiration and fortitude. Jesus was the centre of his life and the experience of joy motivated him to accomplish the many works he did for the Church and humanity at large. This is the reason behind his manifold achievements.<sup>4</sup> Jesus said: “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (Jn 10:10). Saint Kuriakose was filled with this life and he could produce great energy to transform the world.

## 2. Filial Relationship with God the Father

The approach of Saint Kuriakose to Jesus was more on a filial level. He addresses not only heavenly father but also Christ as my beloved father. When reflecting over the passion of Christ he was overflowed with gratitude and he experienced the ineffable love of God. Out of this experience his intimacy with Jesus is also expressed in calling him ‘*ente nalla appa.*’ We can find thirty one times the use of the expression *ente appan.*<sup>5</sup> He says: “My heart however, tells me, to call you by no other name than my father.”<sup>6</sup> As one of his spiritual sons Fr. Louis affirmed he lived in constant union with the Lord.<sup>7</sup> He was confident enough that *appan* is very much concerned about him and cares him. The Christo-centric life of Saint Kuriakose was centered on the Holy Eucharist. There he met and experienced the divinity and humanity of Christ and also

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4 Augustine Mlavarayil, “Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara: A Fruit Bearing Branch of Jesus,” 61.

5 The two reasons for which Saint Kuriakose developed such an approach to Jesus was, first of all, only a father can forgive his children unconditionally, secondly the confidence of a son to approach his father even when he is unworthy.

6 *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara*, Vol. III, *Colloquies With the Heavenly Father*, trans. Jose Chittilappilly, Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Blessed Chavara, 1990, 5.

7 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 6.

the depth of the self-emptying love of God. He received all his spiritual strength from the Eucharistic Lord and this union with the divine changed him into a 'Man of God.'<sup>8</sup> Fr. Leopold his confessor and spiritual director, writes regarding his Eucharistic devotion: "Besides the usual visits to the Blessed Sacrament enjoined by the Rule, he used to spend long hours on his knees, immersed in prayer before the Tabernacle."<sup>9</sup> Moreover, he testifies that "Chavara led a life like Blessed Mother Mary, who was full of grace."<sup>10</sup> Mani Kurian, a very elderly parishioner of Muttuchira, commented that "he was indeed a man filled with the Holy Spirit!"<sup>11</sup> His devotion to the Holy Eucharist was extraordinary which he developed from his childhood and he maintained this zeal until his death. He spent long hours before the Blessed Sacrament and used to discern the will of God in all endeavors of life. He preferred to remain locked up in the tabernacle with Jesus. He writes to the sisters, "I have locked up your hearts in the tabernacle of Jesus. I have done the same with mine as well. Let us remain there until the day of resurrection."<sup>12</sup> As many testify he celebrated the Holy Mass with an angelic countenance before the Holy Eucharist, and it was an awe-inspiring experience for the faithful. He spread this devotion later by introducing the forty hour adoration, Liturgy of the Holy Saturday, reforming the Order of the Holy Mass, etc. His devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and his personal encounter with Jesus was very clear in his writings. In one of his letters, he wrote to the sisters what he had already practised: "Stay constantly in His presence. Walk along with Him. Converse with Him continuously."<sup>13</sup> His life was revolving around Christ. His

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8 Thomas Panthaplackal, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara: Great Soul of India*, 51.

9 Leopold Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 13.

10 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 4.

11 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 5.

12 CWC, Vol. IV, *The Letters*, 85.

13 CWC, Vol. IV, *The Letters*, 82.

food and drink, breath and solace everything was Christ.<sup>14</sup> In this context everything else was irrelevant for him. As we have noted his whole life was centered on Jesus Christ, who was not a distant God but a God who is close by.

## 2.1. God Experience

It is true that he was a Godly man who sought and always experienced the presence of the invisible God in every visible realities of this world. He had a deep quest and longing to see God. He could see God in Jesus, the God became man. As we know nobody needs to be taught how to speak with one's friend. The love between them itself helps them to talk with each other. In the same way the one who is in love with God would converse with each other without much difficulty. According to him, meditation is our intimate personal conversation with God and our life itself is its content. It is like two lovers getting lost in conversation together. He is expressing his most personal and intimate feelings towards God, whether in the person of God the father or Jesus Christ. Being a spirit filled person the Holy Spirit helped Saint Kuriakose to have a deep love experience with God and in communion with Him. His life was led by the Holy Spirit.<sup>15</sup>

Saint Kuriakose Chavara's whole trust was in God alone, from whom he could obtain everything. His desire to remain united with our Lord was not based on his own personal strength, because he was conscious of his weaknesses and his sins.<sup>16</sup> He trusted in God's merits and for him union with God was not merely a sentiment. It was a self-emptying act and he discerned God's will in his dialogue with superiors.<sup>17</sup>

14 CWC, Vol. II, *Compunction of the Soul*, Cantos, 143-146.

15 Mareena and Avila, *Ente Ohariyum Panapathravum*, (Malayalam) John Paul ed., Kakkanaad: A Beth Rawma Publication, Chavara Central Secretariat, Chavara Hills, 2012, 25.

16 Lucas Vithuvattickal, "A Life Full of Virtues," 102.

17 His preference to the divine will could be seen in the acceptance of his transfer to Pallipuram, while he was actively engaged in the construction of the monastery at Mannanam. See Lucas Vithuvattickal,



As we have seen, Saint Teresa of Avila had great influence in his spiritual life. He got inspiration and motivation for his contemplative life from Saint Teresa of Avila. His language and style of meditation exhibit that he was quite familiar with the teachings and the languages of Saint Teresa of Avila.<sup>18</sup>

According to Saint Teresa of Avila for our union with God, we need vocal prayer as a verbal expression for our communication with God. And when this verbal expression becomes interiorized silent expression directed to God, and we practice what Saint Teresa calls mental prayer. According to her, “mental prayer is nothing else than a close sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us” (*Life* 8/5). For her *silence* is the language of prayer. Therefore, she says that the deepest desires of the heart should be the longing for God and to understand God’s mystery. Although we know that humans are finite, yet our finitude becomes the channel of divine communication. And this divine communication takes place best in silence.

According to Saint Teresa the aim of prayer is union with God. The first quality of this union is its wholeness, namely, the prayer of union. Here there is an indescribable fusion, namely, total immersion of the soul into the divine ocean. The fusion of Spirit to spirit and human love to divine charity,<sup>19</sup> which leads to the divinization of human, and the divine Spirit transforms the human spirit, penetrating and beautifying it. Saint Teresa writes: “For He has desired to be joined with the creature that, just as those who are married cannot be separated, He doesn’t want to be separated from the soul.”<sup>20</sup> Saint Kuriakose in his *Colloquies* gives his own

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“A life full of Virtues,” 100.

18 Thomas Kochumuttam, “A Contemplative in Action,” 150.

19 Cf., R.V, D’Souza, *Meeting in God Experience: St. Teresa of Avila and the Bhagavadgita on Prayer*, Gujarat: Sahitya Prakash, 1999, 66.

20 *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, trans. K. Kavanaugh and O. Rodriguez, Vol. II, *Interior Castle*, Trivandrum: Carmel Publishing Centre, 1982, 434.

modified experience of St. Teresa's *Interior Castle* with a deep sentiment of an abiding sense of sorrow for his sins and a personal encounter with the merciful Lord whom he consistently calls Father ('*Appa*'). These meditations exhibit the unique characteristics of his union with God.<sup>21</sup>

The seed of the spirit of prayer that has fallen in the good soil of Chavara's heart, duly sprouted and was nurtured first by the priest in the presbytery, where he was sent by the parents to stay for some time just before he entered the seminary at the age of thirteen.<sup>22</sup>

## 2.2. Pre-Conditions for Prayer

Saint Teresa speaks of certain measures which are essential for prayer life. If we do not possess them then it is impossible to be truly contemplative. The three absolute preconditions necessary for prayer are detachment from all created things, love of neighbour, and true humility. If these conditions are not fulfilled, then those who practice prayer will always be dwarfs. Humility and detachment always go together, and they are two inseparable sisters.<sup>23</sup>

Saint Teresa holds that detachment is a positive attitude that enables one to unite with God wholeheartedly. Detachment from worldly things enables one to grow in prayer and in turn prayer helps one to practice detachment at a deeper level. Saint Teresa gives a few practical suggestions regarding detachment. Inordinate love for our body and too much conscious of our health can be detrimental to growth in prayer.<sup>24</sup> True prayer leads us to die to ourselves and not

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21 Sebastian Poonoly, "Writings of Chavara," 122.

22 Thomas Kochumuttam, "A Contemplative in Action," 141.

23 *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, trans., K. Kavanaugh, and O. Rodriguez, Vol. II, *The Way of Perfection*, Trivandrum: Carmel Publishing Centre, 1982, 76.

24 *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila.*, trans. K. Kavanaugh, and O. Rodriguez, Vol. II, *The Way of Perfection*, 78.

to desire comforts. However, Saint Teresa is also conscious about asceticism and mortification to control the needs of the body. Saint Kuriakose's mystical theology is essentially the same as that of Saint Teresa, that is, complete detachment from all that is not divine on the one hand, and consummate one's spirit with God on the other. Therefore, Saint Kuriakose held on to the motto: "The Lord is my portion" (Ps 16:5), which he had adopted as he received tonsure in 1818, "he had decided to follow the Lord's call, accepting the sorrows with submission to the will of God and dedicating himself repeatedly to the Mother of God, as he had learnt from his parents."<sup>25</sup>

### **2.2.1. Detachment**

Detachment is our willingness to give up the created things to do God's will. It is a means to freedom from sin and the disordered inclinations. That is why, Christ told the young man: "Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me" (Lk 18:22). This teaching of Jesus points to the attainment of a higher good at the denial of a lower one. The term 'detachment' has other equivalents, such as renunciation, mortification, stripping off of the old self, forgetfulness of self, self-sacrifice, humility or spiritual freedom.<sup>26</sup> Detachment, in the true sense of the term, consists of surrendering oneself to God continuously in silence. Surrender has double dimensions: 1) Surrender once and for all and 2) a continuous day-by-day surrender. Retaining what is of interest and sacrificing from the surplus is not surrender. Prayer and union with God require a total self-surrender without any condition.<sup>27</sup>

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25 Thomas Kochumuttam, "A Contemplative in Action," 141.

26 R.V. D' Sousa, *Meeting in God Experience: St. Teresa of Avila and the Bhagavadgita on Prayer*, Gujarat: Sahitya Prakash, 1999, 58.

27 R.V. D' Sousa, *Meeting in God Experience*, 61.

Silence and solitude are important aspects that help us to grow in detachment. They are considered synonyms, but each has its own effect on prayer.

Solitude is a pointer to the explored treasures within us. The discovery of great spiritual treasures helps us to hasten our effort at the detachment. Solitude provides us with a sense of integration and spiritual strength. Through solitude, we become fully aware of the sacred within us. Silence is a factor that contributes greatly to the nourishment of the inner spirit. It assists us to face shallowness and superficiality. In silence, we get the strength to combat distractions and temptations.<sup>28</sup>

Since spiritual solitude is linked with prayer it becomes a strong way of discernment; it is a great help to distinguish between the love of God and the love of the world.<sup>29</sup> Model of such prayer is Christ himself, who constantly withdrew from people and daily demands of his ministry, to be alone with the father and pray. The priority of Jesus' solitude can be found in the way he began his ministry (Mk 1:12, 35; Mt 14:13) and how he made important decisions (Mk 14:32). As already noted prayer for Saint Kuriakose is a conversation with God.<sup>30</sup> However, it was an awareness of the presence of God. Following Christ himself who loved solitude, he spent long hours in front of Holy Eucharist in silence. It has become a habit for him to spend time in solitude and prayer before any major assignment. The moment he spent before the Blessed Sacrament was not only moment of inspiration and consolation, rather solitude of Christ, emptying himself to be immersed in his love.

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28 R.V. D' Souza, *Meeting in God Experience*, 60.

29 *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, trans. K. Kavanaugh and O. Rodriguez, Vol. II, *The Way of Perfection*, 129.

30 CWC, Vol. III, *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 14-15.

### **2.2.2. Love of Neighbour**

Prayer, particularly contemplative prayer should lead one to be one with the Lord, or one's existence becomes one being in love. "Experiencing God's love means experiencing that one has been unreservedly accepted, approved and infinitely loved, that one can and should accept oneself and one's neighbor."<sup>31</sup> A true love of neighbour is the proof that one has achieved its maturity in prayer-life because being in love with neighbour one finds that he is being in love with God himself (cf. Mt 25:40). Jesus himself becomes the model of the truth of love of neighbour because by his sacrificial death on the Cross, he proved that there is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friend (Jn. 15:13). Saint Teresa affirms that we can never attain perfect love for our neighbour unless it has its roots in the love of God. Thus, she calls spiritual love which embraces all trials and every act done with pure intention towards our neighbour. In her view, we love God through our love for our neighbour and it must be expressed through deeds (1 Jn 3:16-18).

As we have seen Saint Kuriakose before interacting with people used to spend long hours in front of the Blessed Sacrament. Through his daily contact with people and listening to them, he came to know their condition and understood how those in authority (political or religious) abused power and position to exploit the poor. As a religious leader, he knew the reality of the people around him. Therefore, he could identify them as the poor of Yahweh and dedicate himself for their well being.

There were numerous events in Saint Kuriakose's life that illustrate his love for his neighbour. His communication with bishop Roccas was an example. Although the bishop had even threatened his life Saint Kuriakose gave him a decent sent off. After the departure of bishop Roccas, Chavara worked diligently to bring back the Churches that had joined

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31 Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 74.

the schismatics. He considered forgiveness as a great value and gave much emphasis to it in his life. All his activities were natural expressions of his inner divine experience. He had a special grace to forgive others and he always tried to reconcile with his adversaries. Due to his hectic schedule of activities during the troublesome situation of the Church history of the 19<sup>th</sup> century he earned some adversaries. But he never kept any grudge or ill feeling towards them. We have already seen his dealings with Mathen Kalapurackal of Manjoor the steward of the Mannanam monastery.

The confidence in God the Father gave him hope and solution for all his problems and problems of others as well. Fr. Aloysius, one of his own students who had stayed with him for long at Manjummel recalls the memory of his revered master in the following words:

He was very keen on observing the spirit of obedience, love of God and devotion to the vows of the congregation. He spent the whole time of meditation in the evening on his knees, in tears and overpowered by emotion. He had to be reminded by those nearby that the allotted time was over. Other priests held him in high esteem as a superman. 'The Prior General appears as an angel they used to say.'<sup>32</sup>

It is to be noted that he was fully and totally absorbed in the meditation that it seemed as if he lost the sense of time and place. All these testimonies from his contemporaries confirm that Saint Kuriakose proactively responded to his quest for communion with God by being committed to and interested in the affairs of the Lord. This commitment and interest in the affairs of the Lord was translated in the form of his involvement in the affairs of his brethren not only in the consecrated community but also in the affairs of the Church and in the existential needs of the society at large.<sup>33</sup> This

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32 Valerian Plathottam, *The First Indian Saint: Blessed Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Revised New Edition, Mannanam: Sanjos Book Stall, 1986, 44.

33 Mathew Maniampra, *Psycho-Theological Paradigms*, xxi.

is very clear in the declaration of Pope John Paul II on the occasion of his beatification in 1986: "His [Saint Chavara's] success ... in all his many undertakings was undoubtedly due to the intense charity and prayer, which characterized his daily life, his close communication with Christ, and his love for the Church as the visible body of Christ on earth."<sup>34</sup>

The fundamental core of all his achievements is solidly established in his filial relationship with Jesus Christ. He had a firm foundation in Christian faith which is reflected throughout his life. He articulated his views and perspectives primarily based on his personal encounter with Jesus and also based on his readings and theological reflections. His theology is experiential than dogmatic. He was convinced that to have a deep constant personal love relationship with God the only means is meditation. In the book *Colloquies* we can find the outpouring of his gratitude to God and repentance for his shortcomings. He is expressing his most personal and intimate feelings towards God, whether in the person of God the Father or Jesus Christ. He experienced God not only as Father, but also as mother. There are biblical passages in which God is presented as a loving mother. For example Prophet Isaiah says, "Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you" (Isa 49:15-16, 66:12, 13). Similarly, we find in the gospel of Saint John who underlines the maternal character of God who is preparing bread and fish for the disciples and inviting them for breakfast just like a mother (Jn 21:12). In the gospel of Mathew the loving care and protection of God is depicted using the imagery of hen (Mt 23: 37). He is reminded of the tender, caring, forgiving, self-giving, merciful, compassionate and maternal love of God. In all these experiences there is a self-emptying involved.

