Theological Studies on Saint Chavara 20

The Whisper of a Saint

St. Chāvara's Timeless Message

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Dr. Shaju Varghese Pellissery CMI

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The Whisper of a Saint

St. Chāvara's Timeless Message

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A Tribute to All My Companions

To all my companions:
May these pages be a blessing to you,
as your support has been a blessing to me.

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 tradi-

tions, 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.

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General Editor

Mar Raphael Thattil
Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church

05/01/2026

MESSAGE

I am delighted to know that a book titled *The Whisper of a Saint: St. Chāvara's Timeless Message*, authored by Rev. Dr. Shaju Varghese Pellissery CMI is being published as a spiritually insightful collection of reflections that creatively unite the life, writings, and vision of St. Kuriakose Elias Chāvara with the Living Word of God. Rooted in the Gospel and attentive to the pastoral needs of our times, this work offers meaningful guidance for proclaiming the Word in a manner that fosters personal conversion and committed Christian living.

By thoughtfully bridging the timeless wisdom of St. Chāvara with Sacred Scripture, the author has rendered a valuable service to the Church. Drawing from the Saint's life, works and writings, including *Atmanuthapam* and the *Testament of a Loving Father*, and relating them to appropriate Gospel passages, these reflections are well suited as homiletic and retreat resources for priests, religious and lay preachers: I appreciate Fr. Shaju Varghese Pellissery CMI for this labour of love, and I prayerfully hope that this work will enable the gentle 'whisper' of St. Chāvara to resound as a compelling call to holiness, social justice, educational excellence and the sanctity of family life.

✠ **Raphael Thattil**
Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church

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MESSAGE

The Whisper of a Saint: St. Chāvara's Timeless Message is an outstanding contribution to Chāvara spirituality and contemporary Catholic spiritual literature by Rev. Dr. Shaju Varghese Pellissery CMI, the author of the work. Rather than presenting St. Kuriakose Elias Chāvara merely as an admired historical figure, the author successfully reveals him as a timeless spiritual guide whose life continues to illuminate the path of Christian discipleship.

The work is marked by remarkable theological depth while remaining pastorally accessible. The author integrates biblical scholarship, Catholic doctrine, the wisdom of the saints, leadership principles, and historical research with exceptional clarity. Complex theological concepts are explained in a practical and inspiring manner, making the book suitable for scholars, priests, religious, seminarians, and lay faithful alike.

Rather than repeating common narratives, this volume provides critical insights into St. Chāvara's internal spiritual engine. The author explores the saint's deep interiority and his intense passion for friendship with Jesus Christ. He masterfully details our founder's journey regarding his vocation to religious life and priesthood. This text serves as a strong reminder that a divine call requires total self-surrender. It challenges us to step away from daily distractions to avoid a dangerous "spiritual vacuum." Furthermore, the book beautifully portrays St. Chāvara as an "entrepreneur sage." He perfectly balanced intense monastic prayer with a highly practical drive to establish printing presses and schools. Ultimately, his active work, authentic authority, and integrity were born out of deep silence and quiet solitude. By constantly counting his blessings, he left a timeless blueprint of a true missionary disciple who genuinely desired others to become holier and more prosperous.

This book speaks to the heart in a simple and inspiring way. Instead of using difficult academic language, it presents the

message of God's Word with clarity and connects it beautifully with the life and witness of St. Chāvara. It will be a valuable companion for personal prayer, retreats, homilies, and spiritual reflection. I sincerely congratulate the author for the time, prayer, and dedication invested in this work. May the gentle "whisper" heard in these pages awaken in many hearts a deeper love for God, a desire for holiness, and a renewed commitment to serving the Church.

With gratitude to God for the many blessings that this book will surely bring, I gladly invoke His abundant blessings upon the author, and everyone who reads it with an open and prayerful heart. May the peace of Christ fill your hearts and guide your lives, and may the loving intercession of St. Kuriakose Elias Chāvara lead you ever closer to God and strengthen you in the path of charity and faithful service.

Rev. Dr. Paul Achandy, CMI
Prior General

FOREWORD

The trajectory of Catholic hagiography and the path of holiness is uniquely paved with markers that transcend time, continually calling the human heart back to its divine origin. Within the rich and vast tapestry of the Catholic Church in India, and more specifically across the landscape of the Syro-Malabar Church, the enduring legacy of St. Kuriakose Elias Chāvara remains an unceasing source of structural and spiritual transformation.

It is within this context of profound remembrance that *The Whisper of a Saint: St. Chāvara's Timeless Message* emerges as an invaluable literary guide. In this book, the author presents a spiritually insightful corpus of reflections that bridges the critical nexus between the Living Word of God and the biographical reality of an authentic monk. Rather than operating purely as a dry, historical biography, this work functions as a thematic and theological exegesis, charting how radical interiority can catalyse systemic social engineering and institutional reformation. By inviting readers to pause and listen to the gentle promptings of a soul entirely consumed by the love of Christ, this work is a living bridge crossing the expanse between Sacred Scripture, personal meditation, and radical historical action and illuminates a definitive roadmap for modern Christian living.

As you journey through these pages, you will encounter thematic presentations structurally organized around a triad mechanism - commencing with a specific scriptural passage, transitioning into a localized spiritual reflection, and culminating in concrete historical evidence from the life of *St. Chāvara* - the volume offers a robust template for theological meditation. The author systematically deconstructs the conventional partitions separating the contemplative life from outward-focused sociopolitical action. In doing so, he reveals an integrated "Level 5" leadership style rooted in absolute self-effacement and iron-willed professional resolve. This methodology becomes particularly striking in the chapter

Perfect Way of St. Chāvara, where the author details the legal and personal persecutions orchestrated by the monastery's steward, Māthan Mānjooran Kalapurackal. Instead of pursuing legal retaliation or proportional justice, St. Chāvara's subsequent written mandates to show special consideration for his persecutor's family act as a striking manifestation of what the author describes as a "Covenantal Love that remains steadfast regardless of the treatment it receives".

Too often, human perspective divides the active missionary from the cloistered mystic, yet St. Chāvara shattered this false dichotomy by drawing every ounce of his outer social reform from the quiet, silent depths of Eucharistic adoration and unceasing prayer. At the centre of this book lies an exhaustive exploration of St. Chāvara's integrated personality - a rare, captivating harmony of intense contemplative interiority and dynamic practical leadership. Each chapter of this volume meticulously mirrors this spiritual architecture, grounding every discussion in the Gospels before demonstrating how these scriptural mandates took tangible form through St. Chavara's concrete choices.

The ethical architecture of the volume is further illuminated through a rigorous investigation of personal virtues and communal directives. In the analysis of the *Virtue of Humility in St. Chāvara*, the book provides a systematic parsing of the *Litany of Humility*, framing it not as a mandate for self-deprecation but as an intellectual alignment with objective truth. The text masterfully demonstrates that Christian humility requires a total "decentring of the self," ensuring that "the person's own ego is sufficiently quieted that others see God through them". This theological premise is systematically expanded across an array of chapters, including *Called and Anointed*, which evaluates St. Chāvara's reluctant acceptance of the role of Vicar General during the critical disruptions of the Roccos schism, and *Mirror, Lamp and Pillar*, which explores the ecclesial symbols used by

the Koonammāvu convent nuns to encapsulate his multifaceted legacy.

By introducing thematic evaluations in chapters such as *Passion for Friendship with Jesus Christ*, *Solitude and Silence*, and *On Family Life*, Dr. Pellissery demonstrates the profound breadth of St. Chāvara's literary and reformative legacy. The author's analysis highlights that authentic prayer does not emerge from compulsory practice, noting that "where there is love, conversation goes unlimited". This thematic continuity allows the reader to engage deeply with St. Chāvara's pioneering structural interventions - ranging from the establishment of the *Pallikkoodam* movement and the *Pidiyari* welfare scheme to the inception of the first indigenous religious congregations, namely the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI) and the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel (CMC). Furthermore, the book vividly recalls St. Chāvara's unwavering missionary zeal during times of severe structural division, illustrating an anointed leadership that prioritized the restoration of unity, order, and charity above all else.

Dr. Pellissery has rendered a monumental service to the Church by curating these daily reflections into an engaging sanctuary of wisdom, designed to spark personal conversion and communal transformation. Ultimately, Dr. Shaju Varghese Pellissery CMI must be highly commended for this labour of love, which successfully translates complex theological truths into clear, universal language accessible to both scholars and lay practitioners. By combining extensive historical documentation with scriptural realism, the author provides a transformative guide that addresses the contemporary spiritual vacuum.

May those who open this book listen closely to the timeless whisper of this great saint, finding the grace and courage to live as authentic witnesses of divine love in their own families, communities, and generation. It is my earnest hope and prayer that *The Whisper of a Saint: St. Chavara's Timeless Message* finds

wide circulation across academic institutions, religious houses, and domestic churches. May its profound insights resonate widely, inspiring a renewed generation of missionary disciples to integrate a deep interior life with a radical commitment to social justice and human excellence.

With profound appreciation for this monumental endeavor, and with earnest prayers for its wide and transformative circulation,

Dr. Johnson Valiyakulathil CMI
Provincial
Preshitha Province, Coimbatore.

INTRODUCTION

The path to sainthood is often paved with milestones that invite us to pause and reflect. For the global Catholic community, 23 November 2014 was such a milestone—the day St. Kuriakose Elias Chāvara was canonized. In anticipation of this historic celebration, the Christ School Family in Bangalore embarked on a unique spiritual journey: a 100-day countdown. Each working day, faculty and students gathered to share a story, a value, or a lived example of the saint, bringing his legacy to life through speech, drama or any other art form. These daily reflections were eventually curated and published as *Footprints: Impressions That Guide Us*.

To prepare the faculty and students for this project, I undertook an exhaustive study of the literature surrounding St. Chāvara. Although I have been a member of the CMI Congregation since 1983 - hearing, reading, and presenting themes about our founder for decades - I must admit that my earlier enthusiasm was somewhat measured. However, this intensive preparation sparked a profound shift within. It provided a renewed interest and a deep, revitalized passion to dig deeper into the life and teachings of a man I presumed I knew too well.

I was amazed at my findings! His creativity, convictions, and vision were all propelled by an exceptional spirituality that defined his very being. Taking his call to the priesthood with the utmost seriousness, he acted as a man who had no time to waste; his soul was visible in every profound action he took. Everything he did was carried out with a deep-rooted, unwavering faith in God.

St. Chāvara was an exceptionally talented leader and a polyglot who mastered seven languages; in his brief 66 years on earth, he achieved a level of success and social impact that few humans of his time could ever dream of achieving. He was

a visionary who neatly blended a profound spirituality with radical social action. Since that period of discovery, I have made it my mission never to miss an opportunity to study or express my views on his life. Whether in my personal study or in my homilies, I now make it a point to share his story, especially in communities where his name and mission are not yet familiar.

This book, *The Whisper of a Saint: St. Chāvara's Timeless Message*, is a fruit of that journey. It is a collection of speeches and reflections born from this renewed fire. Each chapter is structured for deep engagement: starting with a carefully selected passage from the Bible, especially the Gospels, followed by a spiritual reflection of the selected passage(s), and concluding it with a concrete example(s) from the life of St. Chāvara illustrating the thoughts shared put into action. Although these reflections depart from the structure of a formal academic study and omit traditional citations, every account of St. Chāvara's life is meticulously drawn from authentic and well-documented sources.

I have taken great care to ensure that each of the topics is distinct, avoiding the repetition of the same Scripture verses or biographical incidents. Designed to be used for talks or guided meditations, each entry provides enough material for session that could go up to 40-45 minutes. It is my hope that as you journey through these pages, you will hear the gentle 'whisper' of this great Saint and find in his timeless message a guide for your own spiritual and social transformation.

Dr. Shaju Varghese Pellissery CMI
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HEARTFELT THANKS

First and foremost, I offer my deepest praise and gratitude to Almighty Jesus Christ. It was His divine inspiration that first prompted this endeavor and His grace that refined my thoughts and language skills to give voice to these articles. I humbly admit and acknowledge that every word written here is a testament to His guidance, providing the clarity and strength needed to translate the "whispers" of a saint into this humble work.

I am profoundly grateful to **His Beatitude Mar Raphael Thattil**, Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church, for his paternal blessings and the encouraging message that serves as a spiritual cornerstone for this book. I express my deepest gratitude to **Rev. Dr. Paul Achandy CMI**, Prior General of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate, for graciously bestowing his prayerful blessings upon this book. I am deeply honoured by his prayerful support for this book. My sincere thanks go to **Rev. Dr. Benny Nalkkara CMI,** Vicar General, the Chavara Central Secretariat and Dharmaram Publications for their kind consent to publish this work and for their professional support throughout the process. I am equally indebted to **Rev. Dr. Johnson Valiyakulathil CMI**, Provincial, Preshitha CMI Province, for his scholarly insights and for graciously contributing the Foreword. I also wish to express my deep appreciation to **Rev. Dr. Francis Xavier (Sabu) Vellanikkaran CMI**, whose meticulous proofreading and dedication significantly enhanced the manuscript. A special word of thanks goes to **Rev. Dr. Thomas Thottungal CMI** for his creative expertise in designing a cover that so beautifully captures the spiritual essence of St. Chāvara.

I also wish to acknowledge the extensive wealth of literature on St. Chāvara —the books, scholarly articles, and inspiring illustrations—that I encountered throughout the writing of this book. My thoughts were deeply shaped and refined by the insights of many authors whose work captured my imagination

and provided the intellectual framework for this volume. I am truly thankful for the collective wisdom of these thinkers, which allowed me to develop and present St. Chāvara's timeless message in a new light.

The genesis of this book lies in my profound astonishment at the life of St. Kuriakose Elias Chāvara. His immense contributions to the Church and society are a marvel of faith in action. In these pages, I have sought to integrate each of his lived examples with a suitable Bible passage, demonstrating how his revolutionary vision was a direct reflection of the Gospel. It is my prayer that his timeless 'whisper' continues to inspire others to live as witnesses of Christ's love.

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A Brief History of St. Chāvara

Born on 10 February 1805, in Kainakary, near Alappuzha in Kerala, St. Chāvara was the son of devout parents, Iko (Kuriakose) Chāvara and Mariam Thoppil, members of the Syro-Malabar Church. Adhering to the local custom, the infant was baptized on the eighth day at Chennankari parish church in Alappuzha.

From the age of five until he turned ten, attended a local village school (Kalari) under the tutelage of a Hindu teacher (*Asan*), where he studied languages, various dialects, and elementary sciences. Driven by a calling to the priesthood, he began further studies under the local parish priest of St. Joseph's Church. In 1818, at thirteen, he entered the seminary at Pallipuram, then presided over by Rector *Malpān* Thomas Pālackal. He was ordained a priest on 29 November 1829, at Arthunkal and celebrated his first Holy Mass at his home parish of Chennankari. Following his ordination, he briefly engaged in pastoral ministry before returning to the seminary to teach and assist *Malpān* Thomas Pālackal. It was during this period that he joined *Malpān* Thomas Porukkara and *Malpān* Thomas Pālackal in their vision to establish a new religious Congregation.

In 1830, he moved to Mānnānam to supervise the construction of the Congregation's first house, the foundation stone of which was laid on 11 May 1831. Following the deaths of both the senior *Malpān*s, St. Chāvara assumed leadership of the fledgling community. On 8 December 1855, he made his religious profession alongside ten companions, taking the name 'Kuriakose Elias of the Holy Family.' This little effort eventually came to be known as the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate, known with the acronym CMI.

He served as the Prior General of all monasteries of the CMI Congregation from 1856 until his demise in 1871. In 1861, when the Church of Kerala was threatened by a schism following the arrival of Mar Thomas Roccos without legitimate Papal

credentials, the Archbishop of Verapoly appointed St. Chāvara as the Vicar General of the Syro-Malabar Church. The Church leaders and the Catholic community gratefully remember his unwavering stance and effective leadership in thwarting the intrusion of Thomas Roccos, thereby preserving the unity of the Church in Kerala.

After an eventful life as the founding father and the first Prior General of the CMI Congregation, St. Chāvara passed on to his heavenly abode on 03 January 1871, in the odour of sanctity, leaving a lasting legacy as an authentic and holy monk. Recognizing his heroic virtues and long-lasting spiritual impact, His Holiness Pope John Paul II declared him a 'Blessed' on 08 February 1986.

His mortal remains were reverently transferred from Koonammāvu to the chapel of St. Joseph's Monastery at Mānnānam, Kerala, India. Because of his profound sanctity and the many blessings attributed to his intercession, Mānnānam has evolved into a prominent pilgrimage centre. Every Saturday, thousands of faithful flocks to his tomb to seek his intercession and participate in Holy Mass and Novena. The feast of St. Chāvara is celebrated with deep devotion and solemnity each year from December 26 through January 3.

The Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI) in particular and the wider Kerala Church in general remain deeply indebted to the visionary leadership of *Malpān* Thomas Porukkara, *Malpān* Thomas Pālackal, Brother Jacob Kanianthara, and St. Chāvara. Following in the footsteps of his mentors, St. Chāvara was a transformative personality whose influence permeated nearly every sphere of human endeavour. The history of the Church in Kerala honours him for numerous milestones, including the establishment of the first indigenous religious Congregation for men – Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI) and women - Congregation of the Mother of Carmel (CMC), the first Sanskrit school, the first Catholic printing press, and so on.

His intellectual and liturgical contributions were equally pioneering. He was the first to edit and publish the East Syrian Breviary. In 1862, he meticulously prepared the first liturgical calendar for the Malabar Church - a system that remained in use for generations. Under his direct supervision at Mānnānam, Syriac was printed in Kerala for the first time, and the first Malayalam prayer books were produced. These efforts were instrumental in making spiritual resources more accessible to the Catholic faithful.

Beyond the initial foundation at Mānnānam, St. Chāvara expanded his mission by establishing several religious houses across Kerala. His leadership introduced vital spiritual and social initiatives, including the founding of seminaries for the formation of the diocesan clergy, the introduction of annual retreats for both priests and laity, and the initiation of forty-hour adoration. His compassion was manifested in the establishment of homes for the dying and the destitute, alongside a steadfast commitment to the education of catechumens and the development of general education schools.

In 1866, in collaboration with Father Leopold Beccaro OCD, St. Chāvara co-founded the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel (CMC) for women. As a pioneer of popular education in Kerala, he inspired the Catholic community to establish schools adjacent to every parish church. This vision created the legacy of the *Pallikkoodam* - a term for schools in Kerala that literally signifies an educational institution attached to a church.

Despite his vast and varied responsibilities, he dedicated time to author several books in both prose and verse for the spiritual edification of the faithful. His timeless counsels to families, preserved in the *Testament of a Loving Father*, remain profoundly relevant to this day. Fundamentally a man of unceasing prayer and intense charity, he maintained an intimate communion with the Lord despite his hectic social and educational endeavours, radiating a spirituality that led others to recognize him as a 'man of God' even from his youth.

The miracle approved for the canonization of St. Chāvara was the instantaneous, complete, and permanent cure of a congenital squint (alternating esotropia) in both eyes of Ms. Maria Jose Kottarathil. A nine-year-old Catholic girl from Pala in the Kottayam district of Kerala, Maria had been advised by five different doctors to undergo surgery. Instead, she and her family sought the intercession of the saintly Carmelite monk Chāvara. On 12 October 2007, Maria visited his room and tomb at Mānnānam with her parents; by 16 October 2007, the squint had completely disappeared. This miracle was formally approved by the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints on 18 March 2014, paving the way for his canonization.

The official path to sainthood began in 1955 when Mar Matthew Kavukattu, Archbishop of Changanasserry, received instructions from Rome to initiate the diocesan-level procedure. On 07 April 1984, Pope John Paul II declared him Venerable, recognizing his life of heroic virtue. He was later beatified in Kottayam on 08 February 1986, by Pope John Paul II during his historic Visitation to India.

On 03 April 2014, Pope Francis authorized the promulgation of the decree concerning the miracle attributed to the intercession of 'Kuriakose *Kathanar*.' This confirmed the Pope's final approval for sainthood, and on 23 November 2014, he was canonized at St. Peter's Square alongside St. Euphrasia Eluvathingal. During the ceremony, Pope Francis described Father Kuriakose Elias as a religious who was "both active and contemplative," noting that he generously gave his life for the Syro-Malabar Church by living out the maxim: sanctification of oneself and the salvation of others.

St. Chāvara was a prolific author and a literary visionary whose contributions to Malayalam literature earned him the title 'Apostle of Christian Literature.' His works, spanning both prose and poetry, are celebrated for their practical wisdom, profound spirituality, and the seamless integration of local

literary styles with accessible language. Research conducted during his canonization process confirmed a corpus of 102 writings, including 86 letters, five chronicles, six liturgical texts, 16 administrative documents, and eight spiritual treatises.

His poetic legacy is particularly notable, featuring three major works: *Oru Nalla Appante Chāvarul* (The Testament of a Good Father), *Anasthāsiāyude Rakthasākshyam* (The Martyrdom of Anastasia), and *Āthmānuthāpam* (Compunction of the Soul). Through these works, available via the Chāvara Library, he utilized the power of the written word to nurture the faith and cultural identity of the community.

St. Chāvara's extensive literary corpus is categorized into historical chronicles, poetic masterpieces, spiritual treatises, and administrative texts. Key works include:

- *Āthmānuthāpam* (Compunction of Heart): His most significant poetic achievement, written in the epic (*mahākāvya*) style. This autobiographical poem reflects on the lives of Jesus and Mary while interweaving his own spiritual journey. It is celebrated as the first work of mystical literature in the Malayalam language.
- *Maranaveettil Cholluvānulla Parvam* (Dirge): Comprising 1,162 verses, this poem was composed to be sung in homes during wakes. Through vivid illustrations and ten parables, it explores the Christian meaning of death, the necessity of a virtuous life, and the promise of the afterlife.
- *Anasthāsiayude Rakthasākshyam* (The Martyrdom of Anastasia): Recognized as the first minor epic (*Khandakāvyam*) in Malayalam, this narrative poem recounts the martyrdom of St. Anastasia. It was written in the popular *vanchippāttu* (boat song) rhythm to fortify the faith of the community during times of ecclesiastical schism.
- *Oru Nalla Appante Chāvarul* (Testament of a Loving Father): Originally a letter of counsel to the families of his home parish in Kainakary, this document serves as a

timeless instruction manual for Christian family life and the moral upbringing of children.

- *Mānnānam Nālāgamangal* (Mānnānam Chronicles): These detailed historical notes provide a daily record of monastic life, Church affairs, and 19th century Kerala society. They are regarded as the first formal chronicles in Malayalam literature, offering invaluable historical insights.
- *Dhyāna Sallāpangal* (Colloquies in Meditation): A profound collection of meditative notes and prayers, this work offers a window into his intimate spiritual experiences and mystical communion with God.

The literary beauty of St. Chāvara's writings lies in several aspects. His literary style is distinguished by several pioneering characteristics that revolutionized Malayalam spiritual literature.

1. *Simple and Accessible Language*: Eschewing the dense, Sanskritized Malayalam style, common among his contemporaries, St. Chāvara wrote in a clear, vernacular style. This ensured his teachings were easily understood and embraced by the common people.
2. *Integration of Local Culture and Style*: He masterfully adapted popular indigenous poetic forms, such as *pāna* and *vanchippāttu* (boat songs). By utilizing these familiar rhythms, he made profound spiritual and moral messages both engaging and culturally resonant for a broad audience.
3. *Autobiographical Reflection*: In works like Āthmānuthāpam and *Dhyāna Sallāpangal*, he seamlessly wove his personal life experiences and self-reflections into broader theological themes. This approach added a layer of authenticity and emotional depth that continues to resonate with readers today.
4. *Didactic and Narrative Clarity*: His writings possess a strong instructional quality, utilizing parables, stories, and real-

life incidents to simplify complex theological truths. This narrative clarity ensured his moral lessons were both attractive and inspiring.

5. *Prophetic Vision*: His literary corpus reflects a prophetic vision rooted in deep spirituality and humanism. By addressing social issues and personal piety with equal fervor, his work demonstrates a perfect balance between a contemplative life and social action. More information on his spiritual legacy can be found through the archives at CMI Generalate.

His personality was a remarkable blend of gentleness and iron will, reflecting a harmonious composite of profound contemplative spirituality and dynamic practical leadership. He was fundamentally a man of deep humility and unwavering obedience, traits he modelled after Christ's own example. This humility and obedience, however, coexisted with fierce determination and resilience, particularly while championing the marginalized or navigating ecclesiastical politics.

He possessed a naturally compassionate heart, evident in his efforts to feed the hungry and establish a system of universal education for all. Simultaneously, he was a visionary pragmatist - someone who could dream of a robust Catholic presence in Kerala and then systematically, as well as practically, build it through the establishment of monasteries, printing press, and schools. His demeanour was characterized by a quiet serenity, rooted in his absolute reliance on Divine Providence, which allowed him to face crises and, even death, without fear. He was an approachable, fatherly figure who inspired trust and confidence, balancing strict monastic discipline with an empathetic understanding of human frailties. This integrated personality of prayerful asceticism and outward-focused zeal is precisely what made his life such a powerful role model and inspiration.

Perfect Way of St. Chāvara

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

(Matthew 5:43-48)

"Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' No, 'if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink; for by so doing, you will heap burning coals upon his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

(Romans 12:19-21)

The command in Matthew 5:43-48 to "be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" is the pinnacle of the Sermon on the Mount. Theologically, this "perfection" (*teleios*) does not imply a lack of human error, but rather a *completeness of love*. It is a call to "*divine impartiality*" where the believer mirrors God's own character by extending grace to both the deserving and the undeserving. By commanding us to love our enemies, Jesus is asking for a *spiritual symmetry* with the Father, who provides the life-sustaining sun and rain to both the saint and the sinner. To reach this state is to achieve the highest form of maturity, where our internal peace is no longer a hostage to the external behaviour of others. By loving enemies and praying for persecutors, the believer participates in the very nature of God, who allows His sun to rise on the evil and the good alike.

This perfection requires a radical departure from the *Lex Talionis* (the law of proportional retaliation) and demands a radical *interior disarmament*. The "perfect way" requires the

believer to strip away the natural armour of resentment and the weapon of retaliation. While human justice seeks an "eye for an eye," Divine justice seeks the *restoration of the person*. The world operates on a *contractual love* - loving only those who love in return - the Gospel introduces a *covenantal love*. This is a love that remains steadfast regardless of the response it receives. To love an enemy is to see them through the eyes of the Creator, recognizing their dignity even when they act with malice. This impartial love acts as a "theological witness," proving that the believer is a true child of the Father, moved by a Spirit that transcends tribalism and self-defence. It is an act of "Divine Logic" that views the persecutor not as a target for anger, but as a soul in desperate need of the very grace we ourselves have received.

Complementing this, Romans 12:19-21 provides the practical methodology for this perfect love: the *rejection of vengeance and the introduction of the principle of sacrificial surrender*. St. Paul argues that vengeance belongs solely to God, not because God is vengeful, nor not claiming a right to be cruel but because only He has the perfect wisdom to judge and thus relieving the believer of the heavy burden of being a judge. By "stepping back" and refusing to retaliate, the believer makes room for God's grace to work. This is a profound act of trust, asserting that the spiritual order is governed by Providence rather than by the reactionary impulses of the ego. True theological perfection involves trusting in *Divine Sovereignty* - believing that God's justice is more complete than our own. When we refuse to strike back, we are not displaying weakness; we are demonstrating an "anointed restraint" that allows the Holy Spirit to intervene in the conflict.

The metaphor of "heaping burning coals" upon an enemy's head suggests that active goodness has a transformative, purifying power and it establishes a theology of *proactive mercy*. It is an invitation to *moral victory*, where evil is not merely resisted but is overcome by its opposite, goodness. It suggests that evil

is a vacuum that can only be filled, and thus extinguished, by the presence of active goodness. This is more than just "not doing harm"; it is the intentional "doing of grace." This *spiritual alchemy* transforms a moment of potential violence into a moment of redemption, using kindness as a tool to melt the «ice of enmity» in the adversary›s heart. This is the "*passive power*" of the Gospel; it absorbs the blow of the adversary and returns it as a blessing, thereby shaming the malice of the offender and potentially leading them to repentance.

Ultimately, these passages define the *ethics of the Kingdom* and teach that the *Christian victory* is not the defeat of a person, but the defeat of the evil spirit within a situation. To love an enemy is to participate in the *redemptive suffering* of Christ, who, while being unjustly accused, sought only the forgiveness of His accusers. They suggest that the highest moral achievement is not found in personal vindication or legal success, but in *active goodness*. To overcome evil with good is to manifest the victory of the Cross, where Christ conquered sin not through a display of force, but through a total surrender to love. For the follower of Christ, "perfection" is found in the ability to maintain a heart of "undivided charity" even when surrounded by the fires of hostility.

These scriptural mandates are not merely idealistic theories; they constitute a rigorous spiritual architecture for the human soul. Before exploring how these principles were historically realized in the life of St. Chāvara, it is essential to understand the specific pillars of this "Perfect Way." The following seven points distil the essence of the Gospel's call to move beyond reactive human nature and into the realm of Divine action, where the cycle of hostility is broken by the weight of a superior love.

The Seven Pillars of the Perfect Way:

1. Unconditional Love (Macro-Charity): The core principle is the extension of love far beyond the boundaries of

reciprocity or communal ties. By commanding prayer for persecutors and love for enemies, the Gospel replaces the "eye for an eye" ethic with a Covenantal Love that remains steadfast regardless of the treatment it receives.

2. Exemplary Behaviour (The Higher Standard): A superior quality of righteousness is demanded—one that visibly exceeds the "contractual" goodness of the world. A follower of God is distinguished not by average moral compliance, but by an Anointed Restraint and a lifestyle that serves as a living witness to a higher Kingdom.
3. Imitation of Divine Impartiality (Spiritual Symmetry): Believers are called to mirror God's "Macro-Mercy," which does not discriminate based on human merit. Just as the Father provides the life-sustaining sun and rain to both the just and the unjust, the believer's love must maintain a Spiritual Symmetry with the Father that is inclusive and unbiased.
4. The Pursuit of Moral Perfection (Holistic Maturity): This signifies a lifelong commitment to Holistic Perfection—a completeness of character where one's internal peace and charity are no longer hostages to external circumstances. It is the quest for a "mature heart" that reflects the undivided nature of the Father.
5. Moral Victory (The Strategic Triumph): True victory is achieved not by defeating an opponent, but by defeating the evil within a situation. By "heaping burning coals" of kindness, the believer uses spiritual alchemy to transform hostility into a moment of shame and potential repentance for the aggressor.
6. Rejection of Vengeance (Sacrificial Surrender): Personal retaliation is strictly replaced by a total surrender to divine sovereignty. By refusing to seek vengeance, the believer acknowledges that God is the only perfect Judge, thereby freeing the soul from the corrosive burden of bitterness and the desire for retribution.

7. Overcoming Evil with Active Goodness (Proactive Mercy): These advocates for a proactive rather than a merely reactive stance against wrongdoing. Instead of simply resisting or mirroring malice, the believer takes the initiative to meet the enemy's needs. By intentionally "doing grace"—feeding the hungry adversary or sheltering the persecutor—one ensures that mercy, not conflict, becomes the final word.

The life of St. Chāvara becomes a living testament to this Gospel when his theological convictions meet the trials of human conflict. This specific incident involving Māthan highlights how his holiness was not a cloistered virtue but an active, resilient charity that thrived even under the pressure of injustice. His actions prove that moral victory is achieved not by defeating one's opponent, but by overcoming evil with active goodness. Ultimately, this exemplary behaviour reveals his pursuit of moral perfection as a heart that mirrored the Father's unconditional love, making his life a powerful exegesis of the Word.

The steward of Mānnānam monastery, Māthan Mānjooran Kalapurackal, unjustly appropriated some of the monastery's properties. He was punished for this crime by the local civil court. Subsequently, using forged documents, he filed a lawsuit in the criminal court of Āleppey against St. Chāvara, seeking to humiliate him. St. Chāvara personally appeared before the court officials in the Church of Holy Cross at Āleppey, including judges, advocates, and notaries, all of whom were Hindu. After hearing the case, they declared St. Chāvara innocent, and the petitioner, Māthan, was heavily fined and punished. Furthermore, the presiding judge, a Hindu, dismissed the case as fraudulent after listening to St. Chāvara, while remarking, "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."

St. Chāvara made several attempts to befriend Māthan but in vain. In spite of these events, St. Chāvara, in his testament to the members of his Congregation, recommended that the superiors show special consideration for Māthan's family and support it in times of need. He further instructed them to "render as much help as possible to the family of Māthan Mānjooran Kalapurackal of the parish of Muttuchira. In so doing you will be imitating the disciples of Christ and setting a first model."

The incident involving Māthan serves as a historical masterpiece and the trial of St. Chāvara at the criminal court of Āleppey is the definitive historical proof of his holistic perfection. When Māthan turned from a thief into a malicious persecutor, filing forged lawsuits to humiliate the Saint, the stage was set for a purely human pursuit of justice. Yet, St. Chāvara's response was a living exegesis of divine impartiality and his heart remained anchored in covenantal love. Even after the Hindu judge recognized St. Chāvara's sanctity and Māthan's "gross wickedness," the St. Chāvara did not take satisfaction in the legal victory and he recognized that legal innocence was secondary to the spiritual obligation of seeking his brother's soul. So, he sought to befriend his accuser, demonstrating that his heart remained untouched by the "poison of vengeance."

St. Chāvara's proactive mercy reached its zenith in his written *Testament* where his perfection is most evident, where he transformed a personal injury into a communal mandate of mercy. By specifically instructing the Mānnānam monastery to "show special consideration" and "render as much help as possible" to Māthan's family, he moved from a passive rejection of vengeance to an *active goodness*; he practiced a *spiritual symmetry* with the Father. He understood that the "unjust" Māthan was still a child of the parish of Muttuchira whose family deserved the "sunlight" of the monastery's charity. He recognized that while Māthan had failed as a steward, his family remained a subject of God's care. In this act, St. Chāvara "heaped burning coals" of kindness, ensuring

that the monastery's response would be the "first model" of Christ-like behaviour for his Congregation. This was not a mere suggestion; it was a mandate to ensure that the *sacrificial surrender* he practiced in court became the permanent "first model" for his entire Congregation.

This incident reveals that St. Chāvara's "Perfect Way" was a total *interior disarmament*, a moral victory in its truest sense. St. Chāvara understood that his "perfection" depended not on his innocence before the criminal court of Āleppey, but on his charity toward the man who put him there. He refused to let the "gross wickedness" of the forged lawsuit dictate his internal state. By commanding his superiors to support Māthan in times of need, he ensured that the "House of Prayer" he built would also be a "*house of reconciliation*" and an agent of *active goodness* where the enemy is fed and the family of the persecutor is sheltered. He thus refused to let the cycle of litigation and hatred continue, choosing instead to anchor the future of the CMI congregation in a charity that "does not seek its own."

St. Chāvara's handling of the Māthan affair proves that he had fully integrated the commands of Matthew and Romans into his soul and became their *living exegesis*. He did not merely survive the persecution; he used it to set a timeless example of how a man of God should respond to injustice. His "Perfect Way" was to treat the one who sought his ruin as a brother in need of grace, thereby proving that the greatest miracle of a saint is the ability to love like God and remain *undivided* by injury in the face of human betrayal. His legacy teaches us that the highest court is the court of charity, and the only verdict that truly matters is the one that allows a person to say, "I have overcome evil with good."

The Virtue of Humility in St. Chāvara

And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

(Luke 1: 46-55)

In the *Magnificat* Mary provides the ultimate scriptural blueprint for the Christian virtue of humility. Her song is not merely a poem of praise, but a theological declaration that God's power is most perfectly manifested in those who acknowledge their own 'lowliness'.

1. The Decentring of the Self *("My soul magnifies the Lord"):*

The essence of humility is not self-deprecation, but the shifting of the focus from the 'I' to the 'Thou.' Mary begins her canticle by making her soul a magnifying lens for God's glory. A humble leader or believer does not seek to be the source of light but a reflection of it. In this state, humility becomes a form of spiritual transparency - where the person's own ego is sufficiently quieted that others see God through them.

2. Humility as Realism *("He has looked with favour on the lowliness of His servant"):*

Christian humility is rooted in truth - the truth of 'who we are' in relation to our Creator. Mary does not deny her blessedness; she acknowledges that "all generations will call me blessed." However, she immediately attributes this status to the "great things the Mighty One has done for me." Humility, therefore,

is the honest recognition that our talents and successes are gifts from God. It is the 'Level 5' balance of recognizing one's high calling while remaining anchored in the knowledge of one's humble origin.

3. The 'Holy Reversal' *("He has scattered the proud... lifted up the lowly"):*

The *Magnificat* outlines a 'Divine Economy' that is the opposite of worldly meritocracy. Pride is presented as a spiritual blindness that perceives the self as sufficient in itself. God 'scatters' those who are proud in their 'inmost thoughts' because their ego leaves no room for grace. God fills the 'hungry' (*those aware of their need for Him*) but sends the 'rich' (*those full of themselves*) away empty. In this context, humility is the 'emptiness' required to be filled by the Holy Spirit.

4. Radical Dependence on Divine Fidelity *("According to the promise He made"):*

Mary's humility is tied to her memory. She remembers the promises made to "Abraham and his descendants forever." A humble person is a person of memory; they recognize they are part of a much larger story of grace. They do not act as if the mission began with them or will end with them. This 'unprofitable servant' mentality allows a leader to work with intense 'professional will' (as Mary did in her *Fiat*) while trusting entirely in God's historical faithfulness.

5. Humility as the Foundation of Courage:

Mary's humility did not make her timid; it made her revolutionary. She speaks of the bringing down of rulers and the filling of the hungry. This reflects the 'steel spine' of Level 5 leadership. Because she was perfectly surrendered and so aligned to God's plan (*Similar is the case with Jesus at Gethsemane.* "Not my will, but Yours" Luke 22:42), she was granted the divine courage to stand at the foot of her Son's Cross. This proves that true Christian humility is the source of the greatest strength, for

when we are 'low' in our own eyes, we are empowered by the 'Mighty One'.

Humility is often misunderstood as a mandate to make ourselves small, deny our inherent talents, or cultivate a poor self-image. However, from a Catholic perspective, humility is not about self-diminishment; it is about living in the light of truth. It is an act of surrender—a letting go of pride and self-importance to create a vessel for God's grace. When we cease our attempts at self-exaltation, we allow God the space to raise us up. As Scripture promises in James 4:10, "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up."

In Catholic teaching, humility is the path to authenticity, allowing God to elevate us into His grace and glory. This perspective is rooted in five essential pillars: following the kenotic example of Christ, understanding humility as truth, actively resisting the vice of pride, opening the soul to transformative grace, and accepting divine exaltation.

a. ***The Christological Model:*** The life of Jesus Christ serves as the ultimate blueprint for this virtue. Though being in the very nature of God, Jesus 'emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant' (Philippians 2:7). Scripture affirms that precisely because of this profound self-emptying, 'God highly exalted Him' (Philippians 2:9). Catholic teaching thus views humility as the 'Way of Christ': a voluntary lowering of oneself in love and obedience, which paradoxically allows God to raise us into His eternal glory.

b. ***Humility as Truth:*** St. Teresa of Ávila famously stated, "Humility is walking in truth." This virtue does not require us to deny our gifts or pretend to be less than we are. Instead, it is the honest recognition that every facet of our existence—our life, abilities, and dignity—is an unmerited gift from God. Authentic humility is not self-hatred; it is a profound orientation of gratitude and an acknowledgment of our total dependence on the Creator.

c. ***Resistance to Pride:*** Humility stands in direct opposition to pride, the root of all sin. While pride asserts self-sufficiency and demands the highest seat, humility acknowledges the truthful reality: "Without God, I am nothing; with God, I can do all things." It is not about rendering oneself insignificant, but about recognizing our proper relational place before the Divine. By adopting this posture, we invite God to fulfil His promise to 'lift us up' (James 4:10).

d. ***The Foundation of Grace:*** The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that 'humility is the foundation of prayer' (CCC 2559). Only when we acknowledge that we do not know how to pray as we ought do we become receptive to the gift of God's Spirit (Romans 8:26). Scripture consistently affirms that God resists the proud but gives grace generously to the humble (1Peter 5:5). By relinquishing the need for self-exaltation, we create the spiritual capacity and space for God's grace to act within us.

e. ***The Dynamic of Exaltation:*** Catholic spirituality holds that authentic humility inevitably leads to exaltation—not through human effort, but through divine action. The Blessed Virgin Mary is the preeminent example of this dynamic: "He has looked upon His lowly servant... the Almighty has done great things for me" (Luke 1:48–49). Her profound humility provided the space for God to lift her up to the unique dignity of being the Mother of God and the Queen of Heaven.

In summary, humility is not the belittling of self, but the truthful acknowledgment that God is the sole source of our dignity, our gifts, and our destiny. When we stop striving to elevate ourselves, we find ourselves lifted by God into a participation in His own glory. *Humility is not making ourselves small, but allowing God to make us great in His way and in His time.*

The 'Litany of Humility":

A powerful tool for cultivating this virtue is the 'Litany of Humility.' This prayer, first published in the *Handbook of*

Prayers and attributed to Rafael Cardinal Merry del Val (1865–1930), offers a practical and profound pathway to understanding humility not as a weakness, but as a robust spiritual discipline.

- Jesus! meek and humble of heart, *Hear me.*
- From the desire of being esteemed, *Deliver me, Jesus.*
- From the desire of being loved, *Deliver me, Jesus.*
- From the desire of being extolled, *Deliver me, Jesus.*
- From the desire of being honored, *Deliver me, Jesus.*
- From the desire of being praised, *Deliver me, Jesus.*
- From the desire of being preferred to others, *Deliver me, Jesus.*
- From the desire of being consulted, *Deliver me, Jesus.*
- From the desire of being approved, *Deliver me, Jesus.*
- From the fear of being humiliated, *Deliver me, Jesus.*
- From the fear of being despised, *Deliver me, Jesus.*
- From the fear of suffering rebukes, *Deliver me, Jesus.*
- From the fear of being calumniated, *Deliver me, Jesus.*
- From the fear of being forgotten, *Deliver me, Jesus.*
- From the fear of being ridiculed, *Deliver me, Jesus.*
- From the fear of being wronged, *Deliver me, Jesus.*
- From the fear of being suspected, *Deliver me, Jesus.*
- That others may be loved more than I, *Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.*
- That others may be esteemed more than I, *Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.*
- That, in the opinion of the world, others may increase and I may decrease, *Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.*
- That others may be chosen and I set aside, *Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.*
- That others may be praised and I unnoticed, *Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.*

- That others may be preferred to me in everything, *Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.*
- That others may become holier than I, provided that I may become as holy as I should, *Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.*

This litany reveals three essential attributes of humility. First, you must be purified of *selfish desires.* Second, you must be purified of *selfish fears.* Third, *selfless desires must increase* in your heart. If you are willing to allow your desires and fears to become transformed by God, you will begin to discover a new freedom from the subtle tendencies of selfishness. The journey may be challenging, but the rewards are glorious.

The Purification of Selfish Desires:

Consider the following questions with complete honesty:

- Do you harbour a desire to be esteemed, loved, extolled, or honoured?
- Do you seek to be praised, preferred over others, consulted, or approved?

Unless you have already achieved a state of perfect sanctity, you will likely find that these desires remain active within. In fact, the common response is often: "Yes, I desire these things. Are they not 'good'? Why should I avoid them?" Many are surprised to learn that these inclinations can be rooted in a subtle form of selfishness.

In contemporary society, these desires are frequently viewed as healthy ideals to strive for rather than as manifestations of pride to be mitigated. Yet, we must ask:

- How does God perceive them?
- What is the spiritual truth hidden behind these cravings?

To paint a clear picture of authentic humility, let us examine each of these desires individually taking the lines from the litany of humility. *Please note:* As you progress, if a particular section resonates with or challenges you, I invite you to pause, reread it, and spend time in reflection before moving forward.

From the desire of being esteemed, deliver me Jesus:
In the secular world, gaining the esteem of others is frequently viewed as a metric for success, yet the spiritual danger lies not in the fact of being respected, but in the *desire* for that recognition. Within professional or daily endeavours, achieving success is often necessary and good; however, a humble heart must separate its personal identity from these outward achievements.

St. Mother Teresa serves as a preeminent example of this distinction; while she was globally esteemed by the king and the pauper alike, she remained exceptionally humble because she never acted for the sake of such fame and name for herself. Her radiant service was a by-product of love, not a calculated strategy to climb up the ladder of social prestige. Authentic humility, therefore, is found in a heart cleansed of the craving for esteem that it remains indifferent to whether it is praised or ignored.

To discern where your own identity is rooted, you must consider your response to either public acclaim or perceived failure. If the admiration of others is the foundation of your happiness, your peace will remain fragile and fleeting. If a lack of respect due to a perceived failure leads to despair and anger, it reveals an unhealthy attachment to your self-image. Our fallen nature tends to obsess over the opinions of others, but the humble person is liberated from this burden. While it is healthy to rejoice when others perceive authentic virtue in your soul, that recognition should never be the source of your sense of self-worth. True worth is found exclusively in God and in the reality of how He perceives you, independent of human affectations.

Ultimately, humility provides a profound spiritual freedom that makes one content with the truth as it exists in the mind of God. When one is free from the desire for esteem, criticism loses its power to wound or disturb. If a critic offers a valid insight, the humble person rejoices in the opportunity for growth; if the

criticism is meritless, it simply fails to affect their inner peace. Pride makes us slaves to the shifting tides of public opinion, but humility anchors the soul in a steadfast reality. By praying to be delivered from the desire for esteem, you are asking for the grace to be defined by God's love alone, allowing you to walk through life with a 'steel spine' of truth and a heart at rest.

From the desire of being loved, deliver me Jesus:

Do you want to be loved? Of course, you do! This is a natural desire and is central to your human nature. You were made to give and receive love. So why would you want to be freed from the desire of being loved? The answer requires a very subtle distinction. Love is not something that you can demand or expect. Love, if it is authentic, must be freely given and freely received. Therefore, it is good to desire authentic love, given freely and in a selfless way. However, the 'desire' for this form of love is not a selfish desire. It is not a desire that leads you to say, "I *want* your love because I *need* to be loved by you." Rather, it is a desire that leads you to say, "If you freely choose to offer your love to me…thank you! I am most humbled and grateful."