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34 A. Mathias Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 436.



The spirituality of Saint Kuriakose is a harmonious blend of two aspects namely, renunciation of world and mundane things and surrendering oneself totally to the divine power. Renunciation without surrender to the ultimate cause and ground of all existence is meaningless. But surrender to this divine being is impossible without renunciation of ego and things that nourish this ego. He presents the true Christian life in terms of giving oneself whole heartedly to Jesus Christ. For him, to die for Christ is the highest Christian witness and martyrdom is the great sign of love towards Jesus Christ. In his minor epic *Anastasia's Martyrdom*, he highlights and upholds the greatness of being loyal to one's faith in the midst of suffering and persecution even at the cost of one's life.<sup>35</sup> It provides the gift of eternal bliss, a mystical union with Jesus Christ. It is the fullness of discipleship. The *abba* experience is the most sublime aspect of his God experience and he attained this experience through Jesus the Messiah. Messianic experience is the foundation of his deep God experience, experience of universal brotherhood, awareness of him as God's son and the vision of the Church as the body

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35 This form of life witness is self-emptying to a very high degree and serves as the ultimate criterion for being a disciple of Jesus Christ. This is in line with what the gospels call Jesus' new commandment of loving one another as he has loved us, which entails loving another to the point of giving up one's very life for the other. The worth of this way of witness is evident in the words of Jesus, who declared that the summit of love consists in giving one's life for others (Jn 15:13). See Moly Thomas, *Christology in Context*, 298-299. Saint Kuriakose tried to conform to his master in every aspect of his life. However, according to the II Vatican Council teaching especially in *Gaudium et Spes*, we can find a broadened concept of martyrdom by linking the witness of love with justice by associating love with service of those in need, which would naturally require actions and struggles for justice. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 21. This enlarged concept of martyrdom is already reflected in Thomas Aquinas who, provided insights that contributed to the Church's understanding of martyrdom. He contends that the essential nature of martyrdom consists in standing firmly for truth and justice against the assaults of persecution. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 42, translated from Latin by Anthony Ross, London: Blackfriars, 1963, II-II, 124, 1.

of Christ.<sup>36</sup> This is the basis of his altruism. The rest of the humanity is then viewed as consisting of his own sisters and brothers, which explains his concern for others, especially the weaker and less fortunate members of the human family.

### **2.2.3. Humility**

Humility as virtue is one of the important distinguishing way of our Lord himself. He held it as an important virtue which he explicitly asks others to learn from him: "Learn of me that I am meek and humble of heart" (Mt 11:29). Jesus was fully true to his teaching; therefore, Paul's 'kenotic' language has meaning. It shows forth the humble love of Christ when he assumed the human limitation and painful sufferings of human condition. Therefore, Jesus could say: "Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life" (Mt 20:28).

Saint Kuriakose cultivated the habit of practising humility which led him to face all challenges in his life. For example he gracefully accepted the humiliation when he had to return to Pallipuram from the Roman Rite Seminary at Varappuzha where he was sent for further studies of the Latin language. His extraordinary spirit of obedience was manifested in his compliance when he and Fr. Porukkara were transferred to distant Churches despite their request to continue the work of their dearest project in the monastery at Mannanam. Though this experience was a great disgrace, he accepted it as the will of God. He behaved most heroically in complying with the wishes of his superiors to every project he himself had planned.

## **3. Longing for Mystical Vision**

Mystics wish the direct manifestation of God in their lives. They want to enjoy the sweet presence of the Divine. One of the distinctive features of the spirituality of Saint Kuriakose is his intense desire to see God, the longing

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36 Sophy Rose, "Christ Experience in *Atmanuthapam*," 268.

for the vision of God. He longed to see Jesus in all the mysteries associated with him with his own eyes. His ardent desire to see the One, whom every eye longs to see, every mind cherishes to experience, expresses certain sublime characteristics of his personality. For example his craving for the divine, his humanness, childlike simplicity, sense of wonder and appreciation, profound sense of gratitude and also his open-mindedness to see greatness in little things etc. In his autobiographical poem *Compunction of the Soul* there is a poetry of 168 lines that beautifully describes the incidents of the life of Christ. The beauty of it lies in its every other line ends with the words: "I long to see [Jesus]." There was a craving and quest in him to see the different aspects of the Son of God. For example,

The Lord of Mercy, Son of God,  
His glorious splendour, I long to see...  
How he stayed for nine months

In the womb of his mother, I long to see  
Borne in her womb, to Bethlehem He came  
To obey mighty Caesar, I long to see...  
How Jesus, Anna's grandson,  
Was hunger-smitten, I long to see;  
And with the Pharisees discussed law,  
In the twelfth year, I long to see.  
The Good Shepherd, seeking His flock,  
That had gone astray, I long to see...  
The Lord of goodness, proclaiming Himself  
As our loving friend, I long to see...<sup>37</sup>

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37 Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara*, Vol. II, *Compunction of the Soul*, trans. Mary Leo, Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Bl. Chavara, 1989, 17-18.

As we have seen he addresses not only heavenly father but also Jesus Christ as 'my beloved Father.' It is very much apparent in the book *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*. Out of his extreme humility he is identifying himself as the prodigal son of the parable, who is pouring out his aspirations before Jesus Christ while addressing Him as *ente snehamulla appa* (my loving Father):

Oh, it is a long time since I saw my heavenly Father's face!. Like the prodigal son I have squandered all the nice things you benignly bestowed on me. Now I am a servant to a bad master, feeding his swine. I have grown so famished that I would like to be fed on the pods the swine feed on. I have spoilt all the fine clothes my Father gave me to put on and am now dressed in rags. Still I must be going now in this attire. For, further delay is suicidal. So here I am on my feet to make a move to my Father's house with my country cap and walking stick. O my soul! ...Your father is so bounteous as to forgive and forget every ingratitude of yours. Oh! have a look at your Father's palace and the mansions therein with their graceful high walls.<sup>38</sup>

He experienced Jesus as Emmanuel, Redeemer, Father, Mother, Son of God, Son of the virgin etc. Let us see a few of his experiences.

### 3.1. Christ as Emmanuel

Saint Kuriakose had a strong conviction about the eternal presence of the Emmanuel who is God with him. He had a strong desire to see Christ. "God becoming one with man Emmanuel, I long to see". God became man for the sake of the whole humanity. He lives in and with them. He is in

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38 *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara*, Vol. III, *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, J. Chirayil & George H. Ambooken eds., trans. Jose Chittilappilly, Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Bl. Chavara, 1990, 4.

search of them and waits for them. So they have to praise him in their hearts. Even though they are sinners he chooses their hearts as his dwelling place. So the whole humanity is obliged to love him and adore him from their hearts. He conveys this message in *Compunction of the Soul* as follows:

Emmanuel, Lord, praise to you

Singing Carols, I praise to you (II: 365-366)

My Lord the Blessed Babe Emmanuel

Did choose to make his dwelling in my heart (IV: 189-190)

O God Emmanuel, I a sinner

With love, I adore (III: Epilogue, 63-64).

He meditated intensively on the love of Jesus Christ and was ever ready to listen to the sweet voice of his beloved spouse, who always stood before him without leaving him alone even for a single instant. He willingly gave himself to his beloved bridegroom, who took him to the heights of spiritual espousal.<sup>39</sup> As we have seen, according to Saint Kuriakose,

meditation is a colloquy with God, a conversation between friends, in union and together with God, a colloquy with Jesus Christ, the bridegroom of the soul... As friends sit close to each other, they find enough topics to talk about, without cessation. If there is love, conversation goes unlimited. No one needs to teach each other of the two friends how to go on talking. For, the heart has a language of its own. The very close presence of the friends with no utterance of words is quite gratifying and heart warming.<sup>40</sup>

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39 Paul Kalluveettil, "A Christian Portrait of a Bhaktayogi: Blessed Chavara," 300.

40 CWC, Vol. III, *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 1.

To be in union with God in meditation, love is necessary and according to him, a sinful heart is incompatible with God. So he laments over his iniquities, for being one with the creatures and asks pardon. According to him sin is a big block to his chats with the heavenly bridegroom. He confesses that he is incapable of practising greater virtues and attaining high contemplation.<sup>41</sup> Therefore he is asking the help of many saints like Mother Mary, St. Joseph, St. Teresa of Avila, Mary Magdalene, Mary of Cortona and so on. Moreover, a repentant heart is a pre-requisite for prayer. Even the slightest drawbacks hurt saintly souls like Saint Kuriakose. The thought of their shortcomings, imperfections and lack of virtues causes in them great sorrow in their heart, though he was not a sinner. In the *Colloquies* he expresses recognition of his sins, his feelings of remorse over them and the need for forgiveness. Here just as Chavara is prodigal of his sins, God is prodigal of his love and mercy.

Faith in Christ is a treasure, which is given as a gift from God. Saint Kuriakose considers true Christian life in terms of giving oneself whole heartedly to the ever lover, Jesus Christ. The ultimate goal of Christian life is union with Jesus Christ. This was a longing for him. That is why his wholehearted prayer "Oh Lord, do not be separate from us until we are one with you."<sup>42</sup>

### **3.2. Christ as Redeemer**

Jesus Christ is the Saviour of the whole humankind. Jesus Christ came to this world to save sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). Christian faith proclaims this ultimate truth that Jesus Christ as Saviour and the redeemer of sinners. This is the centre point of the mystery of God's eternal plan of salvation. This is the meaning and purpose of the Christ event. He experienced this revealed truth in his life and conveys this message in the following way.

41 CWC, Vol. III, *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 3.

42 CWC, Vol. IV, *The Letters*, VII/6, 83.

You came down below and became man  
 To give us salvation (CS III: Epilogue, 43-44)  
 May your Son, you granted to be

Saviour of all, come forth from the virgin womb (CS V:  
 27-28)

O Shepherd gracious, seeking lost sheep

You came, save me, I've gone astray (CS V: 173-174)

Saint Kuriakose was immensely grateful to God for what he has done to him. He attributed everything as a gift from God and he is grateful to God for everything he received. He realized that everything that happened in his life as God's will and he accepted it gracefully. This understanding kept him humble and realistic, and always grateful and confident in God. He is recalling the various graces he received from God from his childhood onwards with gratitude even though he was aware of his sinfulness and unworthiness. Saint Kuriakose was full of gratitude to God for his birth as a healthy boy without any deformities in a noble, middle class family.<sup>43</sup> He was born in the Chavara family that is from the ancient Pakalomattom family which was believed to be baptized directly by Saint Thomas, the apostle of Jesus Christ. He was brought in a very good Catholic atmosphere which in turn helped him to walk in the path of holiness from the very beginning. He is thanking the Lord for creating him neither in a very rich family nor in a too poor family. So he is very happy and satisfied about his situation. He recalls:

Oh! Lord of all good things, out of your compassion, you did not create me among the ignorant and non-believers, or those afflicted by various handicaps or those suffering from diseases and poverty. This makes me obliged

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43 He is so much grateful to God for whatever he received from God like his human existence, parents, childhood, family, protection from epidemics, vocation to priesthood etc.



to serve you. You have granted me yet another favour by not including me among the kings and princes of this world, nor did you count me among the rich. How unfortunate it would have been if I were born among them! You graciously made me neither too rich nor too poor! That is the reason why I am so happy today!<sup>44</sup>

He is also thanking the Lord for the spiritual birth by baptism:

Oh! Merciful God, bathing me in the baptismal water, you cleansed me of the original sin, freed me of all fear, and adorned me with the beauty of grace virtues. Great, indeed, is this blessing of yours! What can I render you, oh! Lord, for this gift of mercy? At the very start of my life you rid my soul of all stains, and blessed me. Through baptism you made me your child, and extended to me the bliss of salvation in heaven.<sup>45</sup>

Saint Kuriakose was baptized on the eighth day in the parish Church of Chennankari according to the prevailing custom of that time. He was an ardent devotee of Mother Mary as any other Carmelite saint. He recollects the dedication his pious and devout mother made to the Blessed Virgin Mary in the shrine of Vechoor near Vaikom. She offered him as a slave of the Blessed Mother and every year on September 8, feast of the Nativity of our Lord, she renews the dedication and she continued it until her death. She surrendered him to the Holy Mother saying,

“Accept him as your humble slave  
To your maternal love I entrust him.”<sup>46</sup>

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44 CWC, Vol. II, *Compunction of the Soul*, II: 68-96.

45 CWC, Vol. II, *Compunction of the Soul*, 1: 33-42.

46 CWC, Vol. II, *Aatmanuthapam*, Cantos II, 5-6.

She used to remind him, “she (Mother Mary) is your mistress, and you her slave/servant. Beware my son; preserve this in your mind.” According to him, this dedication and its renewal had great influence on the spiritual formation of his life.<sup>47</sup> He laid his life fully at the feet of Mother Mary and was always at the disposal of Mother Mary as her *dasan* and considered her as his role model all throughout his life. He received this Marian devotion as a family heritage from his mother named Mariam who was an exemplary Catholic lady. He believed that to be a servant of Holy Mother is a special gift from God and always looked at her and imitated her and this naturally led him to be a servant of the Lord as Mother Mary.

Moreover, he was aware of God’s providence in imparting to him an ideal Christian upbringing by his parents, especially his mother. He was full of gratitude to God Almighty for the gift of a loving and caring mother to protect him. He sings with joy and gratitude: “A mother to feed me while yet a feeble babe ... To pour that tender love you filled her with, that nectar, unto my tiny blissful heart.”<sup>48</sup> He imbibed the spirit of prayer from his mother who used to get up at midnight and kneels down to pray. He was brought up with great affection, meticulous care, and

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47 His mother ritually dedicated him as a servant of Mother Mary and through her to Jesus Christ and this ceremony had a lasting impression in his life. He declares that he was the servant of the Holy Mother since his childhood and finds protection in her. He considered himself and lived as servant of Mary (*Mariadas*) and he was so much fond of presenting himself by that name. Here also his humble attitude is very clear. In *Atmanutapam* we can find twenty times he proudly declares himself as a servant of Mary. See Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 270. This was a customary act that was prevalent in the then Catholic families. He tried to live accordingly however he regrets several times that he could not live up to the level of servant hood as described in the Holy Bible. Therefore, with the freedom of a son he tells Mother Mary “save me by remembering that I am your servant.” See *Aatmanuthapam*, Cantos II, 286.

48 CWC, Vol. II, *Compunction of the Soul*, 1: 45-48.

constant accompaniment in the family traditions, prayers, customs, and practices. He was fortunate enough to have a good Catholic family background with pious parents who were deeply rooted in faith, Gospel values and devotions. They played a crucial role in the character formation of Saint Kuriakose. It is a challenge to the families of the modern society. The tremendous influence of the family on him was so great that they taught him, all the basics of good living and sowed in his tender mind the seeds of all the values and virtues. He exults in joy and praising God for the gentle but firm manner in which his mother trained and taught him all the basics of Christian faith.<sup>49</sup> In *Compunction of the Soul* he recollects:

Mixed in her sweet milk, she (mother) regaled me  
with thoughts of heaven, and works of grace so pure!  
And when reason grew strong, my little mind  
patiently, informed, to lisp holy names.  
Huddled close to her feet, I learned aright  
gently, of matters sublime, of my faith.  
As at midnight she rose and knelt at prayer  
warding off sleep and pretty, dullness to the air.  
Long hours, on her knee in prayer she stayed  
leaning on her then I would seat myself  
while devoutly a string of pious words  
to Mother of God and the Christ, King of Kings...  
And I listening to the lullaby sweet  
near my gentle mother quietly reposed.  
And, when my infant tongue began to lisp, up to the sky,  
her finger pointing out  
the holy names of Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

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49 CWC, Vol. II, *Compunction of the Soul*, 1: 61-86.

She, my noble mother made me repeat.<sup>50</sup>

Here one can find a perfect model of mother-child relationship, in which, the mother readily appreciates when the child behaves well, but firmly disapproves his misbehaviour. In both cases the motive of the mother is pure love and concern for the well-being of the child. In everything he had a faith vision and spiritual outlook that he acknowledges and attributes with gratitude all the beautiful things in life to God. In great humility he says, "God in his mercy gave me birth in a noble family, provided me with good parents."<sup>51</sup>

#### **4. Consciousness of His Sinfulness and Unworthiness**

From his deep God experience emerges the consciousness of his sinfulness and unworthiness. One of the striking features of his spirituality is his sense of sin. This is true also in the case of all great saints and mystics. The same feeling is expressed in the whole Bible when holy people encountered the divine. It was their firm conviction that before God's holiness, perfection and goodness, they are by nature evil and evil doers, and they are unworthy to stand before the gracious and majestic presence of God. For example when Prophet Isaiah stood before the majesty and glory of God, he realized his sinfulness. "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips" (Isa 6: 5). The Psalmist cries out with a deep sense of repentance, "Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me" (Ps 51: 5). The same is true with Saint Peter, Saint Paul, and others as well. Simon Peter after the miraculous catch of fish, falls at the feet of Jesus telling "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" (Lk 5:8). We can

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50 CWC, Vol. II, *Compunction of the Soul*, I, II: 49-70.