Authentic Christian love cannot be demanded, expected or required of another person. Therefore, when you pray to be delivered from the 'desire' of being loved, you are praying to be freed from a desire for 'selfish' love. Interestingly, if you have a selfish desire for the love of another, it can never be fulfilled. Selfishness simply cannot satisfy us. The only authentic way to enjoy the love of another is to first be purified of the desire for that love. Then, and only then, will love be experienced for what it is: *a freely given gift for which your only response is gratitude.*

In the reception of such a gift, it is normal for a person to allow their *unselfish* desire to receive the love of another. However, they will not depend upon it in a selfish way, demand it, or even expect it. Even among spouses, there must remain

a healthy detachment so that the other remains completely free from pressure to offer a true and pure love. Perhaps that is difficult to comprehend, but if you understand that true love must be freely given, then you will better understand that freedom from the *desire for love* actually helps to free others to offer you, their love. Only when love is freely offered to you, and not demanded by you, will you be in a position to open your whole being to receive another's gift of love. Love that is freely offered to you by another will even consume and satisfy your healthy and holy desires. However, your desires will not attempt to demand this form of love from another. Instead, your desires will only rejoice in this form of love.

From the desire of being extolled, honored, praised, deliver me Jesus: Beyond the mere desire for esteem lies the craving to be extolled, honoured, and praised—a desire not just for respect, but for its public proclamation. This reveals a deeper attachment to a manufactured public image, where self-worth becomes tethered to the spoken opinions of others. Those who fall into this trap become emotionally dependent on external validation; they feel their value increase with flattery and decrease with criticism. This dependency creates a heavy spiritual burden, manifesting as anxiety, fear, and a constant worry over how one is perceived. Ultimately, seeking public honour leads to a superficial existence where happiness is as fragile and fleeting as the applause that sustains it.

Furthermore, the pursuit of being extolled often produces a disingenuous façade that is easily detected by others, frequently resulting in the very disrespect the seeker hopes to avoid. Such praise, when sought for selfish reasons, rarely rises above empty flattery and lacks the weight of truth. In contrast, the humble person is capable of hearing praise without becoming enslaved by it. They do not rejoice in the spotlight of public acclaim; rather, they rejoice in the authentic act of love being offered by the speaker. For the humble soul, joy is in the goodness of the

other person and the shared connection of love, rather than in the specific compliments received.

The Blessed Mother provides the perfect model for receiving honour with humility. When Elizabeth extolled her as 'blessed among women', Mary did not shrink from the truth of the statement, nor had she travelled to Elizabeth seeking such recognition. Because humility is rooted in truth, Mary accepted the praise and immediately redirected it toward its source. Her response was not one of self-aggrandizement, but a song of praise to the Almighty: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord." By attributing the 'great things' done for her to God's grace, she demonstrated that the truly humble can be called 'blessed' by all generations without ever losing their focus on the lowliness of their own servanthood.

From the desire of being preferred to others, Jesus deliver me:

The desire to be preferred over others is a familiar struggle, often first observed on school playgrounds where children wait anxiously to be 'picked first' for a team. In that setting, the longer a child waits, the more they grapple with feelings of exclusion and diminished self-worth. While this is an understandable stage of development for children still learning to navigate their egos, maturing in the spiritual life requires us to outgrow these tendencies. True maturity involves rising above the need for external validation and shedding the insecurities that make us feel rejected or less important when we are not the primary choice of others.

At the core of this struggle is a distorted sense of identity: when we crave preference, we are essentially viewing our value through the lens of another person's favour. If we are chosen, we feel significant; if we are bypassed, we descend into sadness or a sense of worthlessness. This is a false and precarious measure of human dignity. The truth is that our worth is never contingent upon being preferred by others, nor is it diminished by their rejection. The only definitive measure of our life and

value is the truth of who we are in the eyes of God—a reality that remains steadfast regardless of shifting social status.

When the humble person is sought out or preferred over others, they do not interpret this as a reason for self-exaltation or a boost to their self-image. Instead, they view being 'picked' as a specific call to service and a 'duty of love.' Rather than basking in the status of being chosen, they recognize a humble responsibility to give themselves more fully to the task and to the people who requested their presence. In this way, humility transforms a potentially proud moment into an opportunity for selfless ministry, ensuring that their focus remains on the good of others rather than the gratification of the ego.

From the desire of being consulted, Jesus deliver me:

When someone seeks your counsel on a difficult matter, the experience can be deeply affirming; however, the humble person recognizes such a request as a 'holy burden.' This term implies a profound responsibility to enter into another›s struggle with clarity and care. Viewed as a sacred duty, the act of being consulted shifts the focus away from self-gratification and toward the needs of the one seeking help. In this context, the 'burden' is a wonderful weight of accountability, requiring the counsellor to offer their mind and heart as a selfless instrument of God's truth and mercy.

Conversely, if one seeks out or craves the role of a consultant to bolster their own sense of importance, the act is transformed from charity into a manifestation of pride. In such instances, the consultation becomes a selfish pursuit of status rather than a sincere act of love for a neighbour. To live a life of authentic, humble service, one's guiding principle must always be the welfare of the other. When consultation is rooted in charity rather than ego, it transcends self-affirmation, resulting in a transformative encounter where both the giver and the receiver benefit from a shared commitment to the truth.

From the desire of being approved, Jesus deliver me: Building on the previous reflections, the desire for approval must be meticulously detached from one's sense of identity. To grow in humility, you must transition from seeking the validation of peers to seeking only the approval of God. When you encounter failure, the humble response is to rejoice in its discovery, viewing it as a necessary catalyst for conversion. Conversely, when you succeed in fulfilling the Divine Will, your satisfaction should be rooted solely in your union with God, rather than the applause that may accompany your actions.

It is a subtle but vital truth that one should not immediately internalize the approval of others. While this may seem dismissive, it serves to anchor the soul in what is objectively true rather than what is popular. For the humble soul, the convictions of others—whether positive or negative—serve primarily as a mirror for an examination of conscience. If a sin is pointed out, the humble heart rejoices in the truth and strives for amendment; if praise is offered for something that does not align with God's grace, the humble person proceeds with caution, refusing to allow false approval to enter their heart.

Ultimately, the experience of being approved or disapproved should lead you to turn your gaze toward the welfare of the other and the absolute truth in the mind of God. When the words of another are true, they should be met with gratitude as a shared act of love. When the assessment is false, it should be viewed as a compassionate opportunity to guide that person back toward the light of truth. In this persistent act of selflessness, the humble soul finally discovers its true identity, illuminated by the light of Christ rather than the shifting shadows of human opinion.

Purification of Unhealthy Fear: The first segment of the Litany of Humility addresses the purification of pride as it manifests in selfish desires. The second segment, however, pivots toward the purification of pride as it relates to unhealthy fear. While

it may not be immediately obvious that certain anxieties are rooted in pride, or that humility acts as a catalyst to cast out such fear, this is precisely the reality. Recognizing this fact provides a powerful motivation for growth in spiritual life: to grow in humility is to gain ultimate freedom from the burden of fear.

Humility serves as the remedy for fear because unhealthy anxiety typically flourishes in the soil of self-absorption. When our focus is turned inward, we become excessively preoccupied with our own status, safety, and image, leading to spiritual disturbances such as worry, paranoia, and anger. By decentering the ego, humility breaks this cycle of introspection and opens the soul to a more stable, God-centered peace.

It is important, however, to distinguish these anxieties from 'healthy fear,' such as the natural instinct for self-preservation one feels when standing at the edge of a cliff. This form of fear is a gift of nature that acts as a safeguard against physical harm. In contrast, the fears addressed in the Litany are those motivated by a misplaced sense of self-importance. To grow in humility, we must seek to identify and eradicate these selfish fears, allowing the soul to rest securely in the truth of God's providence rather than the fragile defenses of the ego.

From the fear of being humiliated, Jesus, deliver me:

Naturally, no one desires to be humiliated; yet, when viewed through the lens of grace, we should not fear its occurrence. Humiliation is undeniably painful, and we are called to offer those enduring it the utmost compassion and care. However, on a profound spiritual level, these experiences serve as unparalleled opportunities for growth. As St. Faustina noted, "Nothing is better for the soul than humiliations" because they act as a purifying fire, stripping away the ego's attachment to earthly validation. This is a difficult truth to live, as it requires us to abandon the false idols of status that our fallen nature holds so dear.

It is essential to distinguish that humiliation is not a good in itself; rather, it is a cross that disposes the soul toward either holiness or resentment. When we choose holiness in the face of humiliation, we relinquish the need for human esteem and anchor our identity solely in God as our only source of dignity. This process of detachment is a rigorous lesson in spiritual maturity. If this remains difficult to comprehend, one should prayerfully reflect on the interior fears that govern life, specifically the fear of being shamed, and ask for the insight to see how this fear acts as a barrier to true spiritual freedom.

A helpful way to visualize this freedom is to observe the contrast between an innocent child and an egotistic adult. The child, lacking an overdeveloped ego, is largely incapable of feeling humiliated and thus enjoys a profound, uninhibited freedom. Conversely, a person who reacts with intense anger or despair when shamed reveals how much they are enslaved by the opinions of others. By striving for a childlike heart, we become immune to the power of humiliating circumstances. This freedom allows us to keep our eyes fixed steadily on the Lord, ensuring that our peace is never dictated by the attempts by others to diminish us.

From the fear of being despised, suffering rebukes or being calumniated, ridiculed or wronged, Jesus, deliver me:

To be despised, rebuked, calumniated, or wronged is not virtuous in itself; indeed, such treatment is often the direct result of another's sin, and no one has the right to mistreat you. However, the spiritual challenge lies in refusing to fear these experiences. Virtue is found in the reaction to mistreatment rather than the act itself. While a person lacking humility allows the hatred or false accusations of another to abrogate their peace, the exceptionally humble soul remains unperturbed. To receive harsh treatment and respond with genuine charity requires more than just the absence of pride; it requires a profound, abiding humility that liberates the heart from the oppressive fear of how one is perceived or treated by others.

Given our inherent human weakness, it is understandable that most people struggle to hold their composure in the face of rebukes or calumny. We must therefore exercise compassion toward those who react with anger when mistreated, rather than judging their pain. The goal of spiritual life is to move toward a place where we can respond to all harshness with forgiveness, but the essential first step is to overcome the fear of such persecution. By eradicating the fear of being wronged, we strip the persecutor of their power to dictate our internal state, allowing us to remain steadfast in charity even when faced with injustice.

Jesus Christ serves as the perfect model of this profound humility. Standing before Caiaphas and those who mocked Him, He never permitted their hatred to erode His peace or their falsehoods to derail Him from the path of virtue. Similarly, the Christian martyrs throughout history provide a radical example of this freedom; many viewed their persecutors as instruments of God sent to facilitate their final purification. This level of humility—viewing an enemy's malice as an opportunity for grace—requires a total surrender to God. It is a transformative state where the soul is so securely anchored in the Divine that no earthly ridicule or wrong can shake its foundation.

From the fear of being forgotten, Jesus, deliver me:

When an individual is 'forgotten', the natural tendency is to seek recognition or demand attention. While this reaction is common, the spiritual ideal is to achieve a state of detachment where one is liberated from the fear of being overlooked. We are created to both give and receive love, and receiving the affection of others is a profound gift. However, when that love is absent, the humble person does not succumb to despair or resentment. Instead, they turn to God as their singular and sufficient source of comfort. By rooting their identity in the Divine, they find a stability that human neglect cannot undermine, allowing them to remain at peace even when the world fails to take notice.

Conversely, it is essential to recognize how the humble person responds when they are remembered and loved. They do not cling to this affection as a necessary requirement for their fulfillment or self-worth. Rather, they receive thoughtfulness as a 'freely given gift' that directs their attention toward the goodness of the giver. Their joy stems from witnessing the selfless love active in another's heart, rather than the ego-boost of being noticed. This healthy exchange of giving and receiving draws both parties into the inner life of the Trinity, where love is a shared participation in God's heart rather than a transaction based on need.

Ultimately, the humble soul realizes that they do not have an inherent 'right' to the love of another—not even to the love of God. Authentic love must always be a free gift; if it were deserved or demanded, it would cease to be love at all. The Little Flower – St. Therese of Lisieux – uses the parable, in her autobiography, of herself being a ball in the hands of a 'playful' Child Jesus, Who plays with the ball for some time and then loses interest and remains oblivious of its very existence; yet she is content happily waiting for Him to set his eyes on her at His own sweet time. This is an example of the aforementioned mentality. This realization provides a radical freedom: if love is taken away and one is forgotten, the humble person continues to love without bitterness. Paradoxically, it is only by being free from the fear of being forgotten that we are properly disposed to receive love in its purest form. By releasing the demand for attention, we become capable of truly appreciating the gift of being remembered whenever it is freely offered.

From the fear of being suspected, Jesus, deliver me:

The fear of being suspected, whether the suspicion is justified or not, is a particularly arduous affliction to overcome. Our natural inclination is to respond defensively or to lash out in an attempt to protect our reputation. While legitimate self-defense can sometimes be a duty, the spiritual goal is to conquer the

paralyzing fear that often accompanies such scrutiny. A humble response begins with a quiet examination of conscience: if the suspicion is accurate, we should rejoice at the opportunity for correction; if it is false, we should still find value in the clarity gained through self-reflection. In either case, the humble person responds with the truth, delivered with charity and detachment.

One must strive to remain undisturbed by the erroneous judgments of others. If a suspicion is false, it possesses no objective power and should, therefore, have no effect on one's inner peace. However, living this truth is far more challenging than discussing it, as it requires a radical shift in focus from human opinion to divine reality. By refusing to be put off by the suspicions of others, we anchor our identity in a place that the errors and biases of the world cannot reach.

Ultimately, the humble soul receives even false suspicion with a peaceful confidence and courage. This difficult experience provides a unique opportunity to detach from the weight of worldly approval and embrace the truth of God more completely. This process builds a resilient character and a profound, humble dependence on God alone. In this freedom, the individual is empowered to move forward with peace of mind, prepared to face life's many challenges with a spirit that is both unbreakable and anchored in the light of truth.

- ***The Full Embrace of Selfless Desires:*** To achieve the perfection of humility, it is not enough to simply rid oneself of the selfish desires and unhealthy fears; these represent merely the baseline of spiritual maturation. The true height of humility is reached when one cultivates a proactive, holy yearning for its opposite virtues—traits that foster a radical selflessness and a constant orientation toward the welfare of others. When the struggle against pride is replaced by a genuine thirst for humility, the character undergoes a profound transformation. At this stage, humility is no longer an arduous battle of the will but a source of deep, inner satisfaction and joy.

The perfection of humility is the essential precursor to the perfection of love. Just as the fullness of charity is found in the singular desire to love another, the fullness of humility is found when the soul's greatest desire is to remain in a state of truthful lowliness before God. In this elevated state, the humble soul wholeheartedly embraces its identity with every fiber of its being. Let us now examine the qualities of a soul that has transcended the mere avoidance of pride to reach this joyful, total embrace of a humble life.

That others may be loved and esteemed more than I, Jesus grant me the grace to desire it:

To achieve the perfection of humility, one must cultivate a selfless longing for others to be blessed with love and esteem—even more than oneself. This aspiration does not stem from a denial of one's own need for love, but from a heart so oriented toward the neighbor that it finds its greatest fulfillment in their exaltation. Ironically, while a holy person may indeed be loved and esteemed by many, the key to their character lies in the fact that they no longer seek this for themselves. By making the welfare of others your singular focus, you undergo a profound interior transformation, replacing the narrow constraints of the ego with a boundless, outward-looking charity.

There is a profound spiritual peace in this displacement of self-interest: when you cease to worry about your own recognition, you realize that God himself desires every blessing for you. You no longer need to exhaust your energy pursuing personal validation because you trust that God will provide for your emotional and spiritual needs in His perfect timing. By surrendering the pursuit of self-advancement, you allow Divine Providence to become the sole guardian of your dignity, freeing you to invest your life entirely and solely in the service and elevation of those around you.

To practically grow in this virtue, you must intentionally examine your conscience and redirect your desires. Consider

the people in your daily life—including those who have caused you pain—and consciously choose to desire their happiness and success more than your own. Letting your desires be reordered in this selfless way is far more beneficial for your soul than any amount of self-promotion. In the end, by championing the good of others, you discover a deeper satisfaction and a more resilient identity than the ego could ever provide.

That, in the opinion of the world, others may increase and I may decrease, Jesus grant me the grace to desire it:

It remains a transformative spiritual truth that the shifting 'opinions of the world' possess no objective weight; what truly matters is the reality of the soul before God. Fostering a desire for others to increase while you decrease is a powerful exercise in spiritual liberation. This desire does not merely free you from the craving for worldly esteem; it expands your heart to hope that the world becomes a more virtuous place, characterized by a universal respect for the dignity of every person. By prioritizing the recognition and success of others over your own, you contribute to a culture of goodness that transcends selfish ambition.

It is essential to remain detached from how the world responds to your humility. While a selfless person often earns natural respect, the world may also respond with hostility, as Jesus warned would happen to His followers. Regardless of the outcome, your goal remains steadfast: to desire that others be loved and respected more than yourself. This outward focus prevents the ego from becoming the center of your universe and ensures that your peace is anchored in the progress of the Kingdom rather than the fluctuation of your own popularity.

St. John the Baptist serves as the preeminent model for this holy desire. Despite his immense popularity and the consequent certainty of being exalted by the people, he pointed away from himself towards Christ at the very moment Jesus appeared, declaring, "He must increase; I must decrease" (John

3:30). John was content to be the 'voice crying in the desert' as foretold by Prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 40:3), finding his fulfillment in the fact that Jesus was being recognized and loved. Oddly enough, it was this very act of self-effacement and his refusal to claim the spotlight that fostered enduring admiration for him. By desiring the exaltation of Christ more than his own, John achieved a greatness that worldly ambition could never attain.

That others may be chosen and I set aside, praised and I unnoticed, preferred to me in everything, Jesus grant me the grace to desire it:

To achieve a radical degree of selflessness, one must cultivate the holy desire to be 'set aside' so that others may be chosen, or to remain 'unnoticed' while others are praised. This level of humility involves a deliberate reordering of the priorities, where we actively prefer the advancement and recognition of our neighbor to our own. By spending our energy on the exaltation of others rather than on our own status, we break the chains of the ego and enter into a state of profound spiritual freedom.

While these desires may initially seem difficult to attain—or even foolish in a world obsessed with self-promotion—surprisingly they are the keys to our true fulfillment. The natural resistance we feel, manifested in the urge to be preferred or highlighted, is a remnant of an underdeveloped spiritual life. In reality, desiring that others be chosen and praised before us is what makes us authentically human. We were created for self-giving love, and it is only by seeking the good of others in all things that we become the persons God intended us to be.

Ultimately, this outward-looking persona represents love in its purest and most transformative form. Paradoxically, by choosing to go unnoticed and preferring the success of others, we do more for the health of our own souls than any amount of self-advancement could ever achieve. In this selfless exchange, we find that the 'good' we sought for ourselves through pride

was a mere shadow, while the joy we discover through the exaltation of others is, in fact, a participation in the very life of God.

That others may become holier than I, provided that I may become as holy as I should, Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it:

This final aspiration of the Litany contains a vital qualifier: '… provided that I may become as holy as I should.' This is a profound recognition of our universal call to perfection. By praying this, we are essentially saying, 'Lord, bring me to the fullness of sanctity, but let my deepest longing be that others reach that same perfection even more than I.' Such a desire is the ultimate expression of selflessness at the level of the spirit. It shifts the focus from a self-centered pursuit of 'purity' to a communal hope for the salvation and sanctification of all.

The surprising element of this desire is that in seeking the holiness of others, you become exceptionally holy yourself—often without even realizing it. True sanctity is never found in a mirror, nor is it achieved by a narcissistic admiration of one's own spiritual progress. Rather, holiness is the by-product of turning one's entire attention toward the welfare of the neighbor. When your heart is consumed by the desire for others' spiritual greatness, your own soul is perfected in the process.

By making the holiness of others your primary concern, you fulfill the law of love in its most refined state. You stop striving for a 'trophy' of personal sanctity and instead begin to participate in God's own desire for the world. In this radical act of self-renunciation, you achieve the very goal you ceased to obsess over, discovering that the height of holiness is simply a heart that beats entirely for the good of others.

Understanding the virtue of humility within the framework of a leader figure who exhibits both fierce will at the professional level and a profound personal humility offers compelling examples of transformative leadership. Such individuals demonstrate a remarkable dedication to the success

of their organization, often described as having a 'steel spine' of professional resolve. However, they temper this drive with a 'humble heart' that prioritizes the collective good over personal recognition. By viewing their contributions not as individual accomplishments but as part of a larger purpose, they embody the principle that true leadership involves the ability to decrease self-focus so that the well-being and dignity of others can increase. This approach highlights that impactful leadership is often rooted in the purification of selfish desires and a total commitment to the welfare of others, proving that leaders who are anchored in humility and with a focus on significant outcomes can become a steady and transformative force.

Now, let us delve into the life of St. Chāvara based on our discussions on the nuances of a humble soul. We can see the unfolding of the attitude enshrined in the Litany of Humility quite succinctly in the life and activities of the 'Star of the east' – St. Chāvara.

Personal Humility with a Servant's Heart: St. Chāvara consistently demonstrated the qualities of a humble servant of God and His people. He actively avoided personal glory, accepting higher positions only out of obedience to God's will and the needs of the Church. He attributed success to divine guidance and kept his co-workers in the limelight, almost oblivious of his own lion's share of contributions. He embraced simplicity, adhering strictly to community rules and a life of frugal austerity even when old or sick, always seeking permission for any minor deviation from the Rule. Furthermore, his autobiographical poem, *Āthmānuthāpam* (Compunction of the Soul), reflects a deep sense of personal shortcomings, demonstrating profound accountability and openness to correction.

Professional Will with an Unshakeable Resolve: This deep humility did not equate to weakness. St. Chāvara exhibited a fierce determination and an indomitable will to achieve

his God-entrusted mission. He demonstrated courage by pioneering social reforms, challenging caste-based social bans to ensure that even the 'untouchables' had access to education, including Sanskrit studies, which was a revolutionary step at the time. During the serious threat to Catholic unity posed by the Roccos schism in 1861, he provided strong, effective leadership as the Vicar General, thwarting the intrusion and saving the Syro-Malabar Church from division. He insisted on high standards, rigorously observing religious discipline, rules, and community life, setting a perfect model for those under his authority and pushing the community toward excellence. He relentlessly pursued his vision for the establishment of the first indigenous religious Congregations for men (CMI) and women (CMC), seeing these foundations as vital for the Church's renewal, even when faced with significant setbacks and a lack of initial support.

The Transformative Impact: St. Chāvara's life shows how the blend of humility and resolute determination results in a transformative leader. His life was a dynamic harmony of 'prayer and action, solitude and companionship' that left a lasting legacy. He acted as an effective educational reformer through his *Pallikkudam* movement, which attached schools to every church, and the *Pidiyari* scheme, which collected rice daily for poor students› midday meals, transforming literacy and social welfare in Kerala, an impact felt even today. As a spiritual leader, he founded religious Congregations that continue his mission and provided guidance for family life, emphasizing prayer and virtues, thus transforming countless lives and families. St. Chāvara embodied the principle that a leader with a humble heart can possess a steel spine, resulting in enduring greatness and widespread positive change.

In conclusion, the life of St. Chāvara serves as a living synthesis of the Litany of Humility and the Biblical mandate of the missionary disciple, demonstrating that true greatness is achieved through the total displacement of the ego. By mastering

the 'unprofitable servant' spirituality, he navigated a minefield of social and ecclesiastical 'weeds' with an undisturbed heart, viewing his monumental achievements not as personal triumphs but as the simple fulfillment of a 'holy duty.' His radical desire that others 'increase' through education and spiritual empowerment, while he himself remained 'unnoticed' in his own estimation, provides a timeless blueprint for a true disciple of Jesus. Ultimately, St. Chāvara proves that when a heart is anchored in the truth of God and a life is defined by selfless service, a person becomes an unstoppable force for social transformation and a radiant witness to the beauty of divine love.

Called and Anointed

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

(Luke 4:16-21)

This passage, often called Jesus' Nazareth Manifesto, serves as a powerful leadership model, illustrating that effective leadership is defined by a divine calling and a commitment to serving a purpose far greater than personal ambition. The passage emphasizes that genuine leaders are not self-appointed but 'anointed' and 'called' to a higher goal of transformation and service.

The passage begins by establishing the leader's consistent character and engagement with their community. Jesus enters the synagogue 'as was his custom' (Luke 4:16). A key leadership quality demonstrated here is *faithfulness*—regularly engaging with the community and respecting established traditions before introducing change. By standing up to read from the scroll of Isaiah, he assumes a position of responsibility and authority within that context. The selection of a specific, intentional passage rather than a random reading highlights the leadership quality of *vision* and *purpose*—knowing precisely the message that needs to be delivered to the audience.

The core of the passage explicitly defines the source and scope of this leadership mandate: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me" (Luke 4:18). This

concept of being 'anointed' signifies that true leadership is divinely sanctioned, not merely a secular or political position. It implies a sacred trust and an empowerment that comes from a higher source. The leader is 'called' to a specific, high-minded goal—a mission of radical empathy and justice that prioritizes the marginalized: bringing good news to the poor, freedom to captives, sight to the blind, and release to the oppressed. These goals require the leadership qualities of *compassion*, *courage*, and a *commitment to liberation*, moving beyond maintaining the status quo to actively transforming unjust systems.

Finally, Jesus demonstrates the essential leadership quality of *decisiveness* and *execution*. After reading the extensive list of goals, he sits down and declares, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). A leader's calling is not just about articulating a noble vision or having a divine anointing; it is about intentional action and execution in the present moment. This moment transforms the prophetic text into an immediate reality, challenging all aspiring leaders to turn their own high goals and callings into tangible, impactful achievements that bring about 'the year of the Lord's favour' - a time of restoration, equity, and holistic well-being for the community.

St. Chāvara exemplified leadership as a profound response to a specific divine *calling* or vocation, rather than a pursuit of personal ambition. His leadership was anchored in a deep sense of duty he felt compelled to fulfil for the betterment of the Church and society. This internal compulsion provided him with a clear, prophetic vision that was fundamentally apostolic in nature - focused on spreading the faith and serving the people - and remarkably authentic in its realization through concrete actions and institutions.

The authenticity of this 'call' was tested during a critical juncture in his life. At one point, facing immense challenges and perhaps seeking a different kind of spiritual solitude, St.

Chāvara contemplated retreating for *vācha vanavāsam* (remain in solitude and contemplation or hermitage). However, when the Vicar Apostolic intervened and specifically instructed him to remain active within his community, he experienced a pivotal moment of discernment. He recognized that his true 'call' was not to solitary contemplation, but to active, communal leadership and service. Heeding the directives of his superiors as a confirmation of God's will, he chose to 'come down' from the abstract notion of retreat and engage directly with the needs of the people.

This decision, driven by clarity in his 'call,' marked the beginning of his most impactful work. It was after abandoning the idea of isolation that St. Chāvara undertook many wonderful things for the betterment of the Church and people of God. His ability to discern and recommit to his primary 'call' allowed him to channel his spiritual energy into practical, systemic transformations that left a lasting legacy on the socio-religious landscape of Kerala.

St. Chāvara's leadership was characterized by a profound sense of being 'anointed'—implying divine sanction and a recognition that his inherent qualities were specifically suited for the unique role he was meant to fulfil. He was chosen for a mission that transcended ordinary human appointment. This anointing was evident not in a desire for authority, but in his exceptional capacity to serve and innovate in ways that fundamentally uplifted his community and the Church in India.

A remarkable characteristic of his anointed leadership was his 'reluctant' attitude towards power and high positions. Unlike those who seek leadership for prestige or control, St. Chāvara approached authority with a deep sense of humility and detachment. His focus remained steadfastly on the immediate needs of others and the practicalities of serving his community, rather than being served or accumulating hierarchical power. This reluctance underscored the authenticity of his calling;

his leadership was a burden of responsibility accepted out of obedience and love, rather than a coveted status. This divinely sanctioned approach allowed him to implement lasting, impactful changes in the society. These actions were the fruit of an anointed life: a leader chosen and empowered by a higher purpose, whose humility and servant-leadership transformed challenges into opportunities for widespread communal flourishing.

On 9 May 1861 the Chaldean bishop Thomas Roccos from Baghdad arrived in Kochi without authorization from the Holy Father. Very soon the Syrian parishes one after another went after him. Out of the total 154 parishes, 86 fully and 30 partially followed him!

The Prior immediately set to work to convince the people that Bishop Roccos had no authorization from the Holy Father, and to persuade him to stop his destructive efforts in Kerala and return to his country. Through correspondence with Rome for direct information about the Chaldean bishop, gently and peacefully dealing with him and his supporters, and in the spirit of a good shepherd winning the confidence of his own people and lovingly guiding the strayed ones back to the sheepfold, he settled the issue within ten months. It was a matter of hard work for the Prior and his confreres. There were times when his own life was at risk. The rival group also tried their best, even offering him bishopric, to win him over to their side. But he remained steadfast in his commitment to the Church and loyal to the legitimate authority. His only concern was the unity of the Catholic Church and obedience to the lawful superiors.

Finally, on 10 March 1862, in a truly Christian manner Bishop Roccos was sent back to his patriarch. After getting reconciled with the Church, he quietly led a retired life. Soon after the departure of Bishop Roccos, by the constructive work of the Prior and his confreres, most of the separated parishes were brought back and almost complete unity was restored.

"Holy Father Pope Pius IX, gloriously reigning, on hearing about the stability of Chāvara's faith and about his zeal for saving the Christians from schism, wrote to him a letter of high praise and satisfaction."

St. Chāvara assessed the 'Roccos affair' not necessarily as a formal schism in the full theological sense, but rather a 'religious quarrel' (*veda-kalāpam*) and a 'matter of misery' (*dhuritham*). His vehement opposition stemmed from his fundamental belief in the supreme value of obedience to legitimate Church superiors. He was convinced that Bishop Thomas Roccos had arrived in the region against the Holy Father's direct order and was refusing to submit to the local ordinary, Archbishop Baccinelli. For St. Chāvara, individuals persuaded to follow Roccos were misled, prompting the committed pastor to feel duty-bound to rescue them from potential spiritual danger.

Moreover, the Prior believed deeply that unbroken union with the Pope and the ordinaries appointed by him was essential for salvation and the integrity of the Church. The Roccosian movement posed a direct threat to this unity, clearly paving the way for a definitive schism, if it had not already reached that point. St. Chāvara was determined to prevent this misfortune from befalling the Syro-Malabar Church. His response was rooted entirely in pastoral concern and a commitment to preserving the faith and unity of the community.

Early biographers, including Fathers Leopold and Kuriakose Porukkara, universally praise the effectiveness and pastoral concern with which St. Chāvara combated the movement. Porukkara highlighted how St. Chāvara, acting as Vicar General for Syrian churches during those stormy days, utilized his influence, eloquent sermons, and virtuous life to save many people from falling into the 'abyss of schism' and salvaging numerous churches from the clutches of the partisans. Porukkara offered a powerful analogy: just as Noah's Ark saved humanity during the flood, it is reasonable to believe that

without Father Prior and his religious community, all Syrian churches might have been lost to schism.

The conflict surrounding Bishop Roccos significantly intensified the tension and agony experienced by St. Chāvara. The initial plot by the supporters of Roccos to seize control of Mānnānam Monastery by force and turn it into the bishop's residence created a direct threat to St. Chāvara's spiritual home and community. Despite suggestions to seek police protection, St. Chāvara's steadfast reliance on divine providence and St. Joseph for protection meant he faced these threats without seeking secular intervention. His distress deepened when Roccos issued an abusive letter on 24 June 1861 threatening St. Chāvara with excommunication, followed by a public notice cautioning the faithful against associating with the Prior and his community.

This public condemnation resulted in widespread humiliation and oppression, particularly painful as it came from priests and deacons who had been educated at the monastery's seminary. The pressure mounted as Jacobites and Protestants joined in the threats to forcibly expel the monks. Amidst this turmoil, St. Chāvara experienced profound anguish but maintained a remarkable absence of hatred or ill-feeling towards his opponents. His agony stemmed from the spiritual danger he perceived for those misled. Ultimately, after Roccos admitted his lack of papal authorization, it was St. Chāvara who, following the Archbishop's directive, painstakingly organized the logistics for the safe return journey of Roccos, waiting hours at the harbour—a final act demonstrating a shepherd's deep, albeit pained, commitment to peace and order within the Church.

The St. Thomas Christians of Malabar, eager for a bishop of their own rite, greeted Archbishop Thomas Roccos and his companions with great enthusiasm upon their arrival in Kochi on 09 May 1861. Roccos claimed he was sent by the East Syrian Patriarch of Babylon with the consent of Pope Pius IX, a claim

initially accepted by many local leaders. Father Chāvara, who deeply loved his community under the jurisdiction of the Vicariate of Varāpuzha, became concerned about a potential split within the Church. He proactively issued a circular letter to all parishes and monasteries, urging caution regarding the newly arrived Chaldean Bishop. His concern was formalized when he was appointed Vicar General of the St. Thomas Christians on 08 June 1861, empowering him to address the developing crisis.

To ascertain the truth, Father Chāvara wrote a crucial letter to Pope Pius IX on 19 June 1861. The papal reply, dated 05 September 1861, with the letter *Perlibentes vestras,* Pope Pius IX officially communicated to Chāvara and other priests that Bishop Roccos reached Malabar according to the arbitrary decision of the Chaldean Patriarch, against the will of the Pope, despite his order not to interfere in the ecclesiastical affairs of Malabar in any manner. This letter was sent in Latin and Syriac languages and the Pope had instructed the Patriarch to recall him. Armed with this official confirmation, Father Chāvara and his religious community vigorously fought against the impending schism, often facing threats to their lives and their monasteries. The tension peaked when Father Matthai Mariam Kappil, Superior of Koonammāvu monastery, delivered the formal excommunication order for Bishop Roccos to his secretary, an act that forced Father Matthai to flee and hide for his safety.

While waiting for the reply from the Pope, St. Chāvara sent a letter on 22 July 1861 to the Prefect of the Congregation of *Propaganda Fide*:

> "… would like to inform Your Eminence, with great pain, the events which were happening in our midst, these days. Mar Joseph Audo, Patriarch of Babel has sent Bishop Thomas Roccos to our midst. This Bishop preaches to the Christians in Malabar that he has been sent by the Patriarch to govern

> the church in Malabar by the order of His Holiness Pope Pius IX. The faithful and even some priests believe fully his words. They have been reiterating often that the orders of Archbishop Bernardine are very heavy and hard to bear. Your Eminence, we feel that within a couple of months all the faithful of Malabar will follow him unless Bishop Roccos is prohibited by Your Eminence or His Holiness the Pope. Even those who were very obedient and faithful to the Church have slipped into their group. Hence, with great anxiety, tears and sorrow we request Your Eminence to let us know the truth about these matters without any delay. If the reply is in our Syriac language, all will be able to see and read the same and all the priests in Malabar will be convinced."

On the same day that Pope prepared his reply to St. Chāvara, (05 September 1861) with the letter *Hisce literis* Pope Pius IX officially informed the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly that, compelled by his orders the Chaldean Patriarch revoked Roccos from Malabar. The Pope also authorized the Vicar Apostolic to excommunicate Roccos, if he did not return to Babylon.

> In another letter dated 02 October 1861 addressed to His Eminence Alexander Cardinal Barnabo, Prefect of the Congregation of *Propaganda Fide,* was written in Syriac language. "… and since we have not received any reply to the letters we have sent to Rome after his arrival, we are extremely sad. Moving around in all our churches, by the laying of his hands, he is conferring Holy Orders on *Shamsanas* (scholastics) worthy or unworthy, learned or not. He has conferred priestly Orders, Diaconates and other orders on many, irrespective of their duration of training. He has conducted the ordination rites in Chaldean rite which we are not familiar with.

> Here we celebrate Mass with unleavened bread. His ways of celebrating the liturgy are unbearable for us. The people share the Body and Blood of Jesus from the same chalice of the Bishop; their sons and daughters are anointed with Sacred Chrism, and so on. We had published the warning against Bishop Thomas which you had sent to us through our Bishop Bernardine. But in the churches which obey Bishop Thomas Roccos, he speaks publicly, "The letter being circulated is not sent from Rome. It is only the creation of Archbishop Bernardine's imagination." … (Till now, no reply has been received for the letters sent to the Holy Father by the clergy from here.) Daily, Bishop Roccos moves around and visits the churches and addresses the people. Hence, we humbly request Your Eminence to send us urgently a reply to the letter we had sent to His Holiness the Pope. We want the reply to our letter in Chaldean (Syriac) language. It should bear the signature and seal of the Holy Father. By this, the priests who are allegiant to Bishop Thomas Roccos may also read the letter; the faithful also will understand the truth and the mouth of the opponents may be shut… and that once he [Roccos] is removed from Malabar, the crisis over here will be solved. But, in case, he continues here, the unrest among the people will, for sure, endure. It seems even if excommunicated, those who are allegiant to Bishop Roccos may not return. Hence, kindly do the needful urgently so that Bishop Roccos is called back to Babel by an order of the Patriarch of Chaldea."

After consulting the missionaries, the vicar apostolic excommunicated Roccos on 30 November 1861 in the church of Verapoly using the formula and ceremonies of the Roman

Pontifical rite. The excommunication was publicly performed in the church, but there is no evidence that it was officially communicated to Roccos, who continued the visit of some churches, awaiting the response of the Patriarch to the requested clarifications. While Roccos was in Malayāttoor, he received the second letter of the Patriarch (or response) asking him to return to Chaldea. Aloysius Pāreparambil vividly described the reaction of Roccos at the reception of the patriarchal letter: "He at once returned and came to Njārakkal, whence he issued an order to several *Malpān*s and representatives of churches to meet him. Accordingly, some churches sent their representatives, but no *Malpān* came.

On 08 March1862, Cardinal Barnabas, the Prefect of *Propaganda Fide*, officially informed St. Chāvara and his companions, who wrote to him about the activities of Mar Roccos, that the Patriarch came to Rome and asked pardon for his deplorable acts and that after his return from Rome, he would do everything necessary to effect the return of Mar Roccos.

Bishop Roccos was indeed recalled by his Patriarch but faced difficulties leaving Malabar due to resistance from his supporters. In a significant act of magnanimity and commitment to restoring peace, Father Chāvara arranged the necessary travel expenses for Roccos, who finally escaped from Malabar on a ship leaving Kochi on 10 March 1862. At the time of his departure, the extent of the division was stark: 86 churches fully and 36 partially supported Roccos. Following his departure, the concerted efforts of the monasteries and the Carmelite Missionaries eventually led most of the affected churches to gradually return to the Catholic fold, averting a lasting schism.

In conclusion, St. Chāvara's leadership during the Roccos crisis stands as a testament to an 'anointed' and 'called' leader whose greatest trials were mental and spiritual rather than physical. His leadership was never about the assertion of

power but the preservation of unity and truth, a commitment that inflicted significant mental agony upon him. The plotting against his monasteries, the public abuse from Roccos, and the painful betrayal by his own seminary-trained priests were profound stressors he bore with humility and an absence of hatred. His *call* was to be a pastor, and the schism represented a deep wound to his flock.

The true intensity of his agony is evident in his relentless efforts to ensure obedience to the Holy See, not out of bureaucratic rigidity, but because he genuinely believed it was essential for salvation. This conviction placed the burden of souls upon his conscience, compelling him to act decisively despite the threats to his life and the community's stability. Yet, even amidst this profound distress, his divinely sanctioned leadership culminated in an act of extraordinary grace: organizing his opponent's safe departure. This final act solidified his legacy as a leader who, though tormented by the division, prioritized peace and reconciliation, fulfilling his mission to be a faithful shepherd.

Mirror, Lamp and Pillar

You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

(Matthew 5:14-16)

Symbolism, the use of objects, actions, or motifs to represent complex abstract ideas, emotions, and themes, is fundamental to human communication. In everyday life, symbols serve as a vital shorthand, allowing for quick, universal understanding that often transcends language barriers by making intangible concepts concrete; for example, a heart symbol universally signifies love. Symbols carry significant emotional and personal weight, helping individuals relate to shared human experiences or express inner feelings that are difficult to articulate. This integral process of symbolism is how humans interact with and understand the world efficiently.

Writers and artists employ symbolism as a powerful tool to enrich their work and engage their audience on a deeper level. It allows creators to weave multiple layers of meaning into a narrative or artwork without explicit statements, encouraging critical thinking and personal interpretation. This poetic method of 'showing' rather than 'telling' - whether depicting a character's internal state or a story's themes - makes the narrative more immersive. Recurring symbols, or motifs, like a stormy night representing turmoil or a sunny morning symbolizing hope, reinforce central themes. Even objects, actions, or names can symbolize character traits or journeys, adding richness and complexity to development. Ultimately, symbolism invites personal engagement; its meaning can vary across cultures or individual readers, making the interpretive experience interactive and profound. Symbols enrich literature

by making meaning deeper, clearer, more beautiful, and more emotionally powerful.

The above Gospel passage uses powerful, everyday symbolism that goes beyond simple illustrations to convey a deep theological mandate for the Christian life. Jesus uses two central symbols - the 'city on a hill' and the 'lamp on a lampstand' - to emphasize the public, transformative, and necessary nature of Christian witness in the world.

The symbol of a city built on a hill is one of permanence, visibility, and collective identity. A city on a hill cannot be hidden, especially at night when its lights would be the beacon for people from miles around. This signifies that the Christian community is meant to be a prominent, unavoidable moral landmark in the world. Being a follower of Christ inherently involves a public lifestyle that draws attention.

Unlike a temporary tent or a single person wandering in a field, a city is a fixed, structured place. This implies that the Church is a substantial, institutional presence that provides refuge and order, a stable beacon of God's kingdom in a changing world. A city is a centre of commerce, safety, and community life. The Church is meant to be a centre of life and truth, a visible standard of God's way, an alternative way of living.

The symbolism shifts from a large, macro view (the city) to a micro, functional object (the lamp) to highlight the *purpose* of the light. The primary purpose of a lamp is utility - to give light to the whole house so people can see and move about safely. Covering a lamp with a bowl renders it useless. This directly challenges any notion of a private or hidden faith. Faith that is not shared or acted upon is functionally dead and pointless.

The lamp serves as a metaphor for the individual believer's *actions* and *witness*. The light itself originates from God (Jesus is the true Light of the world, as in John 8:12), but the believer is the vessel or 'lampstand' that holds and positions

that light effectively. Verse 16 explicitly connects the 'shining light' with 'good deeds'. The symbolism emphasizes that Christian witness is not just about words or inner feelings, but tangible, visible actions that provide moral clarity and guidance to a world often operating in moral darkness.

Together, these symbols provide a potent theological mandate: The 'city' is collective (the Church), while the 'lamp' is individual (the believer). The passage mandates both corporate, visible identity and individual, functional holiness. The ultimate significance of the symbolism is found in the final clause of verse 16: the light shines so that others 'may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.' The light draws attention not to the person holding the lamp, but to the Source of the light. The symbols teach that Christian visibility is meant to point beyond humanity to the glory of God.

At the news of St. Chāvara's death, the sisters of Koonammāvu convent wrote in their chronicle, "This father was a mirror and lamp to all the Christians in Kerala. Moreover, he was a strong pillar that supported the holy Church in protecting its faith. With zeal, he worked for its growth and expansion."

The nuns at Koonammāvu convent utilized three potent symbols - the Mirror, the Lamp, and the Pillar - to encapsulate the personality and spiritual legacy of St. Chāvara. These symbols represent him as a Mirror reflecting Christ, a Lamp radiating His light and a Pillar grounded in faith. We shall explore the scriptural and spiritual significance of each symbol in detail:

1. The Mirror symbolizes the reflection of Christ and serves as a model for all believers. In the Christian tradition, the mirror holds a dual meaning: it is an instrument for self-examination, as referenced in James 1:23–24, where a person who looks into the 'mirror of the Word' must act upon what they see. More profoundly, it speaks to the transformative process of reflecting divine glory. St. Paul captures this

aspiration in 2Corinthians 3:18: "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord as in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another." The mirror thus represents the Christian call to impeccably reflect the life and image of Christ in the world.

2. The Lamp signifies the light of knowledge and holiness that guided St. Chāvara's life and ministry. Scripture consistently uses light imagery to illuminate the divine path. God's Word is described as a "lamp to my feet and a light to my path" in Psalm 119:105. Furthermore, Christ's followers are called to a vibrant Christian witness; in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus instructs his disciples, 'You are the light of the world... let your lamp shine before others' (Matthew 5:14-16). The lamp, therefore, represents an interior holiness that cannot be contained but naturally radiates outward, offering illumination to all who encounter it.
3. The Pillar stands as a powerful emblem of firmness in faith and the foundation of a community. Within the scripture, the pillar frequently symbolizes God's steadfast, guiding Presence, famously exemplified by the 'pillar of cloud and fire' that led the Israelites (Exodus 13:21). It denotes strength, stability, and fidelity. St. Paul refers to the Church itself as the 'pillar and bulwark of truth' (1Timothy 3:15), and identifies key apostles, such as James, Cephas, and John, as those 'who were reputed to be pillars' holding up the faith (Galatians 2:9). In this vein, St. Chāvara is remembered as an unshakeable foundation for the faithful whom he served.

St. Chāvara served as a mirror in two distinct ways

- *A Mirror of Christ*: His profound compassion, humility, and capacity for forgiveness offered a clear reflection of Jesus' heart. His deep Marian devotion and emulation mirrored the obedience and purity of Mary. Those who encountered him often sensed the light of Christ shining through his actions. A senior priest Father Jacob

Pālākunnel says: "The Prior Chāvara looked like an angel." Mr Māni Kurian Madathikunnel, after meeting St. Chāvara and listening to him, said: "How pleasant an experience it was to see him. He was filled with the Holy Spirit. At the same time, all those who assembled in the church could hear his sermon without any difficulty. I still cherish those memories."

- *A Mirror for the Faithful*: His *Testament of a Loving Father* provided a reflection for families, illustrating the ideal structure of a Christian home. His consecrated religious life became a model of authentic dedication for future CMI and CMC members. His leadership mirrored the virtues of a good shepherd: gentle, firm, and self-giving for the sake of his flock.

St. Chāvara acted as a lamp placed on a lampstand, illuminating the society through education. He advocated for the establishment of schools attached to every church, promoting the *Pallikkudam* (parish schools) system. To enlighten the faithful with catechetical and spiritual texts, he established the first printing press of the Kerala Church. His writings, including *Āthmānuthāpam*, and *The Testament of a Loving Father*, continue to serve as spiritual guiding lights for families. He championed the dignity of the neglected, extending the light of compassion to the poor, orphans, and women. St. Chāvara brightened the Church through his wisdom and sanctity.