51 Thomas Kochumuttom, "Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara: A Man of God's Thoughts," 48; See also Thomas Kochumuttom, "Blessed Chavara: A Man in God's Hands and Moved by God," *Journal of Saint Thomas Christians*, 24, 2 (2013) 49.

find the humble disposition of Peter who sees his nothingness clearly in front of the divine power of Jesus. This is the line of thinking of all those who are far advanced in the path of virtue and sanctity. It is also reflected in the prayer of the tax collector (Mt 8:8), and expressed by the centurion (Lk 7:6). It is true that in the case of all saintly souls the sense of sin and repentance over one's own sins, is in proportion to the holiness each one has attained. Likewise Saint Kuriakose, who never lost his original sanctity, often laments about his sinfulness. The lamentation of Saint Kuriakose that echoes in almost every page of *Compunction of the Soul* is from the thought that he has pained the heart of his loving Heavenly Father. As a member of the tainted humanity, he acknowledges his unworthiness by saying:

Thou art the Lord of all, all blameless, all pure.

I am a worthless sinner, thy weak servant;

Thou art my father and my creator

Your love is unchanging and sure

Yet when I think of my sins

How can I dare to appear before You?<sup>52</sup>

He also remarks: "I am not worthy of exalted virtues, nor can I meditate deeply. Is whatever God has permitted me to achieve, of my merit."<sup>53</sup> In the words of Saint Kuriakose:

Here I come to you, O! My heavenly Father,  
with a heart full of repentance and firm purpose

of amendment to feel your peace in my heart ...

O My Father, I have sinned against heaven and  
before You. I am no longer worthy to be called

Your son ... Count me as one of Your servants ...

Therefore, my Father, source of all graces, forgive

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52 CWC, Vol. II, *Compunction of the Soul*, V: 142-150.

53 CWC, Vol. III, *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 1.

me all my trespasses due to my selfishness and ingratitude.<sup>54</sup>

His sense of repentance can be understood from three angles. We can find first of all the awareness of the sinfulness and weakness of a soul which is privileged to have glimpses of the vision of divine glory. The second one is the thought that he has not adequately expressed his gratitude for the great gifts he has received from God and thirdly, the whole purpose of the incarnation, passion and death of Christ was for our redemption from sin.<sup>55</sup>

But alas! When I grew up, my ferour dimmed  
 My infant pretty, I gently forsook  
 I thought and spoke unseemly unholy words  
 In headless speech, like a silly sot  
 A giddy headed lout, woe to me  
 Veinly a prodigal son, in those cursed days.<sup>56</sup>

Saint Kuriakose delved deep into the mystery of Christ, considered himself as the most ungrateful among the creatures and least worthy to be called a human being. Thus he calls himself a sinner<sup>57</sup> a great sinner<sup>58</sup>, unworthy one (CS VII: 162), and the most unworthy one.<sup>59</sup> He is the wicked one as well as the one without luminosity.<sup>60</sup> He considered himself as the least one (CS III: 39-40), one does not have any

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54 CWC, Vol. III, *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 3-5.

55 Thomas Kadankavil, *Chavara: A Multidimensional Saint*, 40-41.

56 CWC, Vol. II, *Compunction of the Soul*, VII: 25-32.

57 CWC, Vol. II, *Compunction of the Soul*, I: 129, III: 55, Appendix 64,67, V: 142, 144, Last Petition: 3.

58 CWC, Vol. III, *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, Introduction, *Compunction of the Soul*, II: 242.

59 CWC, Vol. III, *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, Introduction.

60 CWC, Vol. III, *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, "Act of Humility," Introduction.

ability (CS II: 278), deaf and dumb,<sup>61</sup> the blind one,<sup>62</sup> the idiot<sup>63</sup> and the destitute.<sup>64</sup> The contrite soul of Saint Kuriakose finds itself disgusting than the despicable and wretched creatures such as worms. He thinks that he does not deserve to be called even by this title. He considers himself as mere soil or *mannu*.<sup>65</sup> The awareness of the greatness of God the creator and the ingratitude of man, the creature, created in him great sorrow for his sins. Saint Kuriakose, a man of the Spirit, finds himself totally unworthy to face the august Majesty of God because of his imperfections. He is conscious of the Absolute Holiness of God, before whom, he feels that he is a prodigal, not a son. It is to be noted that Saint Kuriakose was characterized by the passionate love and devotion for the Eucharistic Lord and the long hours he spent before the Eucharist in prayer was an assurance for the intense flame of his personal love for Jesus and zeal for salvation of his brethren.<sup>66</sup> One of the remarkable characteristics of his spirituality was an abiding compunction of heart and it became deeper and deeper as he advanced in age. In this case his spirituality has great affinities with the spirituality of Saint Teresa of Avila, even though both of them had never been a sinner they were so much aware of their past minor failures and imperfections and deeply sorry for that continuously.<sup>67</sup> Saint Kuriakose confesses his childhood follies and even the minute and insignificant blunders or wrong doings and short comings

61 CWC, Vol. III, *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, "Act of Humility."

62 CWC, Vol. III, *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, "Preparatory Prayer of Meditation."

63 Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara*, Vol. I, *The Chronicles*, 71, 75.

64 CWC, Vol. III, *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, Introduction.

65 It refers to his extreme humility. Soil's position is the lowest where everybody walks over it. But it has no complaints. Humility comes from the Latin word *humus* which means ground or soil.

66 Thomas Mampra, "Kuriakose Elias Chavara: A Saint for Our Times," 41.

67 Thomas Kochumuttom, "A Contemplative in Action," 151.



as grave faults or crimes. In all his spiritual writings also he expresses it consistently and he tries to find occasions to degrade or belittle him in front of others.<sup>68</sup> He was so humble that he always felt his compunction was not in proportion to the magnitude of his sins. Therefore he cultivated a special devotion to those repentant holy women, who renouncing their old sinful life, became acceptable to the Lord. In his own words: "As my sorrow bears no proportion to the magnitude of my sins, I take heart to go to my heavenly Father by offering to Him, with my sorrow and grief, the penance and penitence of the great penitents, like Mary Magdalene, Mary of Cortona, who have always been helpful to me, in evoking repentance for my sins."<sup>69</sup> Because of this humble attitude he considers himself as the servant of priests, novices and laity of the Third Order.<sup>70</sup> Saint Kuriakose, as already noted, a man of the Spirit, even though confessed with confidence that he has never lost his original sanctity but admits that he is the most sinful person.<sup>71</sup>

Although the sense of sinfulness and unworthiness filled the whole person of Saint Kuriakose he was not discouraged to approach the divine presence with confidence and trust of a loving child for its parents. According to him the love of God is an everlasting love. This is due to the conviction that he cannot exist without the divine guidance and protection. He is a destitute (*agathi*) and he must cling to God for his survival, as he alone could give him salvation (*gathi*). He

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68 Paul Kalluveettil, "A Christian Portrait of a Bhakta Yogi: Blessed Chavara," *Journal of Dharma* 29, 3 (July-September 2004) 302.

69 CWC, Vol. III, *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 2.

70 CWC, Vol. IV, *The Letters*, VI/4 (The Testament).

71 In a message by Cardinal Peter Palazzi, the prefect of the Congregation for the Cause of Saints, during the Beatification of Blessed Chavara said: "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." Quoted in Thomas Panthapalackal, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara: Great Soul of India*, 25.

was convinced of the fact that God would never forsake or reject him.<sup>72</sup> He could see the providence of God in all his life experiences and occurrences. As a man of faith he could overcome the challenges of life with equanimity and optimism. He acknowledges that whatever has been achieved is not because of his ability or expertise, but it was God who performed everything even though he did not deserve or merit them.<sup>73</sup> “O joy of Joys! O Lord we are mere worms incapable of understanding anything. Like unto the mother who nourishes her children with milk even while they are asleep, or are unable to express in words their hunger and thirst, you are looking after our needs every day.”<sup>74</sup> He was sure that the Lord stands close to him and provides everything whatever he desires or necessary for him even without asking them. Only a contrite heart which is aware of its radical dependence on God can humble itself. It is to be noted that a repentant person will be a humble person.

According to Saint Kuriakose the Lord makes him happy in both temporal and spiritual spheres even without asking. He was certain that the Congregation came into existence and has grown not by any human efforts, but it was the work of God who founded and nurtured it with marvellous deeds.<sup>75</sup> All such affirmations emerge from his demeanour mentality. He felt that although he is nothing, and he has nothing, he has got everything in God. He could make the words of Jesus as his own: “All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them” (Jn 17:10). With Saint Paul he could say, “I can do all things through him who strengthens

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72 Paul Kalluveettil, “A Christian Portrait of a Bhakta Yogi: Blessed Chavara,” 302.

73 Paul Kalluveettil, “A Christian Portrait of a Bhakta Yogi: Blessed Chavara,” 303.

74 CWC, Vol. IV, *The Letters*, VII/ 10.

75 CWC, Vol. IV, *The Letters*, VI/I.

me” (Phil 4:13). This conviction made him a daring person who could undertake risky projects and activities.<sup>76</sup>

Saint Kuriakose presents a real picture of Jesus as a Redeemer in the garden of Gethsemane. According to him the agony of Jesus in the garden is the agony of the good shepherd who is going after the lost sheep. He identifies with the lost one and gives the message as follows. The Son of Almighty God, the fount of mercy, the eternal Son of God, co-existed with the Lord of God, the sovereign of mankind; the royal Son of David, the one who is adored by nine choirs of angels is seen searching in midnight. He is searching for no one else, but me alone. I am His beloved sheep. He came to the world in search of me and he searched for me for thirty three years. He wandered up and down over sharp stones and thorns, deserting his father’s divine lap. Everything was for me, me alone! And he calls me to his side. Contemplating on the passion of Christ he laments, “My sin, great sin, augments my woe.”<sup>77</sup> In his attitude of humility he clings to the Lord for survival or *gathi* (safety and security). In the beginning of *Colloquies* he says,

Is it because of my power and skill that I did things whatsoever? How is it that I came here? Who called me from home? How did I become a priest? How could I join the community and become member of the congregation? Why should anyone address me as a prior? Am I worthy for any of these? Not at all, to be sure. If so remember it is God’s will that is being accomplished.<sup>78</sup>

He had a special devotion to the passion of Christ. He presents a vivid explanation of the Crucified Lord. He used to kneel before the crucified Christ and prayed for long

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76 Paul Kalluveetil, “A Christian Portrait of a Bhakta Yogi: Blessed Chavara,” 303-304.

77 CWC, Vol. II, *Compunction of the Soul*, VI: 205.

78 CWC, Vol. III, *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 1.

hours in tears. He used to meditate on the sufferings of the crucified Lord and shed bitter tears, confessing that it was his sins that had inflicted such wounds. He fixed his eyes on each part of the suffering servant's wounded feet, knee caps, body, shoulders, hands, face, cheek, lips, eyes and head. Saint Paul says, "For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain" (Phil 1:21). To live and die for Christ is the Christian call. Saint Kuriakose explains this truth through his minor epic *Anastasia's Martyrdom*. It is the story of a beautiful girl, Anastasia, who was persecuted by the minister of the Roman emperor, Valerian in the third century A. D. for worshipping the Christian God.<sup>79</sup>

Saint Kuriakose was a man who experienced God in the inner core of his being and found bliss in him.<sup>80</sup> It is this intimacy with the ultimate that enabled him to offer himself as gift to God amidst the magnitude of obstacles and pressures following the sudden demise of his parents and only brother that left him with the obligation of looking after his niece and other family affairs. Saint Kuriakose cherishes the inner urge for God that governed him throughout his life.

#### **4.1. Repentance and Forgiveness**

The central theme of preaching of Jesus was the Kingdom of God and the necessary condition to enter the Kingdom was repentance and belief in the Gospel. So Jesus began his public ministry by proclaiming, "the time is fulfilled; and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news" (Mk. 1:15). Later, at the time of sending out the disciples to different parts of the world, Jesus instructed them "repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (Lk 24:47). Accordingly, they set out and started preaching. The very first sermon of Peter began with the words, "repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ

79 Sebastian Poonoly, "Writings of Chavara," 120.

80 Sebastian Mullooparambil, "The God-Experience of Bl. Chavara," 260.

so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). Thus, we can notice that the Prophets including John the Baptist, Jesus Christ and his disciples all of them were preaching with an invitation to repentance, because it is the beginning of a new life.<sup>81</sup>

Repentance means, to turn in the right direction. It comes from the Hebrew term *shub* and the Greek term *metanoia*. To commit a sin means to take a wrong direction in the journey of life, while repentance means that realizing the mistake, one stops and turns in the right direction. It certainly implies that the person undergoes a change of heart or perception or the style of life, adopting a new set of values in the place of the former one. This implies that one turns away from sinfulness towards God. In the case of the prodigal son, he first turned away from his father (God), towards creatures in search of happiness. Later while in the miserable situation of the piggery he got the awareness of his sinfulness and turned away from creatures towards the father (God) in search of genuine happiness. But it is not a single act that can be completed all at once; rather it is a continuous process that continues throughout one's life. It is sure that God forgives our sins whenever we sincerely ask pardon. Even though God forgives our sins we have reasons to continue to repent.

Saint Kuriakose thinks that it is not enough to ask pardon for our sins once when we think about the many gifts we receive from the loving God our father. Although we are sinners God is always gracious enough to give us graces abundantly. We should feel sorry for our sins not out of the fear of punishment, but it should be an act of pure love. According to him, when one deepens in spirituality or one becomes closer to God, more clearly one realizes the gravity of sin, and how good and kind God is towards him/her. Then they may feel that even their minor offences

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81 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 338-339.

against him appear to be unforgivably grave. In the life of the saints we can notice this kind of deeper repentance for their sins. This is also the experience of Saint Kuriakose. It is sure that he had not committed any mortal sin, but as a human being, as part of the fallen human nature, he certainly had his venial sins, about which his sorrow was ever deeper. In this sense he was a man of repentance.<sup>82</sup> The abiding compunction of heart was a characteristic of his spirituality. It was consistently expressed in all his writings, including the letters of the last years. Most part of the *'Compunction of the Soul'* is a meditation on the life of Jesus and Blessed Virgin Mary, but Saint Kuriakose looks into himself with deep sentiments of repentance for his childhood follies, but at the same time he is sincerely grateful to God for the many blessings he received from God.<sup>83</sup> At the conclusion of his testament, written in 1870, he asks pardon even to the members of his congregation,

...to all the members of the monasteries, I beg pardon. I beg of them before God to pardon me all my shortcomings and lapses in the performance of duties. Again, I pray my brother religious, pray for me. I took my vows here as the first member and I was made the first Prior. But I have not fulfilled to satisfaction my obligation in observing the constitutions and enforcing the same. I did not give you a good example. You must forgive me the scandal I have given you and pray for me that I may make reparation for them and that you may become more fervent.<sup>84</sup>

According to Saint Kuriakose the practice of penance is the true means to grow in prayer life. Prayer generates devotion and the depth of their devotion is an unmistakable

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82 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 340.

83 Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 488.

84 CWC, Vol. IV, *The Letters*, VI/4, 74.

proof of the seriousness with which the founding fathers practised penance. He says we have to be repentant not only for our own sins, but also for the sins of our neighbours, even for the whole human family. First of all, an act of sin is a hurt inflicted on God, who is our beloved and loving father. When our father is hurt, no matter who has hurt him, we should feel sorry for that, should console him by doing penance and thus heal the wound.

To show his unworthiness before God and the co-operation God requires from his part, Saint Kuriakose refers to the Great Banquet in Luke (Lk 14:16-24), where he considers himself as the one who is called in from the wayside. He had the humility to admit that all his achievements in life are not of his own merits, but God's work.<sup>85</sup> The man in the story did not ask the Lord for the wedding garment and was cast into the darkness. According to him, even without a proper dress on, he could have asked for one in humility, then it might have granted by the divine generosity.<sup>86</sup> He is of the opinion that people fail to understand the continuous grace of God showered upon them. It was because of his self-reliance and self complacency that denied access to him to the banquet hall.