Finally, St. Chāvara is remembered as a foundational pillar of the Church in Kerala. His strength, derived from his unwavering commitment to Christ, was exemplified by his dedication to long hours of prayer and Eucharistic adoration. At a time of significant disunity and brokenness within the Kerala Church, he became a pillar of renewal. His unifying initiatives, particularly the guiding principle "May the members of a family live together in love," were instrumental in stabilizing the Christian community. As a co-founder and the first Prior

General of the CMI Congregation, he established a new charism, providing crucial structural and spiritual strength to a burgeoning missionary community. Furthermore, by founding the first Syrian Catholic seminary, he laid the groundwork for modern priestly formation. St. Chāvara held up the Church by resolutely holding on to Christ.

St. Chāvara stands as a flawless mirror reflecting the very essence of Christ's mercy, simplicity, and pastoral heart, a radiant lamp illuminating society with holiness and education and a pillar of stability for both the Church and the religious. His enduring example challenges us to embody the reflection of Christ in every deed, to shine brightly with love and truth and to remain firm in our faith.

Passion for Friendship with Jesus Christ

"I am the true vine, and my father is the vine grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing."

(John 15: 1-5)

The allegory of the True Vine in the above passage offers a profound theological reflection on the nature of Christian life, particularly when viewed through the lens of friendship with Jesus. The relationship described is one of interdependence, intimacy, and shared life, moving far beyond a casual acquaintance to a vital, unbreakable union.

Interdependence as Intimacy: The primary symbolism is that of the vine and the branches. A branch has no independent life; its very existence is sustained only by its connection to the vine. Friendship with Jesus, therefore, is not merely about emotional closeness or shared interests, but about *shared life*. It is a relationship where we recognize our total dependence on Him for spiritual vitality, meaning, and existence. We are not self-sufficient friends; we are friends who draw all our nourishment from the main source. Jesus makes Himself utterly essential to us.

Abiding as Mutual Indwelling: The repeated command to 'abide' is crucial. It means to remain, dwell, or live permanently in someone or something. This 'abiding' describes a mutual indwelling: "Abide in me, and I in you" (John 15:4). This is the apex of intimacy in a friendship - a constant, uninterrupted presence. The believer lives within Christ's safety, grace, and truth, while Christ lives within the believer through the Holy

Spirit. This mutual presence is the engine of the Christian life and the deepest expression of friendship: total access and uninterrupted communion.

Fruitfulness as the Purpose of Friendship: Jesus clearly states, "apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). The goal of the connection is not just spiritual comfort, but visible results: bearing 'much fruit.' This highlights that true friendship with Jesus is dynamic and productive. The relationship is not static; it is transformative. The 'fruit' (which can be understood as good works, character development, love for others, and evangelism) is the natural, organic outflow of a healthy, intimate friendship with Jesus. It is evidence that the life of the vine is flowing through the branches.

Cleansing as Deepening the Bond: The mention of the Father 'pruning' or 'cleansing' every branch that bears fruit (John 15:2) speaks to the refining nature of this friendship. Friendship with Jesus involves an active process of purification and discipline. God removes the unproductive elements not to punish the friend, but to increase the potential for fruitfulness and deeper intimacy. This is the painful but necessary aspect of a friendship aimed at holiness and spiritual maturity.

St. Chāvara describes real meditation as "a free and friendly colloquy with God." Meditation is a conversation which presupposes a friendship with God. "For, when friends sit close to each other, they find enough topics to talk about without cessation. If there is love, conversation goes unlimited. No one needs teach either of the two friends how to go on talking. For, the heart has a language of its own." It is within the context of meditation that the conspicuous influence of St. Teresa of Avila, a Doctor of the Church, upon St. Chāvara becomes evident, an influence he himself acknowledged in his *Dhyāna Sallāpanghal* (Colloquies in Meditation).

His marvellous description of meditation captures this influence perfectly, defining it as an intimate conversation

between lovers: "Meditation is a conversation with God. As you would do with a friend, so moved by love you sit close to God, intimately communicating with Him. Meditation then is to converse with your beloved Spouse Jesus Christ, sitting very close to Him... You converse with God as you do with a friend. It is a common experience that two friends go on speaking nonstop with one another until they part. They are never short of matter to speak about. That means, where there is love, there is always something to speak about. Nobody has to teach you this kind of conversation. Two friends, even if they do not know one another's language, will mutually speak and understand. To converse with a friend, who does not understand your language, is easier than speaking with another, who, though he/she can understand your language, is not a friend. Even to sit in silence very close to your friend is a matter of satisfaction!"

According to St. Chāvara, "Meditation is a free and friendly colloquy with God… For, if it is a conversation with God, it presupposes a friendship with God. When friends sit close to each other, they find enough topics to talk about without cessation. If there is love, conversation goes unlimited." There is no distraction, there is no shortage of topics, there is no lack of understanding.

St. Chāvara's definition of meditation distinctly highlights three vital elements in the relationship between God and the devotee: friendship, conversation (*sallāpam*), and love. He employs evocative Malayalam words such as *chernnu* (joined), *onnichu* (together), and *onnichirunnu* (seated together) to express a profound sense of intimacy and unity. This unity is founded upon a deep friendship rooted in continuous conversation and love. Through this usage, he emphasizes the possibility of a genuine and stable relationship between God and man, modelled uniquely on the life of the Holy Trinity - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - who exist in perfect, unified communion.

St. Chāvara's entire work of *Colloquies* provides a framework for the spiritual life centred on three fundamental procedures: seeing (*darsanam*), abiding or staying (*vasikkal*), and speaking or conversation (*sallāpam*). These moments of intense spiritual experience can be compared to the Transfiguration event described in the Gospels, where the disciples wished to abide and enjoy the Lord's presence (cf. Matthew 17:4; Mark 9:5; Luke 9:33).

Darsanam (Seeing): The concept of 'seeing' (*darsanam*) is a powerful descriptor in Chāvara's work when he addresses the presence of God the Father. He describes the importance of 'seeing' in varied forms, such as gazing or looking, often picturing the image of the prodigal son (Luke 15:1ff). He records moments of visual prayer: "Behold! my bounteous Father seated on His throne before the tabernacle in the chapel." He expresses sorrow for his shortcomings with intimate language: "Oh, it is long time since I saw the beautiful face of my Father." He encourages the soul, asking, "Oh my soul! See the numerous hired servants in Your Father's place… Seeing them why should you be troubled in heart? … 'Have a look at Father's palace' and the mansions therein with their graceful high walls.' 'Do not you see a movement at the door'!" Furthermore, throughout his writings, "seeing the face of the crucified Christ, each wound he felt, tells stories of love and sacrifice."

Vāsam (Staying): Abiding is the core concept of *vāsam* (staying or dwelling). The parable of the True Vine symbolizes the ideal of a true *Bhaktiyogi* (devoted contemplative). To the Psalmist's question, 'Who shall enter into the house and stay?', St. Chāvara provides a significant response: "God will not stay in the heart of a sinner because God is holy. One who comes to stay must be ready to sit. If you want to stay in love you must sit in love. You must sit facing the other." This posture mirrors Mary sitting at the feet of the Lord, listening to Jesus' words (Luke 10:39). Immersed in His presence, she prioritized listening. This concentration

makes her the beloved devotee who is engrossed in listening to her Master's words and absorbs them into her heart in silence and concentration. The Indian term *sthitapranja* (steady-minded person) aptly describes St. Chāvara, who "does not withdraw from the feet of the Lord until a word is spoken." St. Chāvara reiterates that the relationship with Jesus requires genuine love; as Jesus called His disciples friends rather than servants (John 15:14-15), our relationship should be the same.

Sallāpam (Speaking): *Sallāpam* refers to the genuine, heartfelt conversation between friends. St. Chāvara's *Colloquies* are a collection of his intimate *sallāpam* with his friend Jesus. He grounds these reflections on various Gospel narratives, such as the 'good thief' crucified beside Jesus, the man at the banquet, and the prodigal son. Reflecting on the Good Thief's humility, who acknowledged his guilt while gazing at Christ on the Cross - "for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong" (Luke 23:41b) – St. Chāvara places himself in the thief's position, praying, "Speak, O Lord, to my soul also that I shall be with you in the paradise of Your grace. Sustain me in Your grace and forgive me my sins." This genuine conversation exemplifies the core of his meditative life.

St. Chāvara frequently reaffirmed the necessity of the great virtue of humility in prayer, using specific biblical examples to stress this point. He highlighted that the man denied entry to the wedding banquet hall (Matthew 22:11–12) lacked the requisite humility to ask for a wedding garment. St. Chāvara reasoned that the guest knew the host was capable of providing the proper attire, yet he negligently failed to ask for it. Furthermore, through his reflections on the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15), God is presented as a loving Father. St. Chāvara emphasized that as His children, we should feel the freedom to approach Him with all our needs, echoing the spirit of *Abba* (Father) used by St. Paul in Romans 8:15. This humble, child-like trust, which recognizes both our dependence on

God and His abundant generosity, was central to St. Chāvara's understanding of authentic prayer.

A distinctive aspect of his spirituality is the intimate identification of Jesus as *appan* (father). One might wonder why St. Chāvara addresses Jesus as Father rather than solely the Father, a perspective potentially influenced by the Eastern Christian tradition which regards all three persons of the Holy Trinity in a closely similar way (John 10:30; 14:9: "One who sees me, sees the Father. I and the Father are one"). This usage, where Jesus is addressed as 'beloved Father,' may be an original contribution stemming from his profound, intimate, and affectionate mystical experience. It perfectly expresses St. Chāvara's deep relationship with God the loving Father, using the term *appan* thirty-one times in his shortest work alone.

This understanding of God as a loving *Father* or 'Daddy' (as seen later in the spirituality of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, another Carmelite) forms the basis of authentic Christian spirituality. Prayer, in this view, is an individual's loving conversation with one's 'Father.' The core of the Christian life is the father-son relationship between God and humanity, a principle greatly emphasized in the preaching and message of St. Paul. St. Chāvara's teachings are a continuation of this biblical tradition, insisting that one cannot experience God the Father without Christ, as we know God only through Jesus.

Many individuals find themselves forced into a routine of prayer life characterized by excessive verbal articulation but lacking genuine interiority. This depth of interior life does not emerge from compulsory practice but rather from a personal, intimate relationship with God. Often, people feel compelled to pray out of duty, not love, merely reciting numerous written prayers. While these formal prayers serve a valuable purpose in communal settings, real prayer is the heartfelt conversation one has with the Lord in solitude. Authentic personal contact with Jesus Christ must be intentionally nurtured in the quiet spaces

of silence and solitude, allowing genuine intimacy to blossom free from obligation or external pressure.

What we often label as 'distractions' or 'lack of concentration' in prayer can be reframed as the natural, dynamic flow of intimate conversation between friends. As described by St. Chāvara and other spiritual leaders, true friendship involves a seamless shift between diverse topics without ever losing the fundamental sense of nearness or connection with the beloved friend. This constant presence is sustained regardless of the specific subject matter discussed. This perspective affirms that we are called to bring absolutely *everything* to the Lord - our anxieties, joys, mundane worries, and sudden tangents - making every aspect of our lives a valid point of prayer. The crucial element is not maintaining a rigid, focused topic list, but rather simply 'sitting next to each other,' experiencing the mutual indwelling and intimate presence of Jesus, our friend and spouse. This constant, honest stream of consciousness, shared in humility and love, transforms distraction into dialogue and fulfills the goal of continuous communion with God.

St. Chāvara placed a high value on silence and solitude, seeing them as essential environments for cultivating the interiority required for that 'friendship with Jesus' he so often championed. He actively nurtured these conditions throughout his life and embedded their importance into the rules of his religious community.

Here are the specific ways he practiced and promoted silence and solitude:

Mandating Monastic Silence: The very structure of monastic life at Mānnānam and the other monasteries he founded was designed around silence. The *Rule of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate* (CMI), which he helped draft and enforce, dictated specific times and places for silence (e.g., during meals in the refectory, in dormitories, and the cloister). This institutional silence was not merely an absence of noise, but a disciplined

atmosphere that enabled the monks to maintain a constant awareness of God's presence (*sentire cum Deo,* which translates to 'to think with God' or 'to feel with God').

Prioritizing the Chapel and Adoration: St. Chāvara understood the chapel as the primary space for solitude and intimate communion. He introduced the practice of the Forty-Hours Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in his monastery chapels. This intense, structured time of silent vigil ensured that priests and brothers spent significant periods alone with God. His *Dhyāna Sallāpanghal* (Colloquies) were often composed during these silent hours of meditation before the tabernacle, demonstrating how he utilized physical solitude for spiritual expression.

Solitude as a Literary Space: St. Chāvara used personal solitude as the fertile ground for his deepest theological and spiritual reflection. His most profound works, like *Āthmānuthāpam* (Compunction of the Soul) and the *Dhyāna Sallāpanghal*, were written in the quiet 'evenings of his life' when illness had forced him away from active administration. He retreated into internal solitude, transforming physical quietness into a productive spiritual tête-à-tête with God, as seen in his deeply personal writings.

Encouraging the 'Inner Room' of the Heart: Beyond physical silence, he promoted a lifestyle of interior quietness. His teachings to his priests and the laity such as the one in *Oru Nalla Appante Chāvarul* encouraged daily, personal prayer within the home. This emphasized the cultivation of an 'inner room' in the heart, a place of consistent solitude where genuine unscripted conversation with Jesus could occur, exactly as Jesus mandated in Matthew 6:6.

Through these practices, St. Chāvara ensured that silence and solitude were not seen as empty voids to be feared, but as essential conditions for developing personal intimacy with Christ that gives rise to a truly interior and authentic prayer life.

The Kiss of the Father

Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So, he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living.

When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So, he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."

So, he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe - the best one - and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate."

(Luke 15:11-24)

Usually, the Biblical scholars divide this parable into two or four sections, but St. Chāvara divides Luke 15:17-24 into three parts: 17-19, 21 and 22-24. The parable of the prodigal son is a profound invitation to realize and experience 'the kiss of the father' - representing God's unconditional love, acceptance, full restoration, strong assurance, overflowing comfort, intimate

communion, exceeding joy and immediate forgiveness. St. Chāvara seems to understand this parable as the 'Parable of the Younger Son and the Merciful Father'. This description in *Dhyāna Sallāpangal* shows his radical interiorization of the parable, and it was written in a diction which was closer to the spoken idiom than to the highly ornate, Sanskrit-riddled neo-classical style. St. Chāvara uses very simple language expressions keeping in mind the audience of his times, and it is highly imaginative and intuitive.

The father's actions in the parable strongly supports the aforementioned interpretation.

Running to meet him: The father does not wait for his son to reach the house, apologize, or prove his worthiness. He actively runs to him, which in that cultural context was undignified for an older man, emphasizing the extraordinary extent of his love and eagerness to reconcile.

Embracing and kissing: The embrace and kiss are immediate gestures of affection, intimate reconciliation, and restoration of the relationship. The son does not even finish his prepared speech of repentance before the father accepts him fully.

Restoration of status: The father immediately orders the best robe, a ring, and sandals for his son - symbols that restore the young man to his full status as a beloved son, not a hired servant.

This perspective highlights that the parable is less about the son's journey of repentance and more about the father's overwhelming, extravagant grace and desire to welcome his child back into a loving relationship, regardless of his past mistakes. These elements guide St. Chāvara in picturing this story in his contemplation.

For St. Chāvara, God was never a frightening figure. He described the Divine Presence in the chapel not as a 'frightening judge', but rather as a 'loving and friendly father who is

generous, kind and affectionate'. This profound understanding of God's character extended to human frailty: even when individuals persist in sin and become estranged enemies of the Lord, God continues to love them with an astonishing 'depth of His patience'.

St. Chāvara often depicted himself as the repentant figure in the parable of the Prodigal Son, returning after having despoiled his father's wealth. He emphasized the father's extraordinary generosity and patience upon the son's return. This intimate perception of God as a merciful parent is evident in St. Chāvara's frequent use of the term *appan* (an affectionate Malayalam term for 'father') when addressing Jesus throughout his writings. This 'Abba-consciousness' fuelled his faith, leading him to trust entirely in the generosity and mercifulness of *ente appan* (my father), a term that appears 31 times in his works and this highlights the deeply personal nature of his relationship with God. This core faith was further reinforced by his trust in the intercessory help of other saints.

The Father is Benevolent:

The father's benevolence in the parable provides a timeless model for relationships, highlighting kindness, compassion, and mercy in the face of human frailty.

- ***Kindness, Compassion, and Mercy:*** The father's immediate action of dividing his property and giving it to his younger son, even though it was a culturally unusual and potentially disrespectful demand, demonstrates a profound respect for the son's individuality and desire for independence. He is 'kind' not in the sense of being a pushover, but in honouring his son's free will. There are no rebukes or blockades; he allows his son to make his own choices and learn his own lessons. When the son returns, the father does not seek vengeance with an 'I told you so' attitude or a prolonged apology; instead, he is filled with mercy, instantly restoring the son to his rightful place, offering a powerful metaphor

for immediate and complete forgiveness in modern life, whether within families, communities, or spiritually.

- ***The Father is Waiting, Waiting, and Waiting:*** The father's patient vigil for his son's return speaks directly to a universal human longing for belonging and purpose, a search particularly relevant to a modern generation often feeling disconnected or lost.
    1. ***Waiting for 'Sure Return':*** The father's expectation of his son's eventual return signifies a persistent, hope-filled belief in the son's inherent worth and the possibility of redemption. This aligns with sentiments expressed by figures like St. Augustine, who observed that the human heart is restless until it finds its 'rest' in a higher purpose or connection. For the present day, this illustrates the enduring nature of love and the idea that, despite our wanderings or the myriad distractions of contemporary life, there is always a fundamental space of belonging that awaits us if we choose to return to core values, family, or faith.
    2. ***Waiting to be Seen from 'Far Away':*** The father spotting his son while 'still a long way off' emphasizes proactive compassion. He does not wait for his son to reach the doorstep and grovel; he runs to him. This is a call to action for today's society: not to passively wait for those who are struggling to ask for help, but to actively reach out with empathy and understanding, shortening the distance of reconciliation and offering support before it is explicitly requested.
- ***There is a Space for the Younger Son in Father's Home and Heart:*** The physical and emotional space the father provides for his wayward son highlights the importance of inclusive love and acceptance in a world often defined by judgment and division.

1. ***Space in Home and Heart:*** The father's immediate orders to bring the finest robe, ring, and sandals signify full restoration without conditions. This space is not just physical shelter, but emotional acceptance, a place where mistakes do not permanently disqualify one from love or family. This is vital for the present generation, promoting environments where people feel safe to return from personal or professional setbacks, knowing they will be met with support rather than with the cliched 'I told you so' attitudes.
2. ***Space to Argue on His Behalf:*** The father's gentle reasoning with the older brother showcases his unwavering commitment to both his children, addressing conflict with patience and advocating for the importance of celebrating the lost being found. This models effective conflict resolution and advocacy within families and communities, encouraging empathy for differing perspectives and the paramount value of unity and forgiveness over resentment and rigid adherence to rules.

Ultimately, the parable teaches that true love of the Father is characterized by unending patience, proactive compassion, and a radical openness to welcome back those who have strayed, offering hope and a blueprint for healthier, more forgiving relationships in the modern world. St. Chāvara describes that 'father' descends from the throne to embrace and kiss his younger son. This 'descent' of the father is seen in the backdrop of incarnation of Jesus, Jesus as the Good Shepherd, the Passion narrative and the Eucharistic mystery.

St. Chāvara interprets the father's action in the Parable of the Lost Son - specifically, his descent to embrace his son - as a profound theological metaphor connecting several key Christian mysteries. The 'descent' of the father is not just a human emotional response, but a divine act of salvific love, mirrored across the Incarnation, the Good Shepherd, the Passion narrative, and the Eucharistic mystery.

The Incarnation: The father's 'descent' directly relates to the Incarnation, the core belief that God (the Father, through the Son) lowered Himself to enter the human condition.

- ***Divine Humility:*** Just as the father abandons his position of authority and runs to his ragged son, God, in the person of Jesus Christ, humbles Himself, taking on human flesh to meet humanity in its fallen state (Philippians 2:6-8).
- ***Initiation of Reconciliation:*** The father initiates the reconciliation; the son is still far off when the father sees him and runs. This reflects God's proactive love in sending His Son into the world to save sinners, rather than waiting for humanity to perfectly 'ascend' to Him.

The Good Shepherd: The action is also linked to the parable of the Good Shepherd, which highlights God's active pursuit of the lost.

- ***Searching and Seeking:*** The father leaves the 'ninety-nine' (the obedient older son and household) to pursue the 'one' who is lost. His running stride mirrors the shepherd actively seeking the lost sheep until he finds it.
- ***Bringing Home with Joy:*** Just as the shepherd places the sheep on his shoulders and rejoices, the father embraces his son, bringing him into his fold with great joy and celebration.

The Passion Narrative: The father's embrace foreshadows the Passion narrative - Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection - as the ultimate expression of this sacrificial love.

- ***Vulnerability and Suffering:*** The father makes himself vulnerable by running publicly in a culturally undignified act for an elderly person, much as Christ made Himself vulnerable and suffered public humiliation on the cross for the sake of reconciliation.

- ***Sacrificial Love:*** The love demonstrated by the father is a sacrificial love that absorbs the son's sin and shame, paralleling how Christ's sacrifice on the cross atoned for the sins of the humanity, bridging the God-human gap created by human transgression.

The Eucharistic Mystery: Finally, the entire episode culminates in the Eucharistic mystery, the ongoing re-presentation of this divine embrace in the life of the Church.

- ***The Banquet:*** The father calls for a feast ('kill the fatted calf') and celebration upon the son's return. This feast is a direct typology of the Eucharist, the celebratory banquet of communion where God feeds His reconciled children with the Body and Blood of Christ.
- ***Intimate Communion:*** The act of eating together signifies intimate communion and restored relationship. In the Eucharist, the divine 'descent' is made real and present in the elements of bread and wine, allowing believers to physically and spiritually receive God's embrace and dwell in His house.

Through St. Chāvara's meditation, the single act of the father running to embrace his lost son becomes a powerful summary of the entire economy of salvation: God stepping down to reach us, seeking us out, sacrificing Himself for us, and restoring us to intimate communion through the Church's sacraments.

In Pouring Out His Soul

And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. "When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

(Matthew 6:5-8)

As she continued praying before the Lord, Eli observed her mouth. Hannah was praying silently; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard; therefore, Eli thought she was drunk. So Eli said to her, "How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself? Put away your wine." But Hannah answered, "No, my lord, I am a woman deeply troubled; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord."

(1 Samuel 1:12-15)

'Pouring out my soul to the Lord' is a biblical phrase meaning to pray with deep emotion, revealing your innermost feelings and anxieties to God. It is often used to describe a moment of intense, heartfelt prayer born out of great anguish, grief, or worry. The phrase 'poured out my soul' is a potent metaphor for a specific kind of intimate and honest prayer. It signifies vulnerability and honesty. To pour something out is to empty the container completely, holding nothing back. Hannah did not filter her emotions, use eloquent words, or present a pious façade. Instead, she laid bare her raw pain, anguish, and grief before God. This is the essence of authentic prayer: bringing our full, messy selves and deepest hurts to God.

In ancient times, water was sometimes drawn and 'poured out' before the Lord as a sign of an irrevocable commitment

or complete surrender (1 Samuel 7:6). Hannah's use of this language implies she was not just presenting a request, but surrendering her entire being and desire to God's will. She was emptying herself so that God could fill the void.

The act signifies a deeply personal, one-on-one communication. Hannah bypassed human mediators, trusting that God, who 'searches our hearts and minds,' heard her silent plea even when the high priest could not. After 'pouring out her soul,' Hannah's countenance changed; her sadness disappeared, and she ate again. The theological significance is that the process of total emotional release with trust in God brings profound inner peace, even before the circumstances of the prayer have changed. She connected with God and was able to leave her burden with Him.

Hannah's prayer serves as a timeless model, demonstrating that God desires our broken, contrite hearts and hears the desperate cries of our innermost being, granting us a hope and peace that surpasses human understanding.

The theme of 'pouring out my soul' aligns perfectly with Jesus' call for sincerity and privacy in prayer, challenging the external show of piety. Hannah's prayer was the antithesis of the 'hypocrites' Jesus described. She sought no audience; her distress was so deep that only God could understand her silent, moving lips. This was a private conversation in a public space. Jesus asks us to retreat to our 'inner room' to ensure our motivation is purely to be heard by God, who knows 'what is done in secret.' Hannah demonstrates this sincerity by communicating with a silent, internal language that only God perceived, fulfilling Jesus' mandate for genuine, hidden devotion focused solely on the Father in heaven.

Jesus warns against using 'many words' or 'babbling like pagans,' suggesting that ritualistic, repetitive, or formulaic prayer (praying *at* God) misses the point. Jesus does like raw honesty and not empty phrases. God is a loving Father who

already knows our needs. We are asked to focus on intimate relationship and trust, not word counts or impressive language. Hannah 'poured out her soul,' a process that was deeply *expressive* but not *verbose* in the pagan sense. She was not repeating a magic formula; she was simply emptying her heart before her God. The lack of audible words emphasizes the authenticity of her communication - it was efficient, direct, and emotionally true. She trusted that God's omniscience (Matthew 6:8, 'your Father knows what you need before you ask him') meant she did not need to over-explain to Him.

Both passages affirm that the ultimate goal of prayer is an intimate, trust-filled encounter with God the Father. Hannah's raw honesty led to peace and a renewed trust in God's provision. Praying in secret results in the Father seeing and rewarding openly (Matthew 6:6), indicating a deep, personal acknowledgment and relationship that human praise cannot replicate.

'Pouring out one's soul' is precisely the kind of sincere, vulnerable, and non-performative prayer that Jesus commands, where the individual turns their entire being toward a God who sees in secret and already understands the heart's deepest cry.

The expression 'pouring out' is a rich biblical and literary metaphor that carries deep emotional, spiritual, and symbolic meaning. Across Scripture, theology, and literature, it evokes the imagery of something being emptied, offered, or released completely. At its core, 'pouring out' symbolizes total self-giving, complete surrender or yielding, abundant flow of emotion, grace, life, or spirit and a deliberate act of offering. It suggests something not partially given, but completely emptied, with nothing held back.

As an emotional metaphor, 'Pouring out one's heart' means revealing one's deepest emotions - sorrow, joy, fear, hope. It symbolizes honesty, transparency, and vulnerability. And as a spiritual metaphor, 'Pouring out as a sacrifice' (2 Timothy

4:6) symbolizes a life spent or consumed in service to God. It represents martyrdom, dedication, and spiritual obedience.

As a divine action, 'God pours out His Spirit' (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17) symbolizing God's generosity, abundance, and overflowing grace. It indicates renewal, empowerment, and transformation. As an ethical or moral metaphor, 'Pouring out' compassion or mercy, it represents active and overflowing kindness. It indicates love that cannot be contained.

In literature and poetry, writers use 'pouring out' to depict intense emotion ('She poured out her grief.'), creative overflow ('The poet poured out verses…'), exhaustion ('He poured himself out in service…') and abundance ('Rain poured out from the heavens…') It adds movement, intensity, and rich sensory imagery.

'Pouring out' as a metaphor means to give completely, to release fully, to surrender wholeheartedly, or to overflow generously - whether in emotions, love, prayer, or divine grace. It is a way of offering one's deepest feelings, struggles, desires, and truth completely and honestly - usually in prayer - allowing God to fill the emptied heart with peace and grace.

St. Chāvara's deeply personal spiritual writings, particularly his *Āthmānuthāpam and Dhyāna Sallāpangal*, must be approached with the understanding that they represent a literal fulfilment of the biblical theme of 'pouring out one's heart.' Much like Hannah in 1Samuel 1:15, St. Chāvara held nothing back in his intimate communication with God. His writings were not academic treatises or public sermons but rather the raw, unfiltered emptying of his innermost soul, a testament to a faith that prioritized authentic, vulnerable communion with the Divine over performative piety.

"God almighty, who was in the beginning
You created me, a son of Adam
O God, wherefore this grace, reveal to me
O Lord eternal, your infinite mercy.

A worm creeping on the face of the earth
You created me from the dust of dust
Granted me a guardian spirit so pure
That I may dwell on earth in grace and ease

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

These works capture moments where his thoughts and imaginations carried him away in deep, spiritual ecstasy. He was not writing for a general audience or seeking literary acclaim; he was engaged in an immediate, intense dialogue with his Creator. He never worried about what others might think of these *Sallāpangal* because they were fundamentally private documents addressed to God with a note: 'Only for Your eyes!' This echoes Jesus' instruction in Matthew 6:6 to enter the 'inner room' to pray to the Father in secret, ensuring that the devotion was pure in its intent and free from the taint of seeking human approval.

"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"

St. Chāvara's practice reinforced the sincerity demanded by the Gospels. He typically composed these prayers during deep meditation in the physical presence of the Blessed Sacrament. His communication was internal; he did not make any loud noise or use the 'many words' that Jesus warned against in Matthew 6:7. Rather, he was just silently pouring out the torrent of his thoughts and in tears - a flow of consciousness that included profound repentance, remorse over his past actions and the shortcomings in his life. This profound humility and self-awareness are central to the authenticity of his spiritual life.

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

A significant portion of his *Āthmānuthāpam*, for instance, is dedicated to an intense meditation on the sufferings of Jesus Christ during the crucifixion. By focusing entirely on Christ's passion, he deepened his spiritual empathy and allowed that pain to contextualize his own failings. This meditative absorption - a hallmark of contemplative prayer - allowed him to transform his personal grief and regret into a focused spiritual offering, mirroring Hannah's ability to turn her deep sorrow into complete trust and surrender before the Lord.

"Heaving the heavy burden on your shoulder
You stepped forth unto the streets; your mother
Her visage blue with pain, fell prostrate
And so did the angel train guarding her

The sorrow-ridden Virgin and John
Yea, all fell prostrate adoring the Saviour
O, Woe, bitter woe, all for my sake!
Had my sins been fewer, less severe,

The burden of the Cross had been lighter!
If irresponsibly I hadn't piled
Sin upon Sin, O my god your pain
Had been less! Aye fall ignorant" (Āthmānuthāpam, VIII, 45-56)

"Oh merciful Father! I am unable to raise my eyes and look at your face. Lord, looking at your holy head, I feel frightened to think how it came to be pierced with thorns. How many times did I pierce your had by my pride and unwholesome thoughts! Oh, do place your crown of thorns on my head

> so that I may be enabled to keep up the spirit of repentance till my death and keep away from my mind any thought displeasing to you." (*Colloquies*, Meditation I, Fraction 1)
>
> "O Lord, I thank you for showing great mercy on me a wretched sinner. You have allowed me to call you down from heaven to the altar to hold you in my hands as did Mary and Joseph, to carry you to the sick and the dying, to be near you. Above all, you have deigned to dwell in my humble house in the Tabernacle day and night, to hear my petitions, to grant me whatever I desire." (*Colloquies*, Prayer to St. Joseph)

In essence, St. Chāvara was consciously imitating both the teaching of Jesus Christ on authentic prayer and Hannah's raw honesty. His *Colloquies* and *Āthmānuthāpam* are not merely examples of spiritual literature; they are active demonstrations of an emptying of the self for the filling of God's grace. They serve as a powerful testament that the most profound spiritual communication often occurs not in public declarations, but in the silent, vulnerable pouring out of the soul before God in whom he placed his complete trust.

Gentleness of St. Chāvara

Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to him with her sons, and kneeling before him, she asked a favour of him. And he said to her, "What do you want?" She said to him, "Declare that these two sons of mine will sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom." But Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" They said to him, "We are able." He said to them, "You will indeed drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left, this is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father."

When the ten heard it, they were angry with the two brothers. But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

(Matthew 20:20-28)

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." And he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?" And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They replied, "We are able." Then Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared." When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. So, Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes

to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

(Mark 10:35-45)

In the above accounts, the mother of James and John requests that her sons sit at Jesus' right and left in His kingdom - be given positions of high authority. The other disciples were indignant, leading Jesus to teach them a lesson about true greatness: "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave - just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many".

In Matthew 20:20-28 and Mark 10:35-45, Jesus offers a radical corrective to the human impulse toward hierarchy and dominance. The request by James and John (and their mother) for seats of honour was a clear pursuit of power and prestige, which Jesus used as a platform to redefine the nature of true leadership. These passages highlight several key reflections that confirm Jesus never taught lessons of superiority or belittlement:

- **The Rejection of Secular Domination:** Jesus directly contrasts His Kingdom with the "rulers of the Gentiles" who "lord it over" their subjects. He explicitly commands, "It shall not be so among you," a non-negotiable instruction that the culture of His followers must be the exact opposite of those who use authority to belittle or control others.
- **The Paradigm of Downward Mobility:** In the world's eyes, greatness is achieved by ascending a ladder of power. Jesus flips this, stating that to be "first," one must become a "slave of all". This shift destroys the very structures that allow for "grabbing power" because it redirects ambition toward the lowest rung of service.

- **Authentic Influence vs. Coercive Power:** Jesus teaches that belittling others to appear "somebody special" is a hollow pursuit. Authentic influence is not demanded through status but is earned through sacrificial love and humility. He never displayed an attitude of harsh superiority; instead, He showed "authority under control," using His power to heal and deliver rather than to disparage.
- **The Christ-Centred Example:** The ultimate proof that Jesus rejected power-grabbing is His own life. Though He held the highest divine authority, He did not come to be served but to serve and give His life as a ransom. By washing the disciples' feet—a task for the lowest servant—He demonstrated that in His eyes, no one is to be looked down upon, and no act of service is too small.

These reflections suggest that any desire to "boss others around" or maintain a "lordly spirit" is fundamentally "heathenish" and contrary to the Gospel. In Christ's economy, to belittle another is actually "to be little" oneself.

The profound lessons of servant-leadership taught by Jesus find a vivid and practical resonance in the life of St. Chāvara. Throughout his mission, St. Chāvara consistently rejected the temptation to "lord it over" others, choosing instead to navigate the complexities of leadership with the heart of a humble servant. Whether he was mediating conflicts between his brethren or advocating for the dignity of the marginalized, his actions were a direct rebuttal to the pursuit of secular power and the belittling of others. The following incidents from his life serve as powerful examples of how he translated the Gospel's call to "downward mobility" into a lived reality, proving that true greatness is measured by the depth of one's service rather than the height of one's status.

The convent at Koonammāvu holds historical significance as the foundation site of the Congregation of the Mother of

Carmel (CMC). Its establishment in 1866 was the culmination of a long-cherished dream for St. Chāvara to initiate a religious order for women in the Syro-Malabar Church. He collaborated closely with Father Leopold Beccaro OCD, an Italian missionary, in this pioneering endeavour. Despite facing numerous practical troubles, St. Chāvara approached the project with a consistently positive and trustful attitude, firmly believing in God's providence and the community's mission.

This positive attitude was profoundly evident in his meticulous honesty regarding the construction funds. Once in the course of building of the convent, the project ran out of financial resources for an urgent need. St. Chāvara sent Father Geevarghese Thoppil to appeal to the parishes, who quickly returned with ₹ 400 in donations. Since only half that amount was needed to fulfil the purpose, St. Chāvara's response was swift and clear when asked what was to be done with the remainder: "Return it immediately to the donors!" This response highlights his transparent integrity and earnest desire to establish the convent on fundamental honesty and ensured that the community maintained a spotless reputation for financial rectitude.

Another incident further bears testimony to his extraordinary sense of honesty in handling money, illustrating his commitment to using only honest money for the sacred work of building a residence for the religious nuns. St. Chāvara recorded the process with gratitude: "As we planned to construct the convent, we had no money with us. But God inspired good people to contribute money. Thus, we received as donations ₹8000 with which the work was completed." Even within this success, an amount of ₹100 was received which, according to the conscience of Father Leopold, was considered dishonest money." St. Chāvara supported this strict moral stance, and they refused to use the questionable donation for the construction works, instead had it distributed among the poor as alms with the Archbishop's permission. These incidents

underscore St. Chāvara's deep commitment to building the convent on foundations of both faith and unimpeachable integrity, viewing every challenge as an opportunity to demonstrate fidelity to God's ways.

However, even as St. Chāvara pursued his long-cherished dream of establishing the first convent for women at Koonammāvu, he faced bitter humiliations, particularly from his European collaborators. A notable incident occurred just before the scheduled inauguration on 13 February 1866, demonstrating how St. Chāvara kept his focus fixed on the ultimate goal of founding the community despite being personally sidelined.

As the local authority, St. Chāvara had directed a 37-year-old widow named Eliswa (later Sister Clara) to arrive on 11 February fully prepared to join the community. Yet, the young resident priest, Father Leopold Beccaro, openly refused to accept her without a personal interview, choosing to override St. Chāvara's judgment and extensive experience. This disregard forced the candidate and her uncle to wait outside the convent grounds in an awkward position. This situation caused 'much sorrow and disturbance' for St. Chāvara and was an obvious public slight to his authority.

Despite this deeply humiliating experience, St. Chāvara prioritized the establishment of the Congregation over his own self. He accepted the slight without complaint, maintaining a spirit of dignified obedience. He ensured that Eliswa and her uncle remained patiently waiting in the vicinity, holding firmly to obedience to the new instructions given by Father Leopold. His gentle fortitude ensured the project did not get derailed over an issue of protocol. The matter was providentially resolved the day after the inauguration when Father Leopold conducted the interview and formally admitted the candidate, successfully securing the foundation of the CMC community which was St. Chāvara's primary goal. This situation caused 'much sorrow

and disturbance' for St. Chāvara, as he later recorded, and was an obvious humiliation for him as the local authority."

The primary source of humiliation was the public dismissal of his role as Prior and as an experienced leader. St. Chāvara had directed the candidate to arrive for the inauguration; Father Leopold, a much younger and inexperienced foreign missionary, countermanded that direction and refused admission. This made it appear that St. Chāvara's instructions held no weight within his own mission field.

The text explicitly notes that "the young priest Leopold certainly could have trusted the experience of the Prior and respected his judgment. But he did not!" This disregard implied that Father Leopold considered St. Chāvara incapable of adequately vetting a candidate for religious life. This challenge to his competency was a deep professional and personal slight.

St. Chāvara had made specific arrangements for Eliswa's arrival. By forcing her and her uncle to stay in a house outside the grounds and wait, Father Leopold not only created logistical difficulty but also placed the candidate in an awkward and uncertain position. This reflected poorly on St. Chāvara's leadership and hospitality in the eyes of the candidate and her family.

The rejection forced a delay in what should have been otherwise a smooth process. The matter was only "resolved... the day after the convent's inauguration," meaning the candidate could not be a part of the foundational moment of the community as planned by St. Chāvara. This timing emphasized the disruption caused by a lack of trust.

The final indication of the humiliation is found in St. Chāvara's own recorded reaction: "This caused much sorrow and disturbance. Yet, they stayed and waited holding firmly on to obedience." His biographers highlight that he accepted it *without complaint in a spirit of dignified obedience*. The very need

for such measured 'dignified obedience' underscores that a significant indignity had been inflicted upon him.

This passage highlights several key aspects of his behaviour in the face of being undervalued by Father Beccaro. St. Chāvara had every right to assert his position as Prior and as an older, experienced local leader. He chose not to 'lord it over' the younger priest. Instead of a confrontation over hierarchy, there was a humble acceptance of the situation. Father Beccaro was 32 years younger and relatively new to the context, yet he held authority over the experienced St. Chāvara and accepted him as his confessor/spiritual director. St. Chāvara embraced this reversal, demonstrating the 'servant' attitude that Jesus has mandated.

St. Chāvara's primary concern was the spiritual well-being of the candidate, Eliswa, and the stability of the new Congregation, not his personal dignity or status. His 'dignified obedience' mirrored Jesus' teaching that true greatness lies in service and self-effacement. St. Chāvara accepted the sorrow and disturbance, ultimately trusting that God's will would be accomplished despite the human friction, embodying the spirit of service over personal pride.

This episode with Father Beccaro stands as a profound testament to St. Chāvara's extraordinary patience and graceful acceptance of humiliation. Despite being publicly undermined by a younger priest, he never wavered from his commitment to establishing the convent for women. He chose dignified obedience over asserting his authority, absorbing the 'sorrow and disturbance' without complaint. His actions provide a powerful model for all believers: when personal dignity comes into conflict with the greater work of God's kingdom, one must humbly step aside, trusting that obedience and patient endurance will ultimately ensure that God's Will be done.

Ultimately, St. Chāvara's life demonstrates that authentic authority in the Kingdom of God is never synonymous with

dominance. By consistently choosing the role of a servant over that of a "lord," he proved that the rejection of power-grabbing and the belittling of others is the only path to true spiritual greatness. His example remains a timeless reminder that when we trade the pursuit of superiority for the mission of sacrificial service, we don't just lead—we mirror the very heart of Christ, who came not to be served, but to serve.

Discerning Heart of St. Chāvara

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.

(Matthew 9:35-38)

The above Gospel passage presents a powerful image of Jesus the compassionate Shepherd, who traverses towns and villages engaged in holistic ministry - teaching, proclaiming, and healing. The pivotal moment in this passage, for the purpose of spiritual discernment, is the reaction of Jesus towards the crowd: he is 'moved with compassion' and identifies a critical need - 'the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.' This text is foundational for understanding the 'discerning heart' of St. Chāvara because it highlights the necessity of leaders who possess a heart attuned to both the spiritual *and* material suffering of the people, capable of translating empathy into practical, systemic action and prayer for the future of the mission.

A discerning heart is the ability to choose God's will above one's own; the sensitivity to distinguish between good, better, and best, not just between good and evil. It is a posture of inner listening - *attentiveness to the gentle whispers of the Holy Spirit.* It is the capacity to read life's events through the lens of faith, humility, and love. It is a heart purified of self-interest, fear, or pride, so that it can recognize grace when it comes. A discerning heart does not rush; it listens. Discernment is born in silence, humility, and surrender.

A discerning heart will not simply react to crises; it interprets them through faith. The Church in Kerala was in turmoil; St. Chāvara discerned that unity and reform must come

through education, formation, and sanctification. A discerning heart reads the world not with fear but with vision, it leads to creative, courageous action.

A discerning heart chooses unity over division; it is diplomatic in nature but a firm architect of unity during the troubled times. It avoids violence, rash judgments, or emotional responses. Through prayer, patience, and dialogue, it guides the followers back to the true flock. A discerning heart refuses the easy path of anger or revenge. The true discernment produces peace, clarity, and reconciliation.

A discerning heart recognizes God's presence in ordinary life. God's Will is discovered daily - in family prayer, duties, relationships, and fidelity; discernment begins in everyday life. It gives thrusts to practical spirituality and shows a heart that sees God in the ordinary. A discerning heart is not mystical alone; it is profoundly practical. St. Chāvara teaches a discernment rooted in daily holiness.

A discerning heart produces holy leadership. A discerning heart produces leaders who are firm, compassionate, and Spirit-led. A discerning heart is God's greatest gift to those who must lead, love, and serve. St. Chāvara teaches us that d*iscernment is not merely knowing; it is becoming the kind of person who sees as God sees.*

1. **The Discernment of Compassion: 'When he saw the crowds, he had compassion.'**

Jesus observed the people as 'harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.' His vision was not solely spiritual; it acknowledged their real, immediate distress and vulnerability. St. Chāvara's discernment began not in abstract theory, but in observation and empathy, just like Jesus. The 'discerning heart' is one that first sees the reality of suffering. He too possessed this same observational compassion. His discernment led him to see the specific needs of the 19th century Syro-Malabar Church and society in Kerala. He did not just see 'souls to save';

he saw orphans needing homes, uneducated children needing schools, people fractured by schism needing unity, and families needing practical guidance. His heart was moved by the lack of spiritual and social infrastructure.

2. **The Discernment of Needs: 'Teaching... proclaiming... healing every disease and sickness'.**

Jesus engaged in teaching (spiritual knowledge), proclaiming the good news (evangelization), and healing (physical/social aid). A discerning heart prioritizes action based on genuine needs. St. Chāvara understood that ministry encompasses both spiritual teaching and physical healing and social support. His discernment led to a holistic approach. He did not just establish churches; he founded schools attached to every church. He addressed both the 'disease and sickness' of spiritual ignorance and social neglect, acting as a true shepherd to the flock.

3. **The Discernment of Vocation: 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.'**

The passage highlights Jesus' assessment of the situation: the mission field is vast, but the resources (workers) are insufficient. This required a pragmatic, strategic response. Jesus did not lament the lack of workers; he identified the solution: pray for more vocations. This is where St. Chāvara's genius and strategic discernment truly aligns with the mind of Jesus. Recognizing the 'plentiful harvest' in India, he discerned the absolute necessity of founding indigenous religious Congregations tailored to the local context. He co-founded the first indigenous male (CMI) and female (CMC) congregations in the Syro-Malabar Church. He *created* the workers needed for the harvest rather than waiting for foreign missionaries to fill the gap.

4. **The Discernment of Shared Responsibility: 'He said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful... Ask the Lord... to send out workers."**

Jesus did not intend to complete the massive task of the Kingdom alone. He discerned that the work required delegation and the

active participation of others. Jesus empowers His disciples and instructs them to pray for more help, decentralizing the mission. He trusts His followers to carry on the work. St. Chāvara's discerning heart understood that a solitary priest could achieve only so much. His foundational vision was not individual sanctity in isolation, but communal action. He discerned the need for systemic solutions rather than temporary fixes.

5. **The Discernment of the Source of Mission: 'Ask the Lord of the harvest'.**

The passage grounds all activity in God's providence and authority. Disciples are not independent agents but stewards asking the 'Lord of the harvest' for resources. The instruction is to *ask the Lord*, recognizing that vocations and the success of the harvest are fundamentally divine gifts, not human achievements. St. Chāvara's discernment was intensely contemplative. His writings reveal a life deeply rooted in prayer and adoration. He constantly sought God's will before acting, discerning that all his extensive social and educational initiatives flowed from intimate communion with God. His 'heart' was discerning because it was first a prayerful heart.