#### **4.2. Ultimate Trust in the Providence of God**

According to Saint Kuriakose it was the Lord himself who chose him to be with Him (Mk 3:13) and has become his portion. This conviction helped him to overcome all obstacles on his journey with the Lord. He responded creatively to all the life experiences whether it was positive or negative. Even renouncing his share of family property he was making himself financially insecure. Thereby he literally put into practice the instruction of Jesus: "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, and follow

85 CWC, Vol. III, *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 1.

86 CWC, Vol. III, *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 1.



me" (Mt 19:21; Lk 18:22). Thus having nothing of his own he depended on the providence of God and the generosity of the people for anything and everything. This was the ideal of poverty he practised in his life.<sup>87</sup> For instance, the day before the laying of the foundation stone of the monastery at Mannanam, the bishop arrived at the previous day and in order to accommodate the bishop they put up a temporary tent with bamboo frame fixed on four pillars and thatched with palm leaves. It was divided into two rooms with mats for walls. It was in that tent that the bishop spent the night. All the priests also slept in it. According to Saint Kuriakose "it was indeed an experience of life in forest."<sup>88</sup> According to him two things are essential for the fullness of consecrated life, namely, separation from the family relations and common life in which one has nothing privately. The first among them was realized when he left his home for the seminary training, and still more when, following the loss of his parents and the only brother, he gave up his family property in favour of his sister and brother-in-law. When he adopted the common life in Mannanam the second condition was also fulfilled. "For the consecrated life to be flawless and perfect one should have no personal possessions and programmes or projects, but have everything in common and share in the common mission and undertakings. Personal interests give way to the common goals."<sup>89</sup> They followed the ideal of the early Christian community. In whatever endeavours he had accomplished the only capital at his disposal was his total trust in the divine providence. As prophet Jeremiah says, "for surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope" (Jer. 29:11). His asset was that he had a simple faith which endowed him with a spiritual outlook of people,

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87 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 140.

88 CWC, Vol. I, *The Chronicles*, 20.

89 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 51.

things and events. His faith was not merely a theoretical one, but a practical faith. This enabled him to see the loving hands of the provident God in all that happened to him and around him, in pleasant and unpleasant experiences. This helped him to be different in his responses and dealings with people and their affairs. He was always very peaceful and calm at all times and under all circumstances, because he was sure that everything will be alright in the provident hands of God in whom he put his trust. This made him a steady minded person or a person with a stable consciousness.<sup>90</sup>

It is to be noted that throughout his life and ministries Saint Kuriakose put his trust in the Lord and he could experience that God was performing miracles for him. For example, as we have already noted, the construction of the convent was started with a sum of rupees eighteen which was not at all sufficient to build a decent convent. But God intervened at the last minute and he received sufficient amount of money to complete the work. Total trust in the providence of God gave him the courage to move along with empty hands. He was always ready to share his resources without any reservation and surrendered all or completely emptied himself, but the Lord filled him with abundance. He was generous enough and compassionate towards others and he was rewarded hundred fold. In his life we come across many such occasions when he had no money to give wages to workers. But miracles happened in the last minute when he surrendered himself to the providence of God. When the newly formed congregation was affiliated to the Carmelite order and named it as the Third Order of Discalced Carmelites, all of them felt very sad especially Saint Kuriakose because it was against the will and wish of him and the members of the congregation, who preferred a pastorally involved active life. The rules of the pure contemplative order put them

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90 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 234-235.

into great trouble. However, he accepted it and requested the members to accept it in faith and reminded them that all these occurred in God's great providence so that they may have special protection from Blessed Mother. He was very much convinced that everything that occurred in his life work out for good (Rom 8:28). God being a loving father brought him into existence and gave him a noble birth and saved him from every possible danger like epidemic.

In the later years of his life we find him having minimum attachments to the external world. He had come to a perfect detachment and serenity in his whole being and had no desire of anything of this world. Therefore he prohibited visitors who would like to talk to him about anything of this world and even put up a notice on his room forbidding them from worldly conversations.<sup>91</sup> He was greatly longing for the eternal abode and wanted to be in communion with saints. He attuned himself to the heavenly things and had little interest in the mundane things. He was yearning for the union with God. In the last years of his life he lost his eye sight but his interior eyes opened up more which was an invitation for him to be more and more detached from this world, and in turn, proportionately attached to the divine realm. He was well aware of the transient nature of this world and was constantly engaged in a heaven-ward pilgrimage.

### **4.3. Identification with the Kenosis of Christ**

According to Saint Kuriakose in order to be conformed to Christ who emptied himself and became poor for our sake, and identified with the suffering humanity one should live a life of humility. As part of the self-emptying he has taken humility as the fourth vow. Following the life example of Jesus, Saint Kuriakose, throughout his life one can notice that in all of his various endeavours he was always alert

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<sup>91</sup> Thomas Kochumuttom, "Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara: A Contemplative in Action," *Herald of the East* Vol. V, 1-4 (2001) 26. See also Thomas Kadankavil, *Chavara: A Multidimensional Saint*, 19.

and remained on the right track of redemptive kenosis. His holistic understanding of life and ministry took a two-dimensional practical understanding of the commandment of God, namely, love of God and love of neighbour (Mt 22:37-39).<sup>92</sup> Two aspects of the self-emptying act of Jesus are suffering leading to the crucifixion and the mystery of the Holy Eucharist. In the meditations of Saint Kuriakose we can find a passion for Jesus and the crucifix has a prominent place. He meditated on the crucified Christ long hours before the Holy Eucharist with his eyes filled with tears. He considered his own soul as the bride and the crucified Jesus as the spouse in the bridal chamber of Calvary. He always depended on the crucified Jesus in his days of suffering and mental agony. "It is his contemplation on the crucified Jesus that enabled him to find meaning in times of trials and tribulations."<sup>93</sup> He could overcome all the troubles and he was constant in following Jesus in his experiences of self-abandonment. As Jesus became the bread to satiate the hunger of people, so also Saint Kuriakose following Jesus became the source of love and compassion for those whom he met. The Holy Eucharist was his source of strength to burn and to empty himself for his people. He was convinced that God's will be done, and God loves us so much that he cannot remain passively without involving in the lives of his loved ones.

## **5. Kenotic Experiences in the Life of Saint Kuriakose**

Troubles and tribulations, and humiliating experiences are everybody's lot. During his life time Saint Kuriakose had undergone numerous bodily and mental sufferings, trials and tribulations. Behind all his achievements we can find struggles and difficulties. Suffering is part and parcel of the life of every human being. When one accepts sufferings as a participation in the sufferings of Christ, it becomes conducive

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92 Mathew Maniampra, *Psycho-Theological Paradigms*, XX.

93 Shanthi Rose, "Kuriakose Elias Chavara: A *Bes Rowma*," 113.

to his/her salvation and sanctification and partaker with Jesus for the salvation of others. When one accepts suffering with this vision, it becomes an experience of love.<sup>94</sup> According to him, it was not possible to limit his love for God just to words rather it was possible through sacrifice. Our love becomes sweet and pure when we are ready to suffer for the sake of God. He endured all his sufferings for the greater glory of God and for the salvation of souls.<sup>95</sup> He was always trying to do the will of God not only in his personal life but also in the field of activities and in this effort he was forced to encounter many mental conflicts and tensions. It is to be noted that in the life of Saint Kuriakose, in the face of painful as well as joyful experiences, he was able to overcome it because he knew that it was part of a divine design. He could do it because of his deep God experience and he accepted everything with a faith vision from the hands of God. During his life time he had to undergo numerous illnesses. At a young age in his priestly career, he was affected by Rheumatic fever that was a constant companion of his life till his death. Once during his apostolic activities, he was affected by fever, so as to lose his senses for two days. His legs were also affected by swelling which caused him severe pain now and then. Almost three months prior to his death, his eyes were affected seriously and had acute pain. During this time he lost his vision completely. The treatment given to him by the doctors to regain his sight was also very painful. But he never complained about it.<sup>96</sup> In a heroic resignation and extraordinary patience he endured all the sufferings of old age, complete blindness during the last three months, severely painful medical treatment and isolation in a house outside the enclosure. In all his sufferings bodily as well as mental, emotional, or intellectual he could recognize the

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94 Thomas Panthaplackal, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara: Great Soul of India*, 19.

95 Z. M. Moozhoor, *Blessed Chavara: The Star of the East*, Kottayam: 1993, trans. Sheila Kannath, 84.

96 Thomas Panthaplackal, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara: Great Soul of India*, 20.

will of God and in a spirit of prayer he submitted himself to it. His only refuge was the love of God and by fasting and meditating on the passion and death of the Lord he accepted everything peacefully. "He bore his sufferings with manly courage and attitude of a spiritual man. Hence his sufferings and problems are seen today as precious treasures of gold. The grain of wheat falling to the ground has to die to produce a harvest (Jn 12: 24)."<sup>97</sup>

### 5. 1. Experiences in *the Kalari*

More than the bodily pains what could have affected him most were his mental sufferings. For example, at the age of five he was sent to *kalari*, a kind of village school conducted by a teacher called *asan*, generally a Hindu, who would teach the Malayalam alphabet, reading and writing, and some elementary lessons in Arithmetic. There were no public schools in Kerala at that time. He recollects that period with mixed feelings. Under the guidance of his mother he grew up in love for God and knowledge of God. She taught him to recite the name of Jesus and to say 'Jesus, Mary, Joseph.' But there was great contrast between the blissful training he received at home under the loving tutelage of his mother and the education he got from the *kalari*. The atmosphere in the *kalari* was not favourable for a Christian upbringing. He laments about his association with unchristian friends during his training he received from the *kalari*. He regrets that he could not retain his childhood innocence during his school days. The non-Christian ethos of the *kalari*, with a Hindu *asan*, and his classmates mostly of other faiths, with their 'pagan' practices and rituals were strange to him. He was unprepared for such a sudden transition and that tender age he was not able to sort out things properly and make

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97 Dais Maria, "If the Grain of Wheat falling to the Ground Dies..." Elizabeth William & Prof. Dr. George Zachariah, eds., *The Legacy of Saint Chavara*, Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2014, 111.



correct judgements. As a child he followed the instructions of the *asan*, mingled with other children and took part in their games and practices. He heard bad words from his companions and he did not get any instruction in Christian religion. This created certain confusion in his mind and later in his life he regretted about it.<sup>98</sup> He was deeply hurt because he wanted his mind to be filled with love for God. He regrets that as a result of the unchristian culture, entertainments, and the association with the friends of other faiths, caused degradation of his Christian faith. He says,

Joy and peace, since from me have fled  
My heart sore-pressed with sorrow and pain; I felt  
I was no more the privileged child of God!  
Mingling free with those my dizzy friends  
Stilled became my gratitude to God.<sup>99</sup>

## **5.2. Crisis in Vocation**

Another instance of suffering was 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, due to the epidemic in the region; when the family itself became an orphan by the death of his parents and only brother. In this context his uncles concerned about the family's lineage, took him back from the seminary and strongly advised him to give up priestly studies and take charge of home affairs. There was lot of pressure from the part of his relatives. At this crisis situation he turned to the all sufficing God and we find him on his knees before the blessed sacrament with full trust in the divine providence and he held on to his motto: "The Lord is my chosen portion" (Ps. 16:5) which he had taken as he received the minor orders in 1818 from the then Bishop Peter Alcantra of Varapuzha. It implied his detachment from all that is not God. This was the guiding force all throughout

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98 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 27.

99 CWC, Vol. II, *Compunction of the Soul*, I: 100-104.



his life and it is to be seen as a key to his whole life. Thereby he decided to follow the Lord, accepting the sorrows submitting to the will of God and dedicating repeatedly to the Mother of God. It is important to note that "it is not a question of the person having so many extraordinary experiences of God, but being able to convert every little experience of life into a God-experience. The contemplative character of the person is proved beyond doubt in the face of painful experiences, as it happened in the case of Chavara."<sup>100</sup> Saint Kuriakose was pleasing God throughout his life and he showed a positive attitude even in adverse circumstances.

'Portion' and 'inheritance' are the two key words of Ps 16. It is deep rooted in the OT and it has to be understood in the context of occupation and distribution of the land promised first to Abraham and his descendents (Gen 12:7). To possess land and other material goods are the sign of God's blessings. They considered it as their sacred duty to safe guard and preserve it for the posterity. When the twelve tribes reached the promised land and Josua apportioned the land among the tribes (Chs. 13-20), the Levites were not given any portion of land. The Lord Himself was their portion (Josh 14:40, Num 18:20). The Levites were given the distinct privilege that the Lord himself became the basis of their life. The Lord was their portion and inheritance, a total abandonment as well as complete trust in the Lord.<sup>101</sup> In the

100 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 368. See also Thomas Kochumuttom, "Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara: A Contemplative in Action," 3.

101 Mathew Thenamkalayil, "The 19<sup>th</sup> Century Kerala Church and the Leadership of Bl. Chavara," 110-111. When the psalmist declares the 'Lord is my chosen portion,' he puts his whole trust in the Lord and apart from him he has nothing. That is to say in his life nothing can take the place of the Lord as wealth, pleasure, name or fame. The Lord is his supreme good and he finds his satisfaction and fulfillment in the Lord. It is a complete and perfect abandonment of one's life to the Lord in faith and trust. Saint Kuriakose took a firm decision when his parents and the only brother died within a short span of time and there was nobody to continue the family lineage. He remained strong and

same manner Saint Kuriakose dedicated himself totally to the Lord confiding firmly in the Divine Providence. After the death of his parents and brother he discussed this matter with his sister who was living with her husband in Edathva, and entrusted her his inheritance and the responsibility to take care of the family and his niece. Thus with determination and tact he proved that his portion was in the Lord alone. He settled the issue prudently. He, then, returned to the seminary peacefully with renewed dedication and resumed his priestly studies.<sup>102</sup> He renounced everything that belongs to him on earth for the sake of the Kingdom and tried to seek always the will of the father. Thereby he showed his firmness and determination to remain by his motto. He could overcome all the difficulties of life because of his conviction and sense of deep commitment. In today's world, where values are upside down, it is difficult to choose what is right and wrong. In Saint Kuriakose we have a striking model of a person who stood for his principles at any cost. As in the case of Saint Paul who said: "Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phi. 3:7-8). He realized the greatness and might of the person in whom he relied upon and put his trust. Therefore he dedicated himself totally to the Lord and his service. The dedication and commitment of Saint Kuriakose to his call is very clear in the words of Fr. Thomas Porukara: "While Kuriakose was in the seminary, his parents and brother died. Only the latter's wife and girl child were left. He bore the pain of separation in a

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asserted his commitment to the Lord as his only portion through his well decided action. This is an intimate and radical following of Jesus, equal to sharing in his life. He was living this motto and throughout his life one can notice he was ever seeking the will of God. See George Kaniarakath, *The Dynamic Word of the Lord*, Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2018, 180-183.

102 Thomas Mampra, "Kuriakose Elias Chavara: A Saint for Our Times," 21.

spirit of submission to God's will, and, in accordance with the training he had received from the parents, re-dedicating himself as a servant of the Mother of God, lived with deeper faith in God."<sup>103</sup>

Relieved from all tensions he returned to the seminary with a joyful and grateful heart, with a renewed dedication and devotion to serve the Lord and his people wholeheartedly. It is important to note that once the call is discerned and responded to, they have to remain faithful and committed, whatever comes in their way. As noted Jesus reminds that those who want to follow him should deny themselves and take up their cross and follow him (Mt 16:24). Avoiding all kinds of illusions they have to realize that the path before them is not without obstacles and hardships. Discouraging experiences can be expected. A strong will, deep faith and unwavering trust in the Lord are necessary to resist the temptations and overcome the obstacles. Being called to the radical discipleship of the Lord, one should "let the dead bury their own dead" (Lk 9:60) and "no one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God" (Lk 9:62).<sup>104</sup>

### 5.3. Graceful in Disgrace

Indeed he had a very humiliating experience from his own parishioners and parish priest, when the traditional official entry to the Church after receiving the minor orders was denied due to certain misunderstanding. This was a customary practice of the seminarian visiting home and the home parish and a solemn reception which in his case was the parish of Chennankari. The parish priest, members of the parish council and the parishioners welcome the seminarian

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103 Quoted in Thomas Kochumuttom, "Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara: A Man of God's Thoughts," *Herald of the East: Dharmaram Journal of Chavara Studies*, Vol. 10, 1 (2014) 50.