6. **The Discernment of Urgency: 'The harvest is plentiful.' (Implicit Urgency).**

While not explicitly stated with a harsh command, the imagery of a 'plentiful harvest' implies a time sensitivity - crops must be gathered when ripe or they will be spoilt. The observation of the vast harvest is an urgent call to the disciples to act and pray *now*. St. Chāvara exhibited a prophetic sense of urgency. During a time of immense social need, caste discrimination, and schisms in the Church, he did not wait for perfect conditions. He acted decisively to stabilize the Church structure. His discernment was not passive; it was an active response to the pressing needs of his time, driven by the understanding that the 'harvest' was indeed ripe and waiting for immediate care.

The 'discerning heart' of St. Chāvara is thus an echo of Christ's own heart as depicted in Matthew 9:35–38. His life demonstrated a powerful synthesis of compassionate observation, practical action addressing holistic needs, and strategic foresight in fostering vocations - all rooted in a profound sense of God's will and an unwavering trust in the 'Lord of the harvest.'

A *discerning heart* is the biblical gift to see with God's eyes, to choose what is life-giving, and to reject what is merely appealing but spiritually harmful. It is the inner compass by which a person reads the movements of the Spirit versus the movements of the ego, culture, or temptation.

The Shoulders of Grace

Many tax collectors and 'sinners' came to listen to Jesus. The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began to complain: "Look! This man welcomes sinners and even eats with them!" Then, Jesus told them this story: "Suppose one of you has 100 sheep, but he loses 1 of them. Then he will leave the other 99 sheep alone and go out and look for the lost sheep. The man will keep on searching for the lost sheep until he finds it. And when he finds it, the man is very happy. He puts it on his shoulders and goes home. He calls to his friends and neighbours and says, 'Be happy with me because I found my lost sheep!' In the same way, I tell you there is much joy in heaven when one sinner changes his heart. There is more joy for that 1 sinner than there is for 99 good people who do not need to change.

(Luke 15:1-7)

The Gospel passage of Luke 15:1-7 presents a radical departure from human logic, revealing a theology of relentless pursuit where the value of the individual outweighs the security of the collective. Through the lens of the Good Shepherd, this passage emphasizes that God's grace is not a passive waiting but an active, tireless search that transcends human fault and time limits. By focusing on the Shepherd's refusal to blame the wandering sheep and His choice to carry it 'home' on His shoulders, the narrative shifts from a story of lostness to one of boundless restoration. Ultimately, this reflection invites us to see the heart of God as one defined not by judgment or utility, but by a 'very happy' joy that considers the recovery of a single soul to be the pinnacle of divine celebration.

1. The Divine Calculus – Individual Worth over Collective Security: The decision of Jesus to leave the 99 sheep to find the lost one defies human logic. In a world of 'the greater good', one is often sacrificed for the many. However, the theology of the Shepherd reveals that God's love is not merely general, but intensely particular. The 99 represent those who are currently 'secure' in

the community, but the Shepherd's heart is restless as long as the circle is incomplete. This reflects a God who does not view people as mere statistics, but as indispensable individuals.

2. The Missio Dei (Mission of God) – Relentless and Limitless Grace:
The point that the Shepherd 'keeps on searching' without a time limit or a guaranteed outcome speaks to the unfailing patience of God. This passage reveals that the search was wrought with suffering; the Shepherd wanders into the unknown, reflecting Christ's descent into the human condition to find us. It is a journey of uncertainty and hope. While the Shepherd may not know 'where' to wander, His commitment to 'keep searching until He finds it' suggests that the success of salvation rests on God's perseverance, not the sheep's ability to be found. Grace is the protagonist of this story.

3. Radical Mercy – Grace Beyond Fault:
The sheep is 'lost' solely due to its own wandering - representing human responsibility for the sinfulness and the 'lostness' we bring upon ourselves. Usually, when we help someone who is at fault, we accompany that help with a lecture. Jesus not only did abolish the blame but also revealed a God who bypasses the 'I told you so.' The absence of shouting, frowning, or justification demonstrates that in the moment of rescue, mercy triumphs over judgment. God's priority is restoration, not vindication and that is the lustre of love.

4. The Burden-Bearing Savior – The Theology of the Shoulders:
The Shepherd placing the sheep on His 'shoulders' is a powerful image of substitutionary care, the safest place. It is quite likely that the sheep was exhausted, wounded, or paralyzed by fear and wandering. By carrying the sheep, the Shepherd takes the full weight of the sheep's journey upon Himself. This foreshadows the Cross, where Christ carries the weight of human 'lostness.' The Shepherd does not take the sheep back to a functional 'shed' or even back to the 99 immediately; He takes

it 'home.' This signifies that salvation is not just about returning to a set of rules or a group, but returning to an intimate, familial relationship with the Father.

5. The Ecclesiology of Joy – Communal Celebration:
The Shepherd's happiness 'knows no bounds,' spilling over to neighbours and friends. This reveals the metric of heaven. The greatest joy in heaven is not triggered by the 'steadfastness' of the 99 who never left, but by the 'recovery' of the one who was gone. By calling neighbours to rejoice, Jesus invites us to align our hearts with God's. To be 'not lost' but to be 'jealous' of the lost sheep's return and the shepherd's celebration is to 'be lost' in a different way. True belonging in God's home is defined by sharing in His 'very happy' response to the 'lost and found sheep'.

Ultimately, the parable of the lost sheep reveals that the heart of the Gospel is not about human perfection, but about persistence and unconditional pursuit by the divine Shepherd. It portrays a God who is more concerned with our recovery than our record, more invested in our future than our faults, and who finds His greatest fulfilment not in our perfection, but in our return. It concludes with the radical truth that God does not merely wait for the wayward to return; He proactively enters the 'wilderness' of our faults to find us, carrying our burdens on His own shoulders when we are too weary to walk. By bringing the sheep 'home' rather than to a mere shelter, Jesus shows that salvation is a restoration to intimate belonging. This 'very happy' joy of the Shepherd is so immense that it cannot be contained, inviting all of heaven and earth to celebrate a God who defines His own success not by the security of the 99, but by the recovery of the 'lost one'.

A powerful incident of forgiveness and reconciliation is exemplified in St. Chāvara's efforts to rehabilitate Father Anthony Thondanāt, a key leader of the Roccos faction. Father Thondanāt travelled to Mesopotamia, was consecrated by

the Nestorian Patriarch Simon Ruben XVIII, and returned to Kerala as Archbishop Abdisho. But when he returned to Kerala nobody even bothered to go to him leave alone acknowledge his authority. Calling himself as 'Archbishop of Malankara,' for some time he stayed at Plasanal monastery, which was by then an abandoned building. With the little help from the Jacobite Bishop Kurillos and his people, he just survived. To add to his misery in 1864, he fell ill and suffered from age-related ailments. When he was almost cured, he felt desperate about what to do next.

At that time, Kochouseph Edamattath, who was steward of Mānnānam Monastery, happened to visit this area to collect coconuts. He came across Father Thondanāt and seeing his sad plight, advised him to come and stay at the wall-bungalow at Mānnānam and assured him that the fathers would only be happy to have him there. But he went to Thaikkattussery and stayed at the church. There Parayi regularly sent him his usual daily quota of five measures of rice. Whatever else he asked for was also sent to him promptly. Yet he did not feel happy there this time. Father Paulose Parampil of Muttuchira happened to go there and stayed for four or five days. Observing the miserable condition, he prodded Father Thondanāt for reconciliation. Father Parampil advised him to get reconciled with the Archbishop. But he was afraid to approach the latter. As a way out, Father Parampil asked him to write to Father Prior, who, according to him, would certainly help him. Indeed, their trust in St. Chāvara's mediation was not in vain. Father Thondanāt wrote to him, and St. Chāvara responded sympathetically.

In this desperate situation, St. Chāvara positively responded to the possibility of reconciliation. As soon as St. Chāvara received the request letter showing signs of repentance and pleading for reconciliation, St. Chāvara, with the Archbishop's permission, arranged for a meeting with him in a church at Fort Kochi. On the appointed day the Prior reached at the church in

Fort Kochi at 11 am, and waited there. As he did not turn up even by 4 pm, St. Chāvara began to have doubts, but sat on. Then at 5 pm, Father Thondanāt came along the southern lane, as if by stealth. He had a long black beard reaching down to his neck. He was wearing a black gown over his white cassock. Holding up the former with his right hand in which he held an umbrella also and with a stick in his left hand, he came followed by a deacon. St. Chāvara went forward to receive him at the gate, gave him a peace-greeting and together walked into the Southern veranda of the church. Sitting on two chairs, they began to talk. He assured the poor man that, mediating with the Archbishop, he would have him reinstated as a priest in the vicariate.

With the consent of the Archbishop, St. Chāvara accommodated Father Thondanāt in St. Joseph's Monastery, Mānnānam, where he underwent a spiritual renewal under St. Chāvara's guidance. St. Chāvara helped him to make a good retreat and confession. Eventually with all the formalities completed the Archbishop received him. As Father Thondanāt was not well, the Archbishop allowed him to go to Bharananganam for treatment and gave him ₹ 10. On being told that he had some debts to clear His Grace gave him ₹ 50 more. He was also given a certificate saying that he was permitted to say Mass at any Catholic Church as all his impediments had been removed. Later, he was appointed as Vicar of Edamattom, Vilkummadam, and other parishes.

St. Chāvara exemplified the relentless eagerness of the Good Shepherd through his radical patience and particular focus on the individual. Just as the shepherd in the Gospel leaves the ninety-nine to pursue the one that is lost, St. Chāvara, then the Prior and Vicar General, dedicated an entire day to a single soul. By sitting on the veranda of the church in Fort Kochi from 11 am to 5 pm, he demonstrated that there is no time limit for mercy. Despite his own internal doubts and the high probability

that Father Thondanāt might not appear, he remained vigilant, proving that the value of the 'one' outweighs the administrative security of the many.

The depth of St. Chāvara's forgiveness is further highlighted by the gravity of Father Thondanāt's transgressions. In the eyes of the Church, his decision to seek illicit consecration against his Bishop's will was a profound crime that mirrored the 'lostness' of the sheep who wanders by its own fault. However, instead of focusing on the schism or the betrayal of Catholic tradition, St. Chāvara held a deep, prayerful confidence in the sincerity of Father Thondanāt's repentance. He saw past the 'criminal' and recognized the 'sheep,' choosing to believe in the possibility of restoration even when the legalities of the situation suggested otherwise.

In his personal encounter with the returning priest, St. Chāvara mirrored the divine lack of resentment shown by the shepherd. When Father Thondanāt finally arrived 'stealthily' at 5 pm, likely burdened by shame and fear, he was met not with accusations, shouting, or a 'frowning face,' but St. Chāvara went to the gate and greeted him with a simple greeting of peace. St. Chāvara bypassed all justifications and fault-finding, choosing instead to be immensely 'very happy.' This absence of judgment provided the necessary space for Father Thondanāt to feel the weight of his own restoration rather than the weight of his guilt, illustrating that true mercy seeks its greatest joy in the finding, not the scolding.

Mirroring the shepherd who carries the sheep on his shoulders to 'home' rather than a mere shed, St. Chāvara personally brought Father Thondanāt to St. Joseph's Monastery, Mānnānam. This was a significant act of burden-bearing; the monastery served as a 'home' where the broken priest could find safety and rest under the Prior's own guidance. By arranging for a specific retreat and providing personal spiritual direction, St. Chāvara ensured that the penitent did not just return to a set

of rules, but to a community of love where he could undergo a total renewal of his vocation.

Finally, St. Chāvara's joy reached its fulfilment in the complete reinstatement of the 'lost and found sheep' into the communal life of the Church. Demonstrating a profound commitment to the priest's restoration, the Archbishop took a personal interest in improving Father Thondanāt's health and well-being. He initially provided him with the amount needed to assist with his immediate needs. Later, upon learning that there were further debts to be settled, the Archbishop generously granted him an additional fifty rupees - a substantial and significant sum at that time - ensuring he was unburdened from his financial anxieties as he began his journey of renewal.

True to the Gospel's promise of boundless happiness, the reconciliation was not kept a secret; with the Archbishop's permission, Father Thondanāt was eventually appointed as the Vicar of various parishes, including Edamattom and Vilkummadam. This full restoration serves as a heroic example of the Gospel in action, proving that the greatest celebration in the heart of a saint is reserved for the moment a lost brother is found and returned to the service of God's people.

Drawing from St. Chāvara's heroic encounter with Father Antony Thondanāt, we can find a practical blueprint for addressing 'lost sheep' in our own lives today. In our families, the model of the six-hour vigil teaches us the power of persistent, prayerful presence. In today's world, where the pace of life often demands instant results, we are challenged to wait for loved ones who have strayed into addiction or isolation with the same unmoving hope that St. Chāvara showed on the church veranda. Even when a return seems unlikely, maintaining a consistent 'safe house' without sticking to the set deadline, provides the necessary grace for a wayward family member to eventually return home and find an open door rather than a locked one.

In the modern workplace, St. Chāvara's response to the 'grave crimes' of Father Thondanāt offers a radical lesson in non-judgmental leadership. When a colleague or partner betrays our professional trust, our instinct is often to demand immediate justification or to label and cast them out. However, following the saint's example requires us to greet the repentant individual with a 'wishing of peace' rather than listing out their faults. By choosing not to 'glower' or yell at them, a leader can foster an environment where true accountability is possible because it is rooted in restoration rather than vindication, allowing for the full professional 'reinstatement' of a talented person who simply lost the way.

Social marginalization presents another field where St. Chāvara's burden-bearing is essential. Just as he brought the 'lost' priest to his own monastery 'home' rather than a mere shelter, we are called to move beyond transactional charity. To follow this model today means taking on the personal weight of helping a neighbour who has been discarded by society - such as a formerly incarcerated individual or a person struggling with mental illness. Instead of offering a temporary 'shed' of aiding from a distance, we are challenged to bring them into our own safe zone – here, communities and providing the mentorship and 'spiritual renewal' needed to help them carry the weight of their own past until they can stand on their own.

In the digital sphere, where 'cancel culture' often results in permanent social exile, St. Chāvara acts as a heroic mediator of restoration. His efforts to ensure Father Thondanāt was not just forgiven but eventually appointed as a Vicar in multiple parishes prove that mercy is only complete when it leads to full re-integration. In an age where digital mistakes are rarely forgotten, we are called to be the ones who advocate for the 'cancelled' - working to bridge the gap between the anger of a community and the repentance of an individual. This requires the courage to stand beside those whom others have rejected and to celebrate their return with a joy that 'knows no bounds.'

Ultimately, the example of St. Chāvara serves as a profound challenge to replace passive sympathy with the heroic, active pursuit of the lost. His life reminds us that true strength is found not in the power to judge, but in the relentless, joyful courage to bring a broken brother or sister home. St. Chāvara not only accepted but physically housed a lost sheep, Father Thondanāt, within the safety of St. Joseph's Monastery, Mānnānam. Do we, in our communities today, dare to take such a radical step towards the inclusion of the vulnerable?

St. Chāvara personally guided Father Thondanāt toward spiritual renewal. Do we possess capable members within our own congregation willing to offer a patient hearing, setting aside past grievances with the aim of genuine reconciliation? Father Thondanāt was subsequently reinstated as the vicar of different parishes, a true return to ministry and a challenging example of inclusion and re-integration. Can we think of such a forgiving and restorative approach from our present authorities when dealing with perceived transgressors?

St. Chāvara's profound capacity for forgiveness and restorative love led to his canonization. Given the striking contrast between his actions and our contemporary 'caution', the questions remain: What are we, and where are we and how are we on the path of Christian forgiveness and acceptance?

Missionary Zeal of St. Chāvara

Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.

These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment. Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for labourers deserve their food. Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy, and stay there until you leave. As you enter the house, greet it. If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. Truly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.

"See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of them, for they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues; and you will be dragged before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them and the Gentiles. When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you at that time; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; and you will be hated by

all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly I tell you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes."

(Matthew 10:1-23)

The missionary zeal of a disciple of Christ is presented as a total commitment to Christ's mission, marked by divine authority, radical trust, and unyielding endurance.

Empowered Commissioning: The mission begins with a direct call and the granting of divine authority. Zeal is not merely human enthusiasm but a participation in Christ's own power to heal and liberate. A true missionary understands that they do not go in their own name, but as an 'apostle' - one sent with the specific authority of the Master to continue His work of restoring the broken.

Urgency of the Kingdom: The passage emphasizes an immediate and focused proclamation: "The kingdom of heaven is at hand". This creates a sense of holy urgency where the missionary must prioritize the 'lost sheep' over personal comfort or secondary tasks. This zeal is characterized by a 'plentiful harvest' mindset, recognizing that time is limited and the need for labourers is great.

Radical Detachment and Trust: Jesus commands His disciples to travel light –'taking no gold, silver, or extra tunics'. This reflects a missionary zeal rooted in absolute dependence on God's providence rather than material security. By stripping away earthly reliance, the missionary becomes a living testament to the sufficiency of God's grace.

Sacrificial Generosity: The principle 'Freely you have received, so give freely' defines the spirit of the mission. Zeal is expressed through a selfless pouring out of one's life and gifts for others without seeking reward or recognition. This total self-giving is the hallmark of a heart transformed by the love of Christ.

Wise and Innocent Resilience: Knowing that they are sent as 'sheep among wolves,' missionaries are called to be 'wise as serpents and innocent as doves'. True zeal is not reckless; it involves navigating opposition with spiritual discernment and a refusal to retaliate. It is a 'shrewd' love that remains pure in its intentions while being strategically resilient in the face of hostility.

Endurance through Persecution: The final section of the passage (vv. 16-23) warns that the mission will bring suffering and betrayal. Missionary zeal is ultimately proven by the 'one who perseveres to the end'. It is a courageous commitment that trusts the Holy Spirit to provide the necessary words and strength during trials, viewing even persecution as an opportunity to bear witness to the Truth.

Someone 'Worthy': Jesus instructs to find someone 'worthy'. It refers to spiritual receptivity and moral character rather than wealth or social influence of the person. The intent of Jesus' command can be understood through several layers:

1. Spiritual Receptivity Over Social Status:

The Greek word used for 'worthy' is *axios*, which implies someone who is 'suitably disposed' or 'fitting' for the message of the Kingdom. Commentaries emphasize that a person could be poor but still 'worthy' if they were God-fearing and open to the Gospel. Worthiness was determined by the household's willingness to receive the disciples and their message of peace. If they rejected the message, they were deemed 'unworthy,' regardless of their influence.

2. Protecting the Mission's Reputation:

Jesus required the disciples to 'inquire' about the reputation of the host to ensure the mission was not discredited by associating with scandalous characters. Staying with a person of 'good repute' prevented the disciples' work from being dismissed due to the poor character of their host. A reputable home provided a

stable, credible 'base' from which the disciples could teach and heal the entire community.

3. Practical Stability and Focus:
The command to 'stay there until you leave' was a safeguard against social and material distractions. It prevented disciples from 'house-hopping', moving to 'better' or wealthier homes for superior food or comfort, which would have looked greedy or fickle. Staying in one place allowed the disciples to focus entirely on prayer, study, and ministry rather than navigating the complex social etiquette and 'ostentatious hospitality' of moving between multiple hosts. The act of receiving a messenger was theologically equivalent to receiving Jesus Himself (and the Father who sent Him). The 'worthy' home became a sacred space – a micro-temple where the Kingdom was manifested through healing and teaching.

Empowered Commissioning and Urgent Proclamation: St. Chāvara's zeal was rooted in a profound sense of 'Empowered Commissioning.' He did not view his educational or social reforms as mere human activism but as a direct participation in the authority of Christ to 'heal and liberate.' Recognizing the 'urgency of the Kingdom,' he prioritized the 'lost sheep' of his time - those marginalized by the caste system and deprived of spiritual and intellectual nourishment. His mandate to start a school alongside every church (*Pallikkudam*) mirrored the biblical urgency to proclaim that the Kingdom is at hand through the practical restoration of human dignity and the 'sight of knowledge.'

Radical Detachment and Sacrificial Generosity: In the spirit of 'traveling light,' St. Chāvara embodied 'radical detachment.' Despite founding influential religious Congregations and establishing the first indigenous printing press, he maintained an absolute dependence on God's providence rather than material security. His life was a testament to 'sacrificial

generosity' - he lived the principle of 'Freely you have received, so give freely.' By pouring out his life for the Church and society without seeking personal recognition, he demonstrated a heart transformed by the love of Christ, treating his missionary work as a total self-offering for others.

Wise Resilience and Discernment of the 'Worthy': Navigating the complex socio-religious landscape of 19th century Kerala required the 'wise and innocent resilience' mentioned in chapter 10 of the Gospel according to St. Matthew. 'Wise as a serpent,' St. Chāvara was involved in strategically establishing educational and charitable institutions while remaining 'innocent as a dove' in his pure, prayerful intentions. Furthermore, his mission focused on identifying the 'worthy' — those spiritually receptive to the Gospel regardless of their social or economic status. By establishing a 'central base' of spiritual and educational excellence, he ensured that the mission's reputation was beyond reproach, creating 'sacred spaces' where the Kingdom could be manifested.

Endurance and Witness through Persecution: Finally, St. Chāvara's zeal was proven through unparalleled 'endurance.' Like the warning given to the disciples of suffering and betrayal, St. Chāvara, too, faced significant internal and external challenges, including ecclesiastical tensions and social opposition. He 'persevered till the end' being fuelled by a trust that the Holy Spirit would provide the strength needed for the journey. He viewed every trial not as a hindrance, but as an opportunity to bear witness to the Truth. By remaining rooted in prayer – 'a conversation with the beloved friend' - he became a living witness at all times and in all places, ensuring that the flame of his mission would continue to enlighten generations.

The following is an article written by me and published in 'The Divine Shepherd's Voice', a quarterly journal of Philosophical and Theological reflection, by the Good Shepherd Seminary, Coimbatore, in 2019. This article was titled 'Teachers as

Missionaries' and the following is the revised and abridged form of it to suit this context.

The missionary mandate is contextualized within the ecosystem of schools, students, and parents, specifically within a multireligious framework. Having served alongside colleagues from diverse faith traditions, I recognize that the term 'missionary' - as strictly defined in Biblical or Catholic contexts - may not immediately resonate in a secular educational setting. Therefore, it is essential to explore a more expansive definition of the term 'missionary' that transcends traditional boundaries.

While a 'missionary' is conventionally defined as one sent by a religious body to propagate faith or provide services like education and healthcare, this definition cannot be uniformly applied to faculty members in such a situation. While Catholic educators may view their profession as a mission in a sense, for our colleagues in an inter-faith context, the 'missionary' identity must be interpreted through a broader, more inclusive lens of dedicated service for human transformation.

Redefining the 'Missionary' Identity:

How, then, should we define the identity of a 'missionary' in this context? The secular world often views the term through a narrow lens, attributing strictly Christian proselytizing implications to it. However, a more nuanced understanding reveals that educators who possess a profound passion for their craft and a transcendent purpose in their vocation embody the missionary spirit. In this broader, universal sense, the title 'missionary' belongs to those of genuine integrity: those who lead exemplary lives; who serve as ambassadors of love, peace, and justice; who nurture such values; and who, through their very presence, herald 'good news' to the world.

The Foundation of the Mission:

Every missionary must possess a clear mission to accomplish. For the Catholic educator, the fundamental vision is rooted

in the person of Jesus Christ. He is the ultimate Source of motivation for all professional endeavours. Whether in the classroom or in the public square, we walk in His footsteps, guided by a manifesto derived from the 'Great Commission,' the mandate described as follows: 'go into all the world and preach the Gospel to all creation' (Mk 16:15), 'make disciples of all nations' (Mt 28:19), and serve as His 'witnesses... to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1:8). Thus, while the expression of mission may be inclusive and diverse, its heartbeat remains an unwavering commitment to the transformative power of the Gospel.