104 Thomas Kochumuttom, "Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara: A Man of God's Thoughts," 50-51.

in the parish and thereafter grand celebration hosted by the family of the seminarian. But instead of giving him a warm welcome he was refused entry into the parish Church. The parish priest, according to the decision of the parish council closed the Church and left the place. The probable reason behind this rejection was that he went to the seminary without the knowledge and permission of the parish council. The existing custom was that the parish council takes the decision and inform the *Malpan* in charge of the seminary. One who wishes to join the seminary should get the *desakuri*<sup>105</sup> or formal approval from the parish *yogam*. But in the case of Saint Kuriakose, he was directly recruited to the seminary by Fr. Palackal and his joining the seminary was very quick there was no possibility to procure a *desakuri*. All these happened unintentionally, but the parishioners were not happy about it. Saint Kuriakose was ignorant about it and it was a self-emptying and humiliating experience for him. However, he did not entertain any grudge towards any one and accepted the situation gracefully. Chavara looked at everything from divine perspective and gracefully accepted it. That indeed is the key to explain his spirituality. He understood everything that happened in his life as God's will and nothing else. This realization, on the one hand, kept him humble and realistic and, on the other, made him grateful to and confident in God.

The relatives were very much angry about this fact but brother Kuriakose being a man of God, pacified them and took them to the Holy Cross Church at Alappuzha where

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105 The recommendation of the *yogam* or the parish assembly of the local representatives and the local clergy. Usually, it is the parish assembly that selects the candidate for the priesthood, and they had also certain responsibilities during the period of training in the seminary, e.g., to meet the expenses of his studies. But in the case of Saint Kuriakose, it was met by Fr. Palackal. The candidate also had certain rights, i.e., to get a share of the *pasaram*, after he had received the sacred orders. Saint Kuriakose had difficulties to get this share may be because he was not promoted by the parish *yogam*. See Mathias Mundadan, Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara, 54.

the ceremony was conducted. Afterwards instead of keeping any ill feeling towards them he, by his own initiative visited the parish priest of Chennankari, stayed with him and had meals with him. Later on he donated to this parish Church a beautiful statue of Saint Joseph, which he received as a gift from Europe.<sup>106</sup> Moreover, he decided to go to that parish for the parish feast every year and deliver the sermon and he fulfilled it until his death. In his life he never mentioned about this rejection experience. Furthermore, he considered the parishioners as his own people, and addressed his parting message called 'Testament of a Loving Father' to the members of Kainakari parish, which was originally part of Chennankari.<sup>107</sup>

Another incident was at the time of his ordination which was decided to take place sometime around the feast of Holy Cross on 14 September 1829. Deacon Chavara and other deacons of the Vicariate with their *Malpans* arrived at Varapuzha for the ceremony. But displeased with the quarrel between the *anjoottikkar* ("Five-hundreds") and *ezunoottikkar* ("Seven-hundreds") bishop Mauritius Stabilini, cancelled all the programmes and decided to return to Rome. So the ordination was cancelled. One can easily understand the mental and spiritual agony he had undergone during this period. Later the ordination was conducted on 29 November 1829 in Arthunkal parish.<sup>108</sup> Although the deacon who was denied entry into his parish Church, after his ordination he offered his first Holy Mass on 30<sup>th</sup> November in his parish Church at Chennankari, surrounded by the love and respect

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106 Thomas Kochumuttom, "Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara: A Man of God's Thoughts," 49-50.

107 Thomas Kochumuttom, "Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara: A Man of God's Thoughts," 50. Thus he got a chance to wreak sweet vengeance on his parishioners.

108 Thomas Kochumuttom, "Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara: A Man of God's Thoughts," 51.

of his co-parishioners.<sup>109</sup> He might have had so much distress on this occasion of the indefinite delay of his ordination for which he had come from a distant place with all the preparations. But there was no indication of any complaint from his part. All of them cooperated with their *Malpan* wholeheartedly and pacified the prelate and resolved the crisis in an edifying manner. After ordination he was happy to spend about a month there visiting his relatives and little longer at Pulinkunnu visiting his maternal uncles and other relatives and preaching in different Churches. He preached a retreat in the chapel of the southern part of Pulinkunnu. It was a grand success and much appreciated by the participants. He was also very much delighted and he became a little attached to the people and place there. But he realized that the *Malpan* was not happy about his visits and wanderings. Being aware of the desire of *Malpan* he returned to Pallipuram seminary where *Malpan* Palackal was anxiously waiting for him. Afterwards he never deviated from the path set before him by the *Malpan*.<sup>110</sup> In his own words: "From that day considering myself a full-fledged monk I was determined to keep away from my blood relations, and to give myself up to the monastic pattern of life with all my income going to the common fund and all my needs met from the same."<sup>111</sup>

#### **5.4. Obedience Better than Sacrifice**

The obstacles that occurred when the construction of the monastery had begun, impeding in a way the very project of the religious institute. When Monsignor Francis Xavier succeeded bishop Maurelius there were certain misunderstandings. He was not happy with the activities of the three priests in proceeding with the plan for a religious community. Moreover, he was misled by some jealous priests. Therefore the bishop assigned them with new

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109 Dais Maria, "If the Grain of Wheat Falling to the Ground Dies ..," 99.

110 Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 110.

111 CWC, Vol. I, *The Chronicles*, 27.



responsibilities that really affected their future plans. Bishop Francis Xavier appointed Fr. Chavara as parish priest of South Pallipuram. Moreover, Fr. Porukara, the backbone of the whole project was transferred to Kollam as parish priest. It was unbearable to them because he was not only prevented from being present at Mannanam but also from going about to collect funds. Fully knowing that obedience was better than sacrifice Saint Kuriakose decided to change his residence from Mannanam to Pallipuram. Their dream was broken. They were very much disappointed and their project became a mere illusion. The real intention of the bishop was to stop the work on the monastery at Mannanam. With a heavy heart they considered many options and at last Fr. Porukara came out with the best solution that is, putting the full trust in the Lord he decided to obey the command of the bishop and go to Kollam.<sup>112</sup> It is to be noted that it is the sign of saints to depend totally on God in troublesome situations. They could find the providence of God in such occasions. However, when a new deacon was ordained in the parish, Fr. Kuriakose found it convenient to go to Mannanam entrusting the affairs of the parish to the newly ordained but inexperienced priest. Unfortunately, there occurred something objectionable to someone in the parish and he made a complaint to the bishop highlighting the continued absence of Fr. Kuriakose as the main reason for the incident. Saint Chavara got the bitter pill at the hands of the bishop who severely warned him and sent him to Pallipuram. The bishop advised him that he should not be absent from the parish more than eight days without his permission.<sup>113</sup> It grieved him much but he did not express any distress.

In response to the unfavourable decision, Fr. Kuriakose humbly requested the Archbishop to relieve him so that

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112 Thomas Kochumuttom, "Kuriakose Elias Chavara: A Man of God's Thoughts," 52.

113 CWC, Vol. I, *The Chronicles*, 25. Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 181.



he could continue the work at Mannanam. Because the *Malpan* Palackal was ill and Fr. Porukara had to go about to collect funds, there was no one left in charge of the works at Mannanam.

When the young priest went on pleading for his grievance to be redressed, His grace turned at him and in a stern tone of authority rebuked him saying that he could do whatever he liked if he had not yet learned to obey the orders of the ordinary. With fear and trembling Chavara withdrew and at once obeyed the order, taking charge as vicar of Pallipuram Parish.<sup>114</sup>

In the life of Saint Kuriakose we may come across many such occasions where the depth of his humility in the obedience he displayed.<sup>115</sup> Out of his humility without any ill feeling he accepted it as a paternal correction. There were many other incidents he had to bear with such punishing actions. The motivation behind all his sufferings and sacrifices and being a servant of all was his unselfish love towards God and humanity, unity of the Church and moreover, the zeal for the salvation of souls.<sup>116</sup> His conviction regarding this aspect is clearly stated in his writings repeatedly, for example he says: “Jesus Christ, the Divine master, has called you to follow in his footsteps by purchasing your soul and the souls of your brethren with His precious blood, to save you from sin and make you an instrument of salvation for others; and make you virtuous, and through you to make others virtuous thus

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114 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 180.

115 Just like Jesus he also ‘learned obedience through the things that he suffered’ (Heb 5:8). As a disciple of Christ Saint Kuriakose was ready to be obedient to the legitimate hierarchs, superiors, colleagues and so on for the sake of the salvation of the souls and the redemptive uplift of his brethren, for the unity of the Church and the integral growth of the community without considering whatever risks it may entail.

116 Sophy Rose, *Doulos: A Paradigm for Christian Discipleship and Mystical Path of Total Abandonment to God*, 5-6.

to unite you all with Him.”<sup>117</sup> While mentioning the purpose of the establishment of the monastery also he emphasizes this fact and states: “God has willed to found this congregation for the salvation of our Christian brethren,”<sup>118</sup> and also “these monasteries so dear to Him and so beneficial to our souls.”<sup>119</sup> Being tested their obedience however later the bishop relieved Fr. Kuriakose from Pallipuram and permitted him to go to Mannanam to continue the work of the monastery. Fr. Porukara’s prompt submission with his order, the zeal and vigour he showed in the pastoral field, and the concrete results of his services and the style of life of the pioneers, etc., gradually turned him favorable to them and he permitted Fr. Porukara also to return to Mannanam and engage himself in the work of the monastery. Finally, the bishop became a friend and supporter of the Mannanam project. Although Fr. Thomas Palackal and Porukara were with Saint Kuriakose, he was in the forefront in all these activities. In consultation with them he had undertaken several new initiatives. However, after the death of them the whole burden fell upon him. He had inherited the contemplative spirit of Palackal and the more active dimension of Porukara’s spirituality. He tried to personalize both these aspects of the spirituality in a dynamic manner. “He had been in the process of assimilating the vision and life orientation of the deceased elders and developing a spiritual vision and life style of his own.”<sup>120</sup> He was struggling hard to continue both the material and spiritual aspects of the monastery construction afterwards.

### 5.5. Last Minute Trial

Another instance was that due to the severity of the rules and constitution given to the community some of the young

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117 CWC, Vol. III, *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, “Meditation on Vocation,” 25.

118 CWC, Vol. IV, *The Letters*, VI/4.

119 CWC, Vol. IV, *The Letters*, VI/1.

120 Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 113.

members were unhappy. Saint Kuriakose sadly sensing this fact referred the matter to the Vicar Apostolic Bernardine for reconsideration. But his response was very much discouraging. Saint Kuriakose with great pain submitted to the decision of the Vicar Apostolic.<sup>121</sup> On account of the hard rules imposed upon them two priests, eight scholastics and one aspirant left the budding congregation in 1855 by the Apostolic Vicar and missionaries, at the time of the first profession of the members, it was a great blow to the paternal heart of Saint Kuriakose. Because it was he who nurtured and trained them almost twenty years and the fruits of his hard labour suddenly lost forever. As already mentioned, another obstacle was the Roccas schism that threatened the Malabar Church carrying off the great majority of the Churches into schism, when the prominent people of the Church including the *Malpans*, one after the other left the mother Church and joined the schismatics. The schismatics threatened to occupy by force the monasteries of Mannanam, Elthuruth etc. and his mental agony was immense. But his faith was never shaken and he took refuge in the divine providence in all these occasions.<sup>122</sup>

Still another problem he faced was the entrance of Protestants in the scene by introducing English education and thereby spreading their religion. They got strength and Saint Kuriakose understood the danger involved. Since the Church authorities had denied English education to the Catholics he got an idea to start a Sanskrit School so that he can educate and expose the Catholics to the Indian culture. So he started a Sanskrit School at Mannanam where many people belonging to different faiths, both the higher caste and lower caste studied together along with priests. He knew that all are God's children and his ministry was not restricted to his own people alone. He thought this common

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121 Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 153.

122 Thomas Panthaplackal, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara: Great Soul of India*, 20.

programme would be a solution to the caste discriminations and he wanted to create a society that acknowledges equal dignity of all. But to his dismay the Hindus of the higher caste came with opposition, so he had to close the Sanskrit School.<sup>123</sup> Although his intention was good, he did not want to hurt others' feelings, especially the feelings of the majority. He suffered a lot of mental agony in this context, however, he was not affected by this failure. For him such experiences were occasions to find out new ways to do good. Being a contemplative he never lost his peace of mind and he was humble enough to accept it as God's plan. Those who follow Christ have to face sufferings, humiliations, trials and tribulations. "For gold is tested in the fire, and those found acceptable, in the furnace of humiliation" (Sir 2:5). Behind all his achievements and successes, he had to undergo numerous sufferings and difficulties. But all glory comes from those troublesome experiences.

## **6. A Kenotic Personality**

The exemplary life of Saint Kuriakose was indeed a model for everyone. He was magnanimous to see others always greater than himself. He considered Fr. Leopold with reverence and love and sought his suggestions whenever needed or in matters where he was ignorant. As already referred the life and spirituality of Saint Kuriakose can be summarized in the biblical verse, "The Lord is my chosen portion" (Ps. 16:5; Ps. 119:57). As his name signifies, when he declared the Lord to be his portion it meant a radical and close following of Jesus, which makes one belong to Jesus or God completely without any reservation (Mk 10:28; 1:8; Lk 5: 11). Moreover, it is becoming like Jesus always seeking the will of the Father in everything. It is clear in his expression "Oh my God! You are my love, my joy, and all my fortune.

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123 Dais Maria, "If the Grain of Wheat falling to the Ground Dies..." 103. See also Thomas Panthaplackal, *Agonies and Ecstasies: Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Kakkannad: Chavara Central Secretariat, 2022, 104-106.

If not in you, how could I live my life? You are my breath, my food and my drink. What a solace have I in You!"<sup>124</sup> It is a full and complete abandonment of one's self in the hands of the Lord in faith and trust. It is to love the Lord for his sake alone, that is to say, a genuine and disinterested love and commitment. Such a person is not attracted by any rewards or detracted by pains. It is the creator himself is the guarantor and sustainer of those possessed by him.<sup>125</sup> It is a new orientation in life, a reversal of the accepted values by denying one's self to have life, those who desire to be first will be the servant of all; and the meek will inherit the land. The Lord has brought down the powerful and lifted up the lowly (Lk 1:52). Thereby the Lord becomes one's portion forever. It is a turning towards Jesus to the point of denying one's being and having, everybody and everything, in short whatever possessions one has on earth.<sup>126</sup> Moreover, it is a becoming like Jesus always seeking the will of the father in everything. He is filled with gratitude towards God and for such a person as Saint Teresa proclaims God alone suffices. This is what Saint Kuriakose did when he declared the Lord to be his portion. This motto of Saint Kuriakose is a challenge to the present generation and indeed to all of us. As Jesus the Son of God 'who emptied himself and took the form of a slave (Phil 2:7) and humbled himself, becoming obedient even to death,' death on the cross' (Phil 2:8), he was always ready to come down to the level of a servant to fulfil the mission entrusted to him following the footsteps of Jesus.

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124 CWC, Vol. II, *Atmanuthapam* (Malayalam), translated by Mary Leo, *Compunction of the Soul*, Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Bl. Chavara, 1989, 2:141-146.

125 George Kaniarakath, "'The Lord is My Portion' (Ps. 119:57): A Key to the Spirituality of Bl. Chavara," *The Lord of Heaven and Earth: Chavara Studies in Honour of Fr. Lucas Vithuvattickal*, in Paul Kalluveetil & Paulachan Kochappilly eds., Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2004, 252.

126 George Kaniarakath, "'The Lord is My Portion' (Ps. 119:57): A Key to the Spirituality of Bl. Chavara," 257-258.

When Saint Kuriakose stated the Lord to be his portion it was very much significant in his life, because he lost everyone and everybody very early in his life. As it is written "I have come to do your will" (Heb 10: 9), from his childhood onwards he was always enthusiastic to fulfil the will of God. His whole life and his mission revolved around this guiding principle. He was a man of manifold activities like spiritual guidance of the people entrusted to his care, administration of temporalities, administration of the Church and Congregation, new foundations of monasteries, etc. But all these flowed from this sensibility and sensitivity, 'the Lord was his portion', nothing else really counted. That means a total and radical detachment from everything that does not pertain to God and total attachment to the love of God. The Lord was always his portion that at the end of his life he could declare confidently that he never lost his original sanctity.

It is true that Saint Kuriakose was never bothered about any ecclesiastical position or authority. Although the Roccosians had offered him a bishopric, his answer was that he had no other desire than saving his soul. Archbishop Baccinelli testifies that it was under the precept of obedience that the Prior in all humility accepted the office of Vicar General. It was a remarkable fact that Saint Kuriakose never in any of his writings mentioned his appointment as Vicar General and no where he signed the letters as Vicar General but always as Prior of the monasteries. The Archbishop also recommended him as co-adjutor bishop by presenting the various qualifications of Saint Kuriakose for this position. For example, he is truly Christian, virtuous, very prudent, well versed in Sacred Scripture, expert in the Syriac language, and has proved himself faithful to the Catholic religion and to the Holy See.<sup>127</sup> As already noted although the rebel group and the intruder bishop Roccas tried to influence him to

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127 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 210-211.



win over Saint Kuriakose to their side, even by offering him episcopacy, he did not submit to such seductions. However, it is surprising that in the same letter the Archbishop expressed one reservation, namely, the Prior lacked the perception for the proposed office of bishop.<sup>128</sup> Fr. Leopold also made negative remarks about Saint Kuriakose's nomination as a bishop, because according to him, he lacks knowledge about moral theology and experience in matters of administration, and being already 63 years old, is too advanced in age and had bodily indispositions and health problems. Moreover, he opposed to have a St Thomas Christian continuously as Vicar General and according to him, there was none among them worthy to be a bishop. Vicar Apostolic Baccinelli sent this letter to Rome and held the same position as Fr. Leopold that Saint Kuriakose had little knowledge about moral theology and experience in administration, and was too old. But Saint Kuriakose was unaware of the correspondence between Varapuzha and Rome, concerning his nomination for episcopacy, he was spared of the embarrassment.<sup>129</sup> However, there were instances when the missionaries failed to treat him with due respect and recognition.

### **6.1. Foundation of the Congregation for Women**

To the question of the foundation of the new congregation for women, the direct answer coming from Saint Kuriakose and Fr. Leopold was it is God's work. In their own words, "it was God who made us to do it for you. This convent was made not to admit saints because saints will go to heaven. But this convent was made to admit sinners who desire to become saints."<sup>130</sup> It was a well known fact that the two priests Fr. Kuriakose and Fr. Leopold, were full of

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128 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 210-211.

129 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 187.

130 Quoted in Jossy, "Blessed Chavara and the founding of the CMC Congregation," *Herald of the East, Chavara Jayanthi Special II*, Vol. VI, 2004, p. 20. *Chronicles of Koonammavu Convent*, 73.



appreciation for each other. Both of them give each other the credit of founding the convent and emphasize each other's role. In Fr. Leopold's version, it was Fr. Kuriakose who was mainly instrumental in the new congregation for women. Everybody knows how much care and concern he showed, even after the completion of the convent, for its regular functioning in order and holiness. But being the provincial delegate and his own confessor and spiritual director, Saint Kuriakose had an admirable spirit of obedience and submissiveness to Fr. Leopold. He had even a deep sense of indebtedness not only to Fr. Leopold but also to his family. He wants his followers, both CMI and CMC Congregations and even the entire Church of Malabar to be grateful to Fr. Leopold and his family. It was a well acknowledged fact and also Fr. Leopold was very much sure about Saint Kuriakose's obedience to the authorities, including the missionaries. But according to Saint Kuriakose, Fr. Leopold was sent by God to guide the 'monasteries and convents'. By this he meant Fr. Leopold's presence, influence, efficiency, affectionate nature, wholehearted support, and his commitment for the cause of the TOCD had enhanced the movement of religious life that had already started in Kerala.<sup>131</sup>

Fr. Leopold is of the opinion that Saint Kuriakose had only two motives, namely, obedience to his bishop and salvation of souls. Therefore while describing the founding of the new convent, Saint Kuriakose projected Fr. Leopold as the chief architect, placing himself at the latter's disposal as a humble and obedient servant.<sup>132</sup> Saint Kuriakose accepted Fr. Leopold Beccaro, the Provincial delegate, the Canonical Superior of his Congregation and that of the Congregation for women, and above all, his spiritual director and confessor. The nature of his relationship with Fr. Leopold will reveal that he always

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131 Jossy, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara: Founder of the Women TOCD in Kerala*, 202.

132 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 327-328.

kept a low profile of himself in front of Fr. Leopold. This is quite characteristic of his humility and self-effacing nature.<sup>133</sup> While recording events he always gave credit to others who co-operated with him. This is very much apparent in his description of the foundation of the CMI Congregation, where he refers to the two pioneers Fr. Thomas Palackal and Fr. Thomas Porukara as the founders and attributed only a secondary role to himself. On certain occasions he speaks of bishop Baccinelli as the person mainly responsible for the foundation of the congregation because he was the one who gave the rules. The *Chronicles* written by himself or under his supervision are almost autobiographical in nature as far as the contents are concerned, because they are records of things that he either did himself or was deeply involved in. But in the whole bulk of volumes there are seldom explicit reference is made of him.<sup>134</sup> The sentences in the *Chronicles* are rather impersonal or in passive voice, or have the subject in the singular or plural third person form. We never find any sentence with the subject in the singular first person form. We can notice that this silence is eloquent indeed and it speaks more powerfully and convincingly about his noble character. Another important factor was the modest character of Saint Kuriakose. He experienced the providential hand of God in the arrival of Fr. Leopold and allowed himself to be guided by him. It is to be noted that in the last analysis it was the joint venture of both Fr. Kuriakose and Fr. Leopold. They were united not only in thoughts and words but also in deeds. They were almost always together in making journeys to collect money, doing the administrative works related to the new convent, furnishing it with the necessary things, and final blessing and establishment. Afterwards also they were together in the frequent visits to the convent instructing

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133 Jossy, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara: Founder of the Women TOCD in Kerala*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2015, 205.

134 Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 324.

and guiding them, and caring for the sick etc.<sup>135</sup> When Fr. Leopold was away in Rome Fr. Kuriakose continued his care and concern and the more and more self-effacing efforts for the sake of the community was noteworthy. At that time he was not a mere silent observer, but he was an active guide and administrator, in spite of his old age and weakness. He was very much concerned about the sisters and helped them wholeheartedly whenever it was necessary. But when going through the pages of the *Chronicles* one gets the impression that the years following the inauguration of the convent in March 1867 Saint Kuriakose did not relate himself to it except as a companion and assistant to Fr. Leopold. The *Chronicles* of Mannanam monastery is practically silent about the involvement of Saint Kuriakose in the convent affairs during these years. However, the *Chronicles* of Koonammavu convent continues to mention his frequent visits to the convent accompanied by Fr. Leopold.<sup>136</sup>

## 6.2. Submission to the Ecclesiastical Authorities

Respect and spirit of submission to the ecclesiastical authorities was a characteristic and unique nature of Saint Kuriakose. Those who were familiar to him were convinced of his unusual humility, extraordinary charity, unqualified obedience, and submissiveness to the Ordinary. He was trained as a cleric under *Malpan* Thomas Palackal, and received intensive religious formation from Fr. Marceline OCD. These elements of formation from them inculcated in him the spirit of humble submission to the superiors. Although he was the acknowledged superior of the community at Mannanam, he always acted in subordination to the Vicar Apostolic and his delegate. His approach was always conciliatory

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135 Jossy, "Blessed Chavara and the founding of the CMC Congregation," 21-22.

136 Jossy, "Blessed Chavara and the founding of the CMC Congregation," 22-23.

and he never had any conflict with them.<sup>137</sup> However, this does not mean that he was always blindly subservient to the missionaries. He had his own independent views which he would gently and convincingly put forward whenever occasion arose. Moreover, he had no difficulty to raise his objections most gently without giving offence. He gave to the Vicar Apostolic, who was his superior in a double capacity- Vicar Apostolic and Vicar Provincial- unwavering obedience and support. He was conscious that the congregation of which he was superior belonged to the Catholic Church and it was established for the all-round good and building up of the Catholic Church. Therefore all of his activities were orientated towards that goal and he offered full cooperation to the Vicar Apostolic. "He had an ardent desire to spread the light of the holy Church in all directions; he was grieved to the point of shedding tears when he heard of the trials and persecutions of the Church and eagerly longed to see the days of her triumph."<sup>138</sup> Fr. Leopold writes, "among his [Chavara's] virtues the most outstanding was his ardent faith in, and devotion to, the holy Catholic Church and the Holy Father."<sup>139</sup> Whenever he happened to hear the news about the Pope, he was always moved to tears, either of sorrow or of joy. "It was because of his extraordinary faith that he showed great veneration, love and obedience towards the Papal Legate who was the representative of the Holy Father, and towards the missionaries who were the messengers of the Holy Church."<sup>140</sup>

Regarding the love and dedication of Saint Kuriakose to the Catholic Church the Sisters of the convent at Koonammavu were very much convinced that he was a true lover of the

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137 Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 151.

138 Leopold Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 12.

139 Leopold Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 12-13.

140 Leopold Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 13.

Church. They had a clear understanding of his greatness and contributions to the Church. They testify:

This father of ours was like a brilliant light and a mirror to all the Christians of Kerala. Moreover, he was like a pillar that supported the Catholic Church because of the zeal he evinced in its expansion and in the protection of the faith. He was also especially interested in the numerical increase of the members of the convent and in their growth and perfection in virtues. Therefore, he did much to establish the convent of ours and make us grow in the path of virtue.<sup>141</sup>

He wanted to give a prominent place to Fr. Leopold because he was the Provincial Delegate and Saint Kuriakose had great concern for him. We can find a clear example for this when once both of them were travelling to Thiruvananthapuram in search of a woman to train the Sisters in handicrafts, he wrote a letter to the convent through someone to tell the Sisters to pray for Fr. Leopold. In it we read, "You must pray well to God for us, especially for *Moopachan*, that he may be protected by God without any illness for the sake of your spiritual life."<sup>142</sup> Saint Kuriakose always looked up to Fr. Leopold as a person "who is invested with the power and authority of the Provincial Delegate to look after and govern the monasteries and the convent established in Kerala."<sup>143</sup> There were many occasions in which his obedience to authority was severely tested. For example the Vicar Apostolic Bernardine asked him to take over the institute of Plasnal as monastery of the Congregation, he went to the place personally and found that the place was a malaria infected area that can cause a

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141 *The Chronicles of Koonammaavu Convent*, Vol. II, Aluva: Mount Carmel Generalate, 2002, 23.

142 *The Chronicles of Koonammaavu of Convent*, Vol. I, Aluva: Mount Carmel Generalate, 2002, 63.

143 *The Chronicles of Koonammaavu Convent*, Vol. I, 200.

health hazard to anyone who lives there. He reported the matter to the prelate and waited for his reply. In spite of the negative report he was insistent to take over the place. Saint Kuriakose instantly obeyed the Vicar Apostolic, his superior and sent two priests to take possession of the establishment there and to continue the pastoral ministry in the locality.<sup>144</sup> Once when the Archbishop asked him to take over the Koonammavu monastery, with a submissive mind, without any hesitation he accepted the order and sent there four inmates of Mannanam.

Fr. Leopold on the other hand, always had the spirit of arrogance and superiority complex, which is characteristic of the missionaries of that time, sometimes failed to give due respect and recognition to Saint Kuriakose. A lucid example of such can be noticed in the case of Fr. Leopold delaying the admission of Sr. Clara, a Syrian candidate. It was an occasion when the attitude of Latin supremacy of Fr. Leopold became very apparent. Saint Kuriakose knew her well for years, had already tested and interviewed her and approved her willingness and readiness to join the community to be inaugurated and at his decision she had arrived in Koonammavu prepared well with all the required things on 11 February to join the new community. But Fr. Leopold, only because of the fact that he had not personally tested and interviewed her, refused to admit her in the same day along with others. Then after testing and interviewing her personally, Fr. Leopold admitted her only on 14 February. He could have trusted and respected the wisdom, experience and holiness of Saint Kuriakose. This caused great 'sorrow and disturbance' not only to Sr. Clara and her people but also to Saint Kuriakose himself.<sup>145</sup> For him it was an experience of humiliation and even a public insult. "But he and all those

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144 Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 154.

145 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 328. See also *The Chronicles of Koonammavu Convent*, Volumes I & II, 26.



who were under his guidance kept 'holding firmly on to obedience', in a spirit of faith."<sup>146</sup> He accepted it without any complaint and in a spirit of dignified obedience. He might have suffered much and how much sacrifice he must have made to submit to the will of God, without a word of protest or complaint. Thus the overall impression we get from the *Chronicles* is that Fr. Leopold is always commanding and Saint Kuriakose is always obeying. The former might have had the unconscious superiority complex of the foreign missionaries and the latter responded with noble humility and graceful obedience. For Saint Kuriakose, what was important was achieving the greater goal namely, the convent, even at the cost of his own name and fame. The self-emptying obedience of Jesus Christ was indeed the supreme model for him.<sup>147</sup> In one of his letters, he asks whom should the religious obey and his immediate answer was that they should obey the major superiors, local superiors as well as one another. In his opinion "he who practices obedience in all these three levels will enjoy heavenly peace already while in the monastery which is a miniature heaven. This is certain!"<sup>148</sup> He was advocating a total surrender of one's own will and throughout his life he was practising this type of obedience as if 'one does not have one's own eyes and ears.' This kind of obedience may not be acceptable to the present generation who is prey to individualism and self-centred attitudes but according to Saint Kuriakose obedience holds good for all times. He is a challenging model for us because he has a lifetime experience of his own practising it. That is why he could say just five months before his death as a parting message: "The only mark of a religious is total surrender of

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146 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 328.

147 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 329.

148 CWC, Vol. IV, *The Letters* (Testament written in August 1870) VI/3, 71.



one's will and obedience as if one does not have one's own eyes and ears. He, who practices it, is a true religious."<sup>149</sup>

Although Fr. Leopold loved Saint Kuriakose 'as his own soul' and had great esteem for him, there were occasions when Saint Kuriakose could feel rather uneasy with the way he did things.<sup>150</sup> For example, when Fr. Leopold was away in Italy during the last illness of Saint Kuriakose he wrote a letter to the Sisters, and in it he mentioned "when Father Delegate comes and looks through his glasses to see how I have formed you in my ignorance, I do not know what all accusations he would hail at me. I have fear for the reprimands of the Great Delegate."<sup>151</sup> According to Saint Kuriakose God is the supreme Judge and he needs to fear only God's judgement. However, from the above letter one gets the impression that Saint Kuriakose appears sometimes to be afraid of Fr. Leopold's judgement, in spite of his affection and regard for the convent.<sup>152</sup> According to Fr. Valerian, "his most important concern was to become a true servant of Jesus Christ."<sup>153</sup>

### **6.3. A Man of Humility and Detachment**

Saint Kuriakose was a man of many eminent qualities both inborn and cultivated, of both mind and heart. Being born from a noble family of exemplary parents he inherited so many natural virtues like goodness, piety, righteousness, uprightness, integrity, honesty, probity, decency etc. As Fr. Kuriakose Porukara commented, Saint Kuriakose from his childhood onwards excelled in humility, pleasing manners, modesty, piety, intelligence and eloquence and he was loved

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149 *Chronicles of Koonammavu Convent*, Vol. I, 8.

150 Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 321-322.

151 *The Chronicles of Koonammavu Convent*, Vol. II, 8.

152 Jossy, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 211.

153 Quoted in Chacko K. C., *Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Mannanam: Published by the Postulator, Cause of Fr. Kuriakose Elias, Saint Joseph's Monastery, 1959, 28.

by both God and people.<sup>154</sup> He was a shining example of the virtue of humility, which is not a discounting of reality but a confession that all glory and honour are due only to God almighty. In order to be conformed to Christ who emptied himself (Phil 2:5-8), and became poor for our sake (2 Cor 8:9), and identified himself with the suffering humankind, one should live a life of humility.<sup>155</sup> As already noted as part of the self-emptying he has taken humility as the fourth vow and he dedicated himself to God as an *agathi*<sup>156</sup> and he was determined that there should not be anyone more humble than himself. He lived this mystery of self-emptying very much practically throughout his life. His confessor and spiritual director Fr. Leopold says: "It is more proper to say about Fr. Chavara that he did these virtuous things more by his sanctity and good example than by his advice and authority. He commanded the obedience and respect of others by himself being humble, charitable and obedient to his superiors."<sup>157</sup> It is to be noted that when everywhere else people anxiously tried to assert their selves, flatter their egos, and demand obedience from others, here we find a capable organizer of men and things who promised obedience at all times to the hierarchy. His utter humility, love for the Church, and trust in the Lord which he inherited from the early years of his life helped him to push on singularly in every occasions.<sup>158</sup> As Fr. Leopold commented, he was zealous in the service of God without any consideration for worldly

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154 Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 449.

155 Thomas Kadankavil, *Chavara: A Multidimensional Saint*, 96.

156 It literally means 'having no means to live.' The religious vow of poverty means to have no possessions of one's own so that for anything and everything one depends on God's providence and the people's charity. That is to renounce freely the right of private property and surrender the right of ownership of all things of monetary value. Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 139.

157 Valerian Plathottam, *The First Indian Saint: Blessed Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 43.

158 Mathew Maniampra, *Psycho-Theological Paradigms*, 112-113.

achievements. He was quite orderly and God-fearing. He did not seek any pomp and fame or worldly riches. He was never elated by any amount of praises or recognition. He was already a favourite of *Malpan* Palackal in the seminary and in recognition of his virtues and ability he appointed him to be actively involved in the administration of the seminary and also teaching the seminarians.<sup>159</sup> Being aware of the fact that in order to be totally united to God one should be detached from all worldly attachments he practised a life style according to that. He detached himself from everything that distracted him from God. As Fr. Leopold testifies he isolated himself from all worldly affairs.

It is true that he never aspired to be a superior, but was always content to be a humble servant of God and people. Whenever he accepted any higher positions it was motivated by his spirit of obedience and submission to the will of God. As already noted, Archbishop Baccinelli had to command him under obedience in order to make him accept the appointment as Vicar General. While recording his achievements also he takes care to attribute everything to God, and then to keep his co-workers in the limelight and himself at the background. Moreover, this is obvious in the case of the foundation of the convent at Koonammavu. It is to be noted that the original inspiration for the convent came from Saint Kuriakose which he shared with fathers Palackal and Porukara. So the foundation of the convent was the realization of the combined effort of them. The centuries old Syrian community in Malabar did not yet have consecrated men and women and therefore they wanted to found a religious congregation first for men and then for women. Therefore, the women's congregation was part of the original inspiration of Saint Kuriakose assisted by Fr. Leopold and realized it with the establishment of the convent in 1866. According to him it was a blessing that the Almighty God has

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159 Thomas Kochumuttom, "A Contemplative in Action," 138.

showered on them in response to his prayers for a long time, and especially in his first mass, making him more indebted to God.<sup>160</sup> After the ordination the following Sunday also he celebrated holy mass solemnly with the same intention in his parish of Chennankari.

As we have already seen, his deep sense of humility and detachment is very clear in the concluding words of the Vicar Apostolic Baccinelli to the Prefect of the Congregation of the Propaganda Fide in June 15, 1861, recommending him as the auxiliary bishop. "But I must warn you that the said person (Chavara) has made the simple vow of humility, and even if he had not taken that vow, he would not accept such a character and dignity without a formal command, as I had to give him to make him accept to be the Vicar General."<sup>161</sup> When he was appointed as the Vicar General for the Syrian community of the Vicariate of Varapuzha the Archbishop had to give him an order under obedience in order to make him accept the post. It was indeed the highest post a Syrian of that time could achieve. Thus he became the first among the Syrians to be officially in the Church's administration, in those troubled days of Roccas episode and he did his duties perfectly well which satisfied all including the Holy See. However, as already referred, it is surprising to note that he never mentioned or signed any of the documents with the title of Vicar General.<sup>162</sup>

He clearly expressed his stand to the intruder bishop Roccas that he would not kiss his ring, because it was a symbol of illegally gained authority and he added that, as an act of humility he was ready to kiss his hands and feet. The experiences of humiliations, persecutions, failures,

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160 Thomas Kochumuttom, "Saint Chavara in the Role of Superior," *Herald of the East: Dharmaram Journal of Chavara Studies*, Vol. 12, 2 (2016) 212-213.

161 *Positio*, 260, quoted in Thomas Kochumuttom, "A Contemplative in Action," 138.

162 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 222.

disappointments, and sufferings throughout one's life are unfailing reminders that God's love wanted us to remain humble that he might 'exalt the lowly' (Lk 1:52). We are invited to live a life of humility so that as a way to become conformed to Christ 'who emptied himself' (Phil 2:5-8), and became poor for our sake (2 Cor 8:9) and 'identified himself with the suffering humanity'. As a religious he practised poverty in all aspects of life. He depended totally on God for anything and everything, not only for the material needs, but for everything bodily, mental and spiritual. He had no private possessions, and remained satisfied with minimum necessary things of use.

His spirit of humility is clearly expressed in his writings especially, in *Atmanutapam* and *Dhyanasallapangal* which reveal to us his vision regarding this virtue. He was not reluctant to confess his own faults, shortcomings and unworthiness. "O' my God! A greater sinner as I am, I am struck with fear to enter this chapel, the abode of your presence. ... O Lord, I thank you for showing great mercy on me a wretched sinner."<sup>163</sup> In the *Dhyanasallapangal* a section is set apart for the virtue of humility that may be the longest discourse in this work.<sup>164</sup> As we have already seen, in his writings especially *Atmanuthapam* and *Dhyanasallapangal* are filled with contrition and confession of sins, even though he could preserve his baptismal sanctity until his death. He repeatedly laments about his sins and pleads for God's mercy. As we have noted he confesses that sins pose a great block to his loving chats with the heavenly bridegroom. His God experience and contemplative dimension are best expressed in the *Dhyanasallapangal*. It discloses Saint Kuriakose as a master of spirituality who attained the highest levels of mystic experience. However, he was aware that how much perfect one is in the view of humans, in front of the perfect

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163 CWC, Vol. III, *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 9.

164 CWC, Vol. III, *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 9-22.

Holiness of God he confesses his unworthiness. "I deem not myself worthy to reach high degrees of prayer and sanctity. As I am a great sinner with a heart impure and opaque without virtues of cleanliness and modesty, I realize that I am not worthy to receive the spirit of contemplation and attain perfection."<sup>165</sup>

When he realized that his life is going to be concluded he humbly asks pardon not only of his co-religious but even the sisters at Koonammavu. Often he laments about his imperfections and short comings. All these are expressions of his humble attitude. For example in one of the letters to the sisters, written probably in 1869, he says,

My dear children, ... I am afraid my days are coming to an end. So, I request you to pray for me to God the Father, especially during these days of the 40-hour adoration. Please pardon me for my bad examples, scandalous words, and disorderly behaviour. By my negligence I have caused scandals for the innocent little souls [in the boarding house] who are entrusted to my care, and also for you the brides of the Lord. Please pray to God that He may kindly forgive them and spare me the terrible punishment I justly deserve. Intercede with Him that I may spend the rest of my life doing always His will in all things and finally die a happy death.<sup>166</sup>

According to Saint Kuriakose the Church is not only the body of Christ or people of God but also a servant. As

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165 CWC, Vol. III, *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 1.

166 CWC, Vol. IV, *The Letters*, 77. Seeing their non-exemplary life Saint Kuriakose warns his confreres regarding the impending destruction of the congregation. He says, "if we forget our holy vocation and neglect the sacred duties of our state and fail in humility, charity, religious modesty and genuine devotion and are satisfied with valuing them only in spirit and words and not in deeds, within a short time, all these houses will fall to ruin." See CWC, Vol. IV, *The Letters*, VI/1, 61.



Jesus the supreme pastor came to this world not to be served but to serve, he asked his disciples to follow the path of the Master. He taught them with example of washing their feet and asked them to continue the same model. He told them the greatest among you must be a servant, a servant of slaves. Therefore their service must be rendered, not only to the chosen ones but also to the gentiles, pagans, foreigners, outcastes, suppressed, marginalized, sick and afflicted, widows, old and children, to everyone irrespective of their status of caste and creed.<sup>167</sup>

#### **6.4. Humiliating Experiences**

There were many instances in the life of Saint Kuriakose illustrating his deep sense and practice of humility. He was one of the three students who were sent to the Latin seminary to study Latin language. But being Syrians they were denied permission to sit in the same class with the Latin Rite students and therefore brought back to Pallipuram. It was an incident of disgrace, waste of time and money, and it caused the three students even to forget the little Syriac they had studied. But he gracefully accepted the humiliation, and did not keep any ill feeling towards anybody involved in it. Likewise "he bore with equanimity the rejection at the hands of the people in the press at Kottayam where he went twice to see and learn the workings of a printing press."<sup>168</sup>

Another occasion of proving his humility was the practice of obedience as a sure means of discerning the will of God as well as the only mark of consecrated life. As we have already referred in his testament he speaks about the value of such

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167 Mathew Thenamkalayil, "The 19<sup>th</sup> Century Kerala Church and the Leadership of Bl. Chavara," 121.

168 Thomas Kochumuttom, "A Contemplative in Action," 137. One can imagine how much pain and humiliation he had undergone in such experiences. Being a real contemplative he accepted all those experiences with calmness and composure.



obedience.<sup>169</sup> Saint Kuriakose and all the founding fathers practised this kind of obedience and according to them “an order from the local ordinary is God’s will, which, therefore, should unconditionally be obeyed.” He narrated some of the events that hurt his feelings when he was humiliated by the authorities. When Monsignor Francis Xavier succeeded bishop Maurelius he was not in favour of the activities of the three fathers in proceeding with the plan of religious community because he was misled by some priests. The bishop assigned them with new responsibilities that really affected their future plans.<sup>170</sup> As we have seen when unexpectedly and in a distressing manner Saint Kuriakose was transferred from Mannanam to Pallipuram during the construction of the monastery at Mannanam and Fr. Porukara, the backbone of the whole project was transferred to Kollam as the parish priest. It was a great blow to their future plans. Saint Kuriakose approached the Archbishop and humbly explained the matter and begged to reconsider the order of transfer, but the Archbishop was not willing to accept. Then he obeyed it without any hesitation.<sup>171</sup> “To submit without a word of protest to the will of God, how much Fr. Chavara must have suffered, how much sacrifice he must have made!”<sup>172</sup> For him it was sure that often the will of God is given through human agents and he was confident that he belonged to the Lord and that he was only an instrument in the hands of the Lord to execute it. He trusted in the Lord and the Lord offered his servant an opportune time to continue the work.<sup>173</sup> Another incident was that after the appointment

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169 CWC, Vol. IV, *The Letters*, 70.

170 Jose Eroorickal, *Mystical Missionary Spirituality of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 177.

171 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 223-224.

172 Dais Maria, “If the Grain of Wheat falling to the Ground Dies....”, 110.

173 George Kaniarakath, “‘The Lord is My Portion’ (Ps. 119:57): A Key to the Spirituality of Bl. Chavara,” *The Lord of Heaven and Earth: Chavara Studies*

of Saint Kuriakose at Pallipuram once he sent Fr. Varkey, a newly ordained priest from that parish, to Pallipuram and he stayed at Mannanam. During the Three-Days-of-Abstinence while distributing the offerings Fr. Varkey struck Kurisunkal Itty, one of the parishioners with a cane. His relatives considered it as an insult and they presented a petition to the Bishop saying that their parish priest, Fr. Kuriakose Chavara, had been staying away at Mannanam for the construction of the monastery. He had deputed a young priest Fr. Varkey, from the parish as Vicar, and that they were now much hurt due to the indecent behaviour of this priest who had struck a gentleman publicly. By receiving this the bishop ordered Saint Kuriakose to redress the grievance and prohibited him not to be away from the parish more than eight days at a stretch without the prior written permission of the Bishop.<sup>174</sup> This humiliation grieved him much.

As we have seen, once the Archbishop reproached him severely for no fault of his own; but he did not protest and graciously accepted this accusation as a paternal correction and was grateful to the prelate for not punishing him. Likewise there were many incidents which thoroughly tested and proved the spirit of obedience and humility of Saint Kuriakose and the founding fathers. Furthermore, they had to wait patiently around 25 years for the canonical approval of the congregation. After the formation of the Mannanam community although it had all the requirements of the canonical approval, they had to wait long indefinitely for the approval without any apparent reason. The fathers made repeated requests to the Vicars Apostolic of that time but they were not willing to give a positive response, probably because of their prejudice against the Syrians' rootedness in matters related to faith and morals. However, trusting in

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*in Honour of Fr. Lucas Vithuvattickal*, Paul Kalluveetil & Paulachan Kochappilly, eds., Dharmaram Publications, Bangalore, 2004, 256.

the providence of God and in a spirit of obedience to and respect for the ecclesiastical authorities they patiently waited for God's time for their dreams to be realized. By that time the first two of the founders, Fr. Palackal and Fr. Porukara died without seeing the realization of their heart's desire. But they died in the hope of the fulfilment of God's promise at his time and in his style. The disappearance of those fathers, although it was very painful, did not discourage Saint Kuriakose and he prepared the community to the great event of final commitment.<sup>175</sup> However, during this long period of uncertainty and waiting, they never refused to cooperate or disobey the hierarchy and there was never a trace of defiance or protest against them.

It was not an easy task and it was a hard time of stress and strain for Saint Kuriakose. "On several occasions and in several ways he requested the bishops for it [canonical approval]".<sup>176</sup> In 1850 according to the direction of Archbishop Martini he submitted to him a petition but there was no response. Again in 1855 by the request of Archbishop Bernardine he presented to him the rule of life practised in Mannanam. Instead of giving them approval the Archbishop imposed on the community the Carmelite rule without much change. The way of life and spirituality they had by then spontaneously developed all those were ignored. Saint Kuriakose presented to the Archbishop their observations and request for adaptations of rules to their reasonable needs and honoured traditions but he mercilessly refused everything. Being a mediator between the community and the Archbishop it was Saint Kuriakose who suffered most. It was indeed very painful for him because all proposals were rejected, he was humiliated and even being questioned by the Archbishop. It was a self-emptying experience for him. He

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175 Thomas Kochumuttom, "Blessed Chavara: A Man in God's Hands and Moved by God," *Journal of Saint Thomas Christians*, Vol. 24, 2 (2013) 78.

176 Leopold Beccaro, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 8f.

might have probably embarrassed by seeing the congregation being put on a habit that was not originally designed for them.<sup>177</sup> Moreover, by affiliating the Congregation to the Carmelite Order, as their Third Order, the Prior, Chavara, lost his authority. When the Congregation juridically came under the Superior General of the Discalced Carmelites, even the founders of the Congregation lost their separate identity, privileges, and autonomy. The Superior General of the first Order became the legitimate authority who governed the Congregation through his delegate. This was effected without the consultation of Saint Kuriakose and the community. Many of the members of his religious family were quite unhappy about this change of authority however, because of the sanctity and humility of Saint Kuriakose, he accepted it without questioning, as coming from the hands of God.<sup>178</sup> He persuaded his confreres to accept the event in that spirit. However, all of them tolerated, forgave and cooperated with the authority. Saint Kuriakose, having a spiritual outlook in everything, could see the divine providence in all these, and he clearly stated in his Testament: "Dear children, due to the special grace of God we have been called as Carmelites, the most dear to the Mother of God. But we are most certainly convinced that this has been not according to the counsel of men but according to the counsel of God."<sup>179</sup> The Archbishop refused to mitigate and adapt the rule to the local conditions and needs and the honoured Syrian traditions and the founders' ideals. The proposed rules and regulations were too hard for some of them and many of the members opted out without making profession of religious vows. Although Saint Kuriakose informed the Archbishop about this unfortunate development, his response was rather disgusting. He said:

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177 Thomas Kochumuttom, "Blessed Chavara: A Man in God's Hands and Moved by God," 78-79.

178 Jossy, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara: The Founder of the Women TOCD*, 206-207.

179 CWC, Vol. IV, *The Letters*, 99.

“Only those of good will and determination need to be admitted. Don’t worry about the dropouts. I shall pray for the remaining few!”<sup>180</sup> The last minute withdrawal of 11 candidates from making the profession of religious vows, the affiliation of the congregation as the Third Order of the Carmelites Discalced, the humiliations and the insults at the hands of the supporters of bishop Roccas, his transfer from Mannanam to Koonammavu where he had been about 35 years, the occasions when his close associate and spiritual director Fr. Leopold apparently disregarded him all these were distressing experiences for Saint Kuriakose.<sup>181</sup> There were many such situations in his life where he had undergone numerous experiences of mental conflicts and intense suffering that cannot be fully understood by anyone. He accepted all such instances and experiences with full trust in the Lord because he was sure that God would transform everything for good (Rom 8:28). So having tested in the crucible of sufferings and humiliations he became a strong personality, a steady minded person.

## 7. A Steady-Minded Person

It was a certain fact that Saint Kuriakose was never influenced by any worldly attractions of praise, prestige, position, name and fame. He was a man of profound humility, assuming always a low profile, self-effacing and never showy or presumptuous. As we have seen he had professed a fourth vow of humility along with the other three vows, that is, not to seek any position or dignity in the Church and in the congregation. He adhered to this promise all throughout his life.<sup>182</sup> Fr. Leopold was of high appreciation for his God-fearing habits, detachment from worldly achievements,

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180 Valerian Plathottam, *The First Indian Saint: Blessed Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 18.

181 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 224.

182 Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 464-465.

and the spirit of service, said: "He was detached from all disorderly affections for earthly things and persons, which was all the more true in the last days of his life."<sup>183</sup> According to Saint Kuriakose, asceticism was a means to get closer to God. Through penance and sacrifice he tried to attain a complete obliteration of self-centredness and freedom to serve only the Divine Master. "This was his life style - a life of detachment, freeing the soul from everything that could come between itself and God, a life style contrary to the modern way of total self-centredness."<sup>184</sup> In order to convince the sisters the importance of detachment he says:

Above all learn the art of loving Jesus Christ ... When you feel inclined or attached to any other object, this loving Lord turns his gaze on you and asks you: 'Look at me! Does this object give you greater enjoyment than what I give? Or, does it cause you pain and affliction? Is this not sufficient? He is always with you, with sole desire of pleasing you. He whispers to you: 'You must love me. Everything is here. Whatever you desire, I have given you everything... There is nothing which I have not given you.' Yes, He has given himself to you. He is the creator of the whole universe. He asks You: 'is this little object greater than myself?'"<sup>185</sup>

He performed all his duties with a detached attitude and desire-less mind. Whenever he refers to himself in his writings his deep humility comes to the front very clearly and he presents himself as a penitent. For example Mannanam Chronicle begins with the words: "These are written by humble Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara, a disciple of our Father

183 Leopold Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 18.

184 Shanthi Rose, "Kuriakose Elias Chavara: A Bes Rowma," 111.

185 CWC, Vol. IV, *The Letters*, VII/6, 82.



Thomas Palackal.<sup>186</sup> Analyzing the nature of the relationship between Saint Kuriakose and Fr. Leopold we can notice that he always kept a low profile of himself in front of Fr. Leopold Beccaro. This is quite characteristic of the humility and modest nature of Saint Kuriakose. As well trained in the school of humility he attributed every achievement to others, especially to his collaborators, even though he had equally contributed. While speaking about the various achievements he presents his role always at the background, never projecting himself but always others with whom he worked. As we read in the Letter to the Phlippians 2:3, “.. in humility regard others better than yourselves.” He always valued others better than himself and offered prominence to them. He rendered importance to his elder priests and gave them credit on all occasions. He always consulted with his elder priests in every matter. As we know Saint Kuriakose was the one who bravely fought against ‘Roccas Schism’ and afterwards he was appointed as the ‘Vicar General of Syrians’ by Archbishop Bernadine. But the attitude of Saint Kuriakose was that of an unworthy servant. As Fr. Leopold points out, “those who came to know him were convinced of his unusual humility.”<sup>187</sup> It was a humility which directed all his existence to the one thing which is essential namely, the salvation of his soul and salvation of souls of others was the aim of all his pastoral activities. Fr. Kuriakose Porukara describes how Saint Kuriakose succeeded the two elderly founders, the grief-stricken Prior, “in extreme humility, trusting in God and the intercession of the Blessed Mother and Saint Joseph, and above all with his meek and docile nature started to walk in the path of his predecessors.”<sup>188</sup>

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186 Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 467.

187 Leopold Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 12.

188 Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 467.



It was Saint Kuriakose who worked very hard from the beginning till the end with fathers Palackal and Porukara in the formal establishment of the CMI order, he was the first Prior, and he was the one to whom the first members made their vows. But he points out fathers Palackal and Porukara as the founders.<sup>189</sup> Likewise it is to Fr. Leopold that he attributes the credit of the establishment of the convent at Koonammavu.<sup>190</sup> As mentioned already, he had no desire of name or fame. Many a time he is silent and keeps himself behind the curtain. Fr. Leopold could have done nothing without Saint Kuriakose because he was the all-approved leader of the Syrians.<sup>191</sup> Throughout his life he enjoyed the appreciation, praise and recognition of people of all kinds, and even people from other religions and denominations. Even the enemies admired him and sought his support. It is important to note that people of all walks of life irrespective of caste and creed, held him in high esteem. However, he ever remained a humble servant of the Lord for the service of his fellow beings even though people praised and admired him for many of his personal qualities. He can never be elated by praise and recognition. He may be rightly described as a steady-minded person, "always keeping the mind fixed on the Lord alike in praise and blame, health and illness, success and failure, life and death."<sup>192</sup> Contemplation or prayerfulness means the ability to live, uninterruptedly in all circumstances keeping the mind fixed on the Lord. That is to live always in the awareness of the presence of the Lord not only in the formal hours of prayer in the oratory, but it

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189 CWC, Vol. IV, *The Letters*, 99.

190 *The Chronicle of Koonammavu Convent*, Vol. I, 15. See also Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 467.

191 *The Chronicles of Koonammavu Convent*, Vol. I, 15.

192 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 372; See also Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 478.

becomes a habitual trait of the person in all circumstances of life. He had an equal mind in happiness and sorrows, in gains and losses, and in victories and failures.

The *Chronicles* written by him or under his guidance are almost autobiographical works concerning its contents, but in the entire bulk of volumes there are very few occasions when his name is explicitly mentioned. This is a lucid evidence of his spiritual maturity and noble character. It is this silence that speaks more powerfully and convincingly about his personality. He was a person of *nishkamakarma*, selfless service, the defining mark of a *karma-yogi*, a contemplative in action. Being a person of contemplation he always gives credit to God for all his successes and achievements that made him humble and free of all attachments. In accordance with the desire of bishop Baccinelli, he in his old age, in a spirit of detachment moved to Koonammavu monastery from Mannanam in 1864, and lived there until his death. When Vicar Apostolic Leonard Mellano and Fr. Leopold went to Rome, he fell ill. Then the doctor and his confreres at Mannanam advised him to return to Mannanam for better treatment and rest, he did not agree to go in their absence.<sup>193</sup> “He said he was placed in Koonammavu by the Archbishop himself, and he continued to stay there as a martyr of obedience.”<sup>194</sup> Moreover, when the sisters requested him that if he willed, he could continue to stay in Koonammavu without going to Mannanam, his spontaneous reply was: “have I a will of my own? I do not desire either to go and stay there, or to stay here. I am ready to do as I am told. I don’t wish to do my will. I am ready to do what I am commanded to do.”<sup>195</sup> Although bishop Baccinelli had given equal

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193 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 369.

194 Dais Maria CMC, “If the Grain of Wheat Falling to the Ground Dies...” 111.

195 *The Chronicles of Koonammavu Convent*, Vol. I, 203.

responsibilities to Fr. Leopold and Saint Kuriakose, the latter did his service always subject to Fr. Leopold.<sup>196</sup> However Fr. Leopold himself testifies: "It is known to all how interested and zealous he was in the orderly progress of the convent in virtue and perfection, once it was founded."<sup>197</sup> The *Chronicles* does not assign a prominent role to Saint Kuriakose may at least partly be due to his own directions to the writer. It is important to note that he preferred to be overshadowed by Fr. Leopold not only as a matter of humility, but also in consideration of propriety and practicalities. Moreover, Saint Kuriakose gracefully gave Fr. Leopold freedom in exercising his rights and duties in relation to the convent.

The *Chronicles* present a number of qualities possessed by Saint Kuriakose namely, deep humility, love for enemies, prudence in acts, love for the Church, openness, transparency, farsightedness, hard work and adherence to truth etc. It also unveils his inner personality, namely, his sincerity, accuracy, his traits of thoroughness, honesty, humility, and simplicity in a great measure.<sup>198</sup> Humility can be considered the foundation and guiding virtue of Saint Kuriakose. While describing the construction of the religious house he explains everything in words filled with humility. He mentions about him as the least of the disciples of Fr. Thomas Palackal. While writing the life history of Fr. Palackal he commented that his work consisted of "only the things that I have come to know and have been able to remember I am putting on record."<sup>199</sup> This underlines his truthfulness and inner transparency. The expression *kurayapettavan* (the least one)<sup>200</sup> which he used to denote himself is a profound

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196 Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 326.

197 Leopold Beccaro, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 12.

198 Sebastian Poonoly, "Writings of Chavara," 117-118.

199 CWC, Vol. I, *The Chronicles*, 53.

200 CWC, Vol. I, *The Chronicles*, 15. See also Thomas Valavananickal, "The

example of the meaning of the virtue of humility that enabled him to speak about his ignorance, defects or weakness in his religious life. The *Chronicles* of Chavara describe several of his personal experiences. He was filled with gratitude for God's graces and repentance for his shortcomings. It is true that there were several events in the life of Saint Kuriakose which demonstrate "how low he felt himself," and which sentiments dominated his whole life. This virtue of humility facilitated him to share his ignorance, defects, foolishness, lack of understanding and weakness in his religious life.<sup>201</sup> He had no hesitation to confess his own faults, shortcomings and unworthiness before others.<sup>202</sup> He attributed to God all the good works he had done. Seeing the non-exemplary life of his confreres, he criticizes and advises them that these monasteries are founded and willed by God "to be mirrors of virtues and assembly of holy people, not an association of self-willed stewards and business administrators."<sup>203</sup> He reminds us that the strength of a monastery does not consist in the thickness of its walls, but in the virtue and the religious zeal of the monks who dwell in them. He urges us to be virtuous and be loyal to our call. He emphasizes the real role of the religious and their obligation to make strenuous efforts towards perfection and he is of the opinion that we left everything in the name of God and if we renounce God due to our carelessness or indifference that would be foolishness and madness.

As we have seen, Saint Kuriakose was a very humble and simple man. Humility is accepting the truth about

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Apostolic Zeal of Chavara: A Reflection on His Writings," *Herald of the East: Dharmaram Journal of Chavara Studies*, Vol. 12, 1 (2016) 32.

201 Jose Eroorickal, *Mystical Missionary Spirituality of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 175.

202 CWC, Vol. I, *The Chronicles*, 26.

203 CWC, Vol. IV, *The Letters*, VI/1, 61-62.

oneself. It is the basis of all virtues, and it is the queen of all virtues. God being the sovereign truth to be humble means to walk in truth. From the very beginning of his life till the end we can notice that humility was the hallmark of his life. We can observe the depth of his humility in the obedience he displayed at every phase of his life. Sometimes he had to undergo even punishing actions. But as we have noticed he accepted all such occasions graciously as paternal corrections. In front of such experiences he was patient, calm and quiet. It is to be noted that he approached them with equability and optimism. He was convinced that God is the source of all goodness and out of God's mercy he received everything and he acknowledges it with humility. He is grateful to God for his birth, family and all his accomplishments and because of that he is so happy.<sup>204</sup> The sufferings and the humiliating experiences he had undergone shaped his personality. To be humble one's ego should be melted out. Humility leads one to centre one's life on others and not on oneself.

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204 CWC, Vol. II, *Compunction of the Soul*, II: 68-96.



## CONCLUSION

Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara was a vibrant leader and concerned pastor who was a man of God and attuned to the Holy Spirit. Throughout his life, he labored with zeal and enthusiasm for the spiritual and temporal welfare of the Church and society. His extraordinary accomplishments are due to his dynamic activities which have the endorsement of his mystical experience. First and foremost, he was a man of deep spirituality and all his achievements flowed from his inner life that was permeated by his spiritual vision and worldview. The preceding pages illustrate how he dedicated his life for the faith formation and integral growth of the people of God and brought about spiritual revival among the people. He worked hard day and night to foster and protect their faith and led his flock to green pastures and animated them spiritually and socially devoid of any discriminating boundaries. He had a universal outlook and selfless commitment to his contemporaries. He was motivated by his profound faith in Jesus Christ that was nurtured by his long hours of intense prayer and his personal encounter with the Lord. His kenotic spirituality is an eye opener and inspiration for the present generation to imbibe the spirit of Saint Chavara to be motivated by him and to make them available for all.

The initiatives and interventions of Saint Kuriakose as Vicar General are incomparable because his timely involvement at the time of Roccas Schism saved the



Church from division. He was a defender of Catholic Unity. Moreover, his contributions in the foundation of two indigenous religious congregations, the initiation of the forty-hour adoration for the first time in Kerala and considering the renewal of families his final testament for them (*Nalla Appante Chavarul*) which has a lasting relevance even today. His pioneering contributions in the education field are noteworthy. The efforts of Saint Chavara to start a Sanskrit School considering unification of the people in a caste-ridden society of Kerala were significant. He made every possibility accessible to them including print media and literary facilities. His contribution in the literary field is remarkable, which was mostly written in the latter half of his life. He was well aware of the fact that for the transformation of the Church and society, along with education good books are inevitable.

He was a faithful son of the Syrian Church who pursued his priestly life with holiness and apostolic zeal for his own people with a broader concern for the development of all peoples without any discrimination. Following the model of Jesus Christ, as a good shepherd, he worked hard for the unity, identity, autonomy, and spiritual growth of the Syrian Christians. He was guided by a prophetic vision in all areas of his undertakings. Saint Kuriakose enlightened a period in history through his life filled with Christ- experience so as to inspire and strengthen us to live a life according to the plan of God. He was a committed pastor who was ready to sacrifice anything for the betterment of the people around. The role of Saint Kuriakose in the foundation of the two indigenous religious congregations (CMI and CMC) demanded lot of hardships and sacrifices from his part. The founding and guidance of the religious congregation for women and the contributions of the members of that congregation for women empowerment are memorable. The

great and invaluable contributions of Saint Chavara in the field of women and Dalit empowerment remains as an eye-opener and guidance to many believers and to the official teaching authority of the Church. For the development of Dalit community, he arranged schooling facilities, financial assistance, catechetical instruction etc. He could illumine his contemporaries because of his constant contact and communion with the Lord and his commitment to the people of his time. All these are certain milestones of the holy life of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara and from all these it is obvious that he was a man who spent his whole life for the welfare of his fellow beings. His epoch-making contributions brought about thorough and drastic changes in the Church and society in Kerala which have a lasting effect.

His firm conviction was that faith should lead one to action (James 2:14-17) and this led him to greater concerns for social development and renovation. He opines that a day on which one has not done a good deed would be considered lost forever. We have seen how his spiritual, ecclesiastical, educational, literary, religious and socio-cultural contributions helped in the growth and progress of the Syro-Malabar Church and the society at large. He had a firm foundation in Christian faith that was clearly visible throughout his life, and it was reflected in all his apostolic activities and in his various accomplishments. As Saint Paul he could do all the humanitarian services and other ministerial activities because the Lord urged him (2 Cor 5:14). His point of reference was the love of God, and he was never tempted with any worldly desires of name and fame or prestige issues.

It is true that in today's globalized world people are becoming closer to each other on the one hand however in reality what is happening is that their horizon is rather

reduced. They are not at all bothered or concerned about what is happening in the immediate neighborhood. In the present scenario the facilities to contact with each other are increased however people are becoming more self-centered and selfish. The mission of the Church is evangelization and in this process, we can never be centred on ourselves. Our mission is to witness to the love of God in the midst of the whole human family. The Synodal process has a deeply missionary dimension to it. It is indeed intended to enable the Church to better witness to the Gospel, especially with those who live on the spiritual, social, economic, political, geographical, and existential peripheries of our world. In this way, Synodality is a path by which the Church can more fruitfully fulfil her mission of evangelization in the world, as a leaven at the service of the coming Kingdom of God.

It is to be noted that the spirituality and vital contributions of Saint Kuriakose enabled the Syro-Malabar Church to keep up her own apostolic faith and traditions, and to renew her life according to the signs of the times. However, today, when the Syro-Malabar Church is undergoing a critical period of troubles and tribulations and in need of another renewal, owing to the struggles of the current situation an overview of his life, insightful teachings and contributions are very much relevant since the saint was a strong pillar who initiated and guided the formative period of the Malabar Church in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a crucial time in her quest to regain her identity and autonomy, while keeping intact the unity of the Universal Church. Saint Kuriakose was a faithful and Spirit-filled son of the Malabar Church who emptied himself in order to make him available for others. Undoubtedly, he spent his time and energy for others without any reserve and never projecting himself. He was doing all his ministries and apostolic activities with such a great zeal and enthusiasm that

his biographers could not help writing that the many things he accomplished could have been realized, only through the combined efforts of many priests.

By being grateful to Saint Kuriakose for what he had accomplished, it is our responsibility to continue his vision and mission in our present context. We need to have a wide vision about our mission and be available to others in this vast world in order to transform it into the Kingdom of God. All of us display a prophetic vision in today's world and think and act with the sense of the past looking forward to the future transcending the limitations of the present. It is our duty to highlight the image of religious life as a source of inspiration for Christian perfection and symbol of holiness.



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