The teaching profession should be viewed as a primary calling and passion, not as a last resort. Approaching the vocation to teach with the right attitude transforms it into a profoundly rewarding career. For a teacher missionary, Jesus' command outlines three essential points: proclaiming the Gospel or good news, making disciples, and serving as a witness continuously and universally.

Firstly, 'teacher missionaries' are specifically called to announce the good news, which, according to Luke 4:18, involves 'bringing good news to the poor, proclaiming release to captives, restoring sight to the blind, and freeing the oppressed'. To a teacher missionary, this translates to addressing the needs of students marginalized spiritually, mentally, educationally, socially, psychologically, and economically. They are tasked with releasing students imprisoned by social injustice, providing the enlightenment of knowledge and wisdom, and liberating them from various constraints to ultimately emancipate their lives. In this context, teachers function as true missionaries, capable of significantly influencing and correcting students' erroneous paths.

Teacher missionaries are called to cultivate life and ensure its abundance (John 10:10), acting as promoters of life by nurturing a holistic development of the students. They ought

to pay particular attention to those at the periphery, including the back-benchers and those struggling academically or emotionally. This dedicated focus is a participation in Jesus' redemptive work, fulfilling his purpose: "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10). They become missionaries dedicated to imparting fullness of life, the life promised by Jesus.

Mahatma Gandhi defined the purpose of education as "all-round drawing out of the best in the child and man – body, mind, and spirit," encompassing all necessary elements for their development. Fundamentally, education aims to build the lives of students and fortify them against destructive evil forces such as poverty, illiteracy, child abuse, child labour, exploitation, bribery, drug abuse, and sexual harassment. A teacher missionary can effectively empower students to combat these forces that tend to extinguish the essence of life. This developmental process allows a teacher missionary to instil two key attitudes in students: self-awareness and genuine concern for the welfare of others. Teacher missionaries should cultivate in their students the virtues of love, mercy, compassion, and forgiveness, anchored in charity towards others and sharing available resources.

Secondly, the command to 'make them disciples' is relevant as it aligns with the belief in John 3:16 – 'For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life' – and the understanding that existence is sustained by God dwelling within (1John 4:9). This illustrates God's love expressed by sending His Son so that humanity might live through Him. The core values and dynamics of a missionary are applicable to the teaching profession today for all educators, regardless of their faith traditions, cultural backgrounds, or individual differences.

Thirdly, being a witness at all places, at all times, and to all people, means that for a teacher missionary, the school and

classrooms are the appropriate places, school hours are the right time, and the students –along with their parents, siblings, relatives, and friends through them– are the intended audience. A teacher missionary appreciates everyone inclusively, shows no partiality, avoids depriving opportunities, and is always prepared 'to go the extra mile' for deserving students.

How does one embody the role of a 'teacher missionary'?

The educational institutions must serve as sanctuaries for the principles of pro-life, and the educators must transform into heralds of a 'culture of life.' For the teacher missionary, the mission field is not a distant land to be sought; it is immediately and perpetually present. In a society where young parents prioritize and invest heavily in their children's education, the teacher is granted a captive and receptive audience. Consequently, they do not need to journey in search of a mission territory; it is entrusted to them daily.

The primary missionary field for these educators is the classroom, and their core missionary activity is the holistic formation of personalities of the students entrusted to their care. Teachers must remain mindful that their influence transcends the individual student; by shaping the child, they simultaneously impact the parents, siblings, and the extended family network. In this light, the teaching profession offers a vast and uniquely impactful missionary field, providing an unparalleled opportunity for social and spiritual transformation. Below I describe three models to become Teacher Missionaries.

1. Presence as the Proclamation of Good News: The very presence of a teacher on campus should serve as 'good news' to the students. Addressing priests during the 2013 Chrism Mass, Pope Francis exhorted them to be "shepherds living with the smell of the sheep," warning that those who fail to go out of themselves risk becoming mere 'managers' rather than mediators of grace. This exhortation is profoundly applicable

to teacher missionaries. Educators bring the healing power of grace to their students by remaining close to the marginalized and deprived. In doing so, they become vital bridges between students and parents, facilitating socialization and resolving adjustment issues. The teacher's mission, therefore, extends beyond the classroom and into the very homes of their students.

2. Missionary by Attraction: Teachers fulfil their mission through the power of attraction. The inner beauty of a teacher - their character and integrity - is sensed and appreciated by students far more than their external appearance or erudite speeches. By fostering a genuine rapport with colleagues and students, educators exert a positive influence. Their authority flows from their *being* rather than their *having*. Their value is defined by who they are, not by their possessions. When a teacher's behavior manifests the 'habits of the heart' rather than mere intellectual exercise, students are more likely to listen and follow. While remaining aware of global trends to stay relevant, the teacher missionary guides students according to their timeless, socially accepted value systems.

3. Missionary by 'Going Forth': The mission requires 'going forth' to the last benches, to the forgotten corners of the classroom, and into the families of especially such students. Our educational institutions possess tremendous potential to provide leadership and thus to influence the society systematically. Schools must provide the space and resources to reach out to every student until they are empowered with the life skills necessary to navigate the world.

Here are some practical suggestions for the teachers to become missionaries:

a. Keep Your Eyes and Ears Open: Observational sensitivity is a hallmark of the missionary educator. Every instance of aberrant behaviour by a student is a silent communication. If teachers keep their eyes and ears open, they can better understand these underlying struggles and help students progress in life.

b. Redirect Misbehaviour Toward Constructive Activities: Students possess a wealth of latent talent and constructive skills. Often, due to over-enthusiasm or a lack of guidance, this energy is channelled in deviant activities. A teacher missionary identifies their talent and redirects it toward virtuous and constructive goals.

c. Reach Out to Families through the Institution: In an era of broken relationships, the school often becomes a battlefield for custody disputes. Teachers frequently find themselves caught between parents competing for the child's loyalty or possession. In such precarious situations, a teacher missionary must be 'as prudent as a serpent,' assisting parents in ensuring the child does not become a victim of adult egos.

d. Exercise Prudence in Correction: Correction must be seasoned with understanding. At a young age, 'delinquency' is often just confusion. These children are not being deceitful; they are struggling to discern the rules and 'testing' the consequences and boundaries. A teacher missionary guides them toward clarity and right choices rather than simply labelling them as wrongdoers or troublemakers.

e. Identify the Positive in Every Child: A compassionate missionary must avoid the trap of rudeness through generalization. We often use absolute terms like 'You *always* fight,' when the behaviour may have only occurred once or twice. Our report cards should not merely be lists of negative comments or just 'areas for improvement.' Instead, they should document the tangible progress a child has made through the teacher's influence. A teacher is a true missionary when they can find and nurture the good in every student.

f. The Teacher as an Effective Counsellor: The teacher missionary must embody multiple roles – an active listener, an empowering leader, a creative problem-solver, a motivating guide, and a sincere advocate – for their students. The more a

teacher earns these 'degrees' in the eyes of their students, the more effective they become in ministering to both the children and their extended families.

g. Serve as a Role Model: Modelling behaviour is often more effective than verbal instruction. This is the essence of the teacher missionary: leading not by command, but by the quiet yet effective power of example.

A story is told of a parent who sought guidance from a Guru on how to groom and discipline his children. The Guru offered a singular, profound insight: "There are no parenting tips other than to become a role model yourself." He explained that children view their parents as heroes and look to them for solutions. These solutions do not require scientific precision, but they must be age-appropriate. Furthermore, consistent examples are far more effective than constant exhortation, as children are prone to imitation rather than mere listening. The responsibility to change lies primarily with the adult, not the child.

This principle is the cornerstone of the teacher missionary. To guide erring students, one must provide a living example to follow—not only within the confines of the classroom but as a consistent witness within the society.

Essential Attitudes of the Teacher Missionary:

To embody this missionary identity, a teacher should cultivate these foundational attitudes:

1. An Attitude of Prayer: Effective mission work in a school requires a spirit of prayerfulness. Without a deep sense of dependence on the Divine, a teacher lacks the spiritual grounding necessary to serve as a true role model.

2. Passion for the Profession: A teacher must possess a genuine love for the profession. If the motivation is restricted to remuneration, they are in the wrong vocation. A teacher missionary is fuelled by passion, not just a pay-check.

3. Enduring Patience: Character refinement is a slow, incremental process; it does not occur overnight. Teachers must be prepared to provide constant guidance and reminders, a task that demands tireless and enduring patience.

4. Prudence and Discernment: In line with the biblical mandate, teacher missionaries must be 'innocent as doves and prudent as serpents.' They must watch carefully to discern the inner cravings of students for love, appreciation, or correction. Often, delinquent behaviour is not an act of malice but a desperate cry for help or a technique to seek attention.

5. Unwavering Trust: Trust is the currency of the teacher-student relationship. Students rarely fail those who believe in them. Conversely, partiality is a grave offense that deeply wounds a child's spirit. While criticism can leave lasting scars, words of appreciation and encouragement possess the power to bring a wandering student back to the 'fold of the Shepherd.'

6. A Contented Life: A teacher's personal outlook on life inevitably influences the mentality of their students. As the adage goes, 'Your attitude determines your altitude.' By finding joy and contentment in their work, teachers model a healthy psychological state and do true justice to their profession.

7. Courage to Intervene: Students often approach teachers with complex, multifaceted problems, expecting solutions. A teacher missionary must have the courage to face these challenges head-on, seeking to resolve issues rather than multiply them. This courage is rooted in the commitment to save and protect the child, who is always a precious gift.

Experience often shows that the so-called 'back-benchers' and 'troublemakers' are frequently those who achieve the greatest success later in life. Those who required the most frequent admonitions are often the ones who return with the greatest love and appreciation for their mentors. Therefore, one should never be discouraged by those who struggle or loiter.

Teachers must remain steadfast in offering correction, for, deep down, students expect and desire the guidance that only a dedicated teacher missionary can provide.

Challenges Faced by the Contemporary Teacher Missionary:

1. Navigating the Legal Landscape: Modern society has become increasingly vigilant regarding the protection of minors, resulting in the formulation of stringent rules and regulations with severe penalties for violations. In the Indian context, it is imperative for teacher missionaries to be thoroughly versed in the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act. While these laws are essential for safeguarding children, educators must also be aware of their professional implications and the potential for these regulations to be misused against targeted individuals. Operating with transparency and maintaining professional boundaries are no longer optional, but essential components of the missionary vocation.

2. Understanding the 'New Gen' Student: The contemporary missionary field is populated by 'New Gen' or Millennial and Gen Z students. These learners are characterized by their advanced technological proficiency, deep immersion in social media, and instantaneous access to global information. This digital nativity often brings a desire for immediate gratification and, occasionally, a struggle to form deep, enduring, and lasting interpersonal relationships. Managing the complexities of this generation within a traditional school setting requires a significant shift in pedagogical and relational approaches.

3. Integration of Innovation and Tradition: A teacher missionary in the modern era must remain abreast with technological advancements and global events. Prudence is required to integrate innovative methods and digital techniques into the resolution of student problems. However, this does not mean abandoning the past; rather, age-old proven strategies and traditional moral values must be presented in 'new wineskins.'

Ultimately, the challenges of the modern era do not diminish the calling; they refine it. When the situation demands it, a true missionary zeal should propel the educator to serve with the totality of their being, fulfilling the greatest commandment: to serve the Lord 'with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind' (Matthew 22:37). Fusing the modern tools with eternal truths, the teacher missionary remains an effective instrument of transformation in an ever-changing world.

"I Don't Want to be A Saint by Halves!"

He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' I tell you; this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted."

(Luke 18:9-14)

St. Therese of Lisieux g or the curated perfection often displayed on social media. In a culture where people broadcast their good deeds, fitness regimes, or moral stances, it is easy to fall into the trap of measuring one's spirituality against others. Believers must ask themselves if their acts of service, attendance at religious ceremonies, or adherence to moral codes lead to genuine humility or subtle self-congratulation. The parable warns that a faith defined by comparison is spiritually bankrupt.

The Pharisee created a chasm between himself and the 'sinner'. Modern society often creates similar divides based on politics, lifestyle choices, or social status. The parable calls believers to recognize a universal truth: we all stand equally in need of God's mercy. It demands that we approach all people - regardless of our perceived differences in morality – with the same compassion we hope God extends to us. We are all 'tax-collectors' at the foot of the cross, dependent entirely on the Father's grace.

The tax collector in the parable offers 'all' he has in terms of humility and total reliance on God's mercy. He recognizes his total unworthiness and casts himself entirely upon God's grace

("God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"). He does not itemize his few good deeds; he offers his brokenness and his whole being to God. A saint should aspire not just to follow the rules (like the Pharisee) but to give his *entire* will and life to God, aiming for nothing less than perfect love. He is doing *everything* that God demands with extraordinary love, no matter how small the task, turning every moment into an act of love for God.

This passage encourages believers to reject the performance mindset. True faith requires acknowledging one's weaknesses and failures before God, resisting the urge to project a perfect image of sainthood. It reminds us that grace meets us in our brokenness, not in our curated perfection.

Modern culture highly values achievement, hard work, and earning one's keep. This secular mindset can easily seep into faith, leading believers to treat salvation as a reward for moral effort rather than an unmerited gift of God's grace. The parable is a powerful reminder that God justifies the humble, not the 'successful' or 'morally superior' person. Believers must constantly guard against the attitude that their good deeds *earn* them God›s love, embracing instead the tax collector›s posture of relying solely on divine mercy.

At the end of the parable, Jesus declares that the tax collector, not the Pharisee, went home justified. "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted." This is the core message of the passage. The Pharisee represents the danger of religious half-heartedness and pride, while the humility of the tax collector perfectly aligns with the disposition needed to truly embrace the radical call to pursue nothing less than perfect sainthood.

Constant prayer, sincerity and permanency in thoughts and living make the priestly life an ideal one. With this in mind, St. Chāvara points out that certain persons are zealous for a day to fulfil their daily prayers, service and charity works. Their life, according to Chāvara, will find a very horrible end

as he described in the story of the death of an impious priest in the third meditation. Unfaithfulness, repetition of sins, and scandalous thoughts led him to the wrath of God.

St. Chāvara's life is a powerful testament that he, like St. Thérèse of Lisieux, chose 'all' of God's Will and grace, rejecting the notion of being a 'saint by halves'. He embraced the radical demands of the Gospel without compromise, applying this total commitment to every aspect of his life: monastic discipline, social action, and spiritual leadership.

Despite his profound dedication, St. Chāvara often felt he was choosing 'the half,' that he was not following in the footsteps of Jesus with his whole heart. Fully aware of this internal struggle, he offered these penetrating remarks: "O privileged priest of God, whom are you serving? Whose servant are you? Thinking that you can serve God and the world at the same time, you chalk out a path of your own by not committing grave sin and at the same time neglecting to advance in virtue. One day you are fervent, next day you are cold, and tepid and careless. Today an act of virtue, next day a fault. Today you recite the canonical prayers with attention and fervour. Next day you completely neglect the canonical prayers or say it with distraction and without reverence and attention. Today after receiving the Lord fervently, you go out of the church seeking for pleasure company and pleasurable talk. You waste your time knocking out here and there for distraction. Today you remain in your room engaged in spiritual reading and meditation. The next day you do not at all enter your room." His self-awareness and call to consistency remain a hallmark of his spiritual legacy, clearly cited in the historical archives of the CMI Congregation.

Embracing Radical Obedience and Discipline: St. Chāvara chose 'all' of the monastic life, not just the comfortable parts. He co-founded the first indigenous religious Congregation for men in India and established rigorous rules for community life, prayer, and poverty. He insisted on strict observance of poverty and

obedience. His willingness to enforce discipline and live by an austere rule, even when it was challenging for the community or himself, shows he aimed for comprehensive sanctity, not a convenient form of religious life.

Total Reliance on Divine Providence: Rejecting the worldly safety of wealth or security, St. Chāvara committed himself fully to relying purely on God's provision for his community's needs. When the monastery had no money to pay daily wages, he did not resort to worldly schemes or compromise the vow of poverty. Instead, he maintained strenuous effort within his power and retreated to radical prayer, trusting God for 'daily bread'. The instantaneous and miraculous arrival of funds justified his 'total' choice of God's way over human anxiety.

Comprehensive Commitment to Charity and Social Justice: St. Chāvara demonstrated his choice for 'all' in his approach to Christian charity, which extended far beyond the walls of his monasteries. He saw no division between spiritual works and social responsibility. He mandated that every monastery should establish a school open to all, including the marginalized, and was a strong advocate for girls' education. This was a revolutionary act that broke centuries of social injustice. He did not just minister to the soul; he addressed the full human person – mind, body, and spirit – demonstrating a complete commitment to human dignity and equality.

Unwavering Leadership and Ecclesiastical Fortitude: As the Vicar General for the Syro-Malabar Church, he faced immense political and ecclesiastical opposition, yet remained steadfast in his mission and obedience to Rome. He maintained strong leadership amidst various schismatic challenges to the Church. His firmness in upholding unity and faith shows a personality that chose the demanding path of hierarchical loyalty and truth, rather than the easy route of compromise or popularity.

Seeking Perfect Grace at Death: He confessed, "By God's grace I feel confident to say that... I never had an occasion of losing the grace that I received in baptism." This shows his life was a singular, total commitment to preserving God's grace entirely, rejecting any half-measures of sin or spiritual lukewarmness.

Jesus is understood as both fully human and fully divine, a unified reality without duplicity. In this theological mystery, His divine nature is perfectly and consistently expressed through His human nature. In mirroring this duality, we too experience both our human and divine aspect – reflecting the image of God within us. There are moments when our words and actions manifest a divine quality, exhibiting a righteousness that surpasses even the outward observance of the Pharisee, as seen in the aforementioned parable. Conversely, there are times when we behave in ways that can only be described as devilish, surprising those around us with how sloppy and slovenly we can become. This dichotomy of behaviour appears to be an inescapable part of the human condition.

Ultimately, the behaviour that becomes prominent in our lives - whether we lean toward our divine potential or our base instincts - will determine the quality of our life in the eyes of God. It is the prevailing inclination and the constant striving toward the divine that shapes our spiritual reality. St. Chāvara's life exemplifies choosing 'all' by integrating prayer, work, charity, and obedience into a seamless life of radical Christian commitment.

Imageries Used in *Āthmānuthāpam*

With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.

(Mark 4:33-34)

Jesus often employed rich imagery, primarily through parables and metaphors drawn from everyday life in ancient Judea, as a powerful pedagogical tool to make complex spiritual and moral truths relatable and understandable to his diverse audience. This approach was highly effective because the imagery was both relatable and familiar, utilizing common scenarios like planting seeds (Parable of the Sower), sheep herding (The Good Shepherd), baking, and fishing that resonated deeply with people in the society of his time. These vivid comparisons were memorable, making profound concepts easier to retain and retell within an oral culture compared to abstract theological arguments.

Furthermore, his stories were thought-provoking, often introducing a twist that challenged conventional wisdom and compelled listeners to uncover deeper meanings. The accessibility on multiple levels was a key function, offering immediate, practical morals for the general public while concealing deeper spiritual insights for those who actively sought further understanding. This narrative strategy also allowed his critique of religious authorities and societal norms to be authoritative yet non-confrontational, letting listeners draw their own conclusions without direct accusation in the public.

The effect of this teaching method varied significantly depending on the listener's receptiveness.

- For the open-minded and his followers, the imageries clarified complex spiritual truths, provided practical guidance for

their moral life, and fostered a deeper connection to God, leading to engaging and transformative experiences.

- The curious found their interest piqued by the narratives, prompting them to seriously consider the implications of His teachings.
- However, for the sceptical or hostile minds, the parables often served to conceal the message.

As noted in the Gospels (Matthew 13:10-17), Jesus explained to the disciples that He spoke in parables so that 'seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand,' essentially hardening the hearts of those unwilling to accept His authority or change their ways. Ultimately, Jesus' use of tangible, enduring imagery allowed His message to resonate across time and cultures.

In the rich tradition of spiritual writing, great religious figures often employ powerful imageries to articulate the ineffable mystery of the divine relationship. St. Chāvara, too, utilized a profound array of metaphors drawn from scripture and nature to express his profound and intimate prayer experiences. His writings starkly juxtapose the absolute sovereignty of God – understood from his usage 'beginning' which points to a God who is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent – with a deeply humble view of his own humanity. By casting himself as the 'son of Adam,' a 'brute of the earth,' a 'worm creeping on the face of the earth,' and mere 'dust of dust,' St. Chāvara highlighted the radical fragility and intrinsic limitations of his human self. This intense self-abasement served not to despair, but to amplify the overwhelming abundance of God's kindness and mercy, which he experienced as a boundless, 'sleepless guardian angel' and a compassion 'as vast and endless as the sea.' Through this vivid spiritual language, he reveals an intimate relationship founded entirely on divine grace, where human limitation meets the limitless extent of God's benevolent providence.

In the Beginning – God as Omniscient, Omnipotent, and Omnipresent:

The reference to the word 'beginning' brings out the imagery of God as omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent. It serves to establish the absolute sovereignty and eternal nature of the Divine.

- 'Omniscient' implies that all human actions, thoughts, and the very fabric of existence are known to God instantly and completely.
- 'Omnipotent' signifies His unlimited power, the source from which all creation originates and is sustained.
- 'Omnipresent' speaks of His unbounded presence, existing everywhere at all times, making it impossible to be outside His notice or reach.

The profound implication is that humanity exists within the constant, all-encompassing gaze and power of a perfect Creator, which underscores both the accountability of human actions and the constant availability of divine presence.

The Son of Adam – Fragility and Limitations of Human Beings:

Describing humans as the 'son of Adam' immediately invokes the biblical narrative of the first man, carrying connotations of original sin, mortality, and inherent weakness. This imagery highlights the stark contrast between the perfect Creator and His limited creation. The 'fragility and limitations' are not merely physical but also moral and intellectual. Profoundly, this imagery serves as a constant reminder that human capabilities are finite; people are susceptible to error, physical decay, and moral failings, fostering a sense of humility and a recognition of the need for the guidance and mercy of a higher power.

The Brute of the Earth – Insignificant and Unworthy:

The phrase 'brute of the earth' is a powerful and demeaning self-description, emphasizing human insignificance and a perceived lack of inherent worthiness when measured against

divine perfection. In this context, 'brute' suggests an existence guided more by base instincts and earthly desires than by spiritual aspirations, akin to an animal that lacks a rational soul or a higher purpose in the spiritual realm. The profound implication is an extreme form of self-abasement, a literary device used to express deep humility and unworthiness before God, suggesting that without divine grace, humanity is merely an insignificant part of the material world, not worthy of divine attention.

A Worm Creeping on the Face of the Earth – Humanity's Insignificance before God's Grandeur:

The imagery of 'a worm creeping on the face of the earth' pushes the idea of insignificance even further. Worms are often perceived as lowly, vulnerable, and easily crushed creatures. This metaphor powerfully conveys humanity's extreme littleness and vulnerability when juxtaposed with the immense 'grandeur' of God. It implies that human existence is fleeting, our impact on the grand milieu of the universe is minimal, and we move about in a humble, almost unperceivable scale. The profoundness lies in its ability to evoke a feeling of absolute dependence on God's benevolence for survival, reinforcing the theme of divine majesty and human fragility.

Dust of Dust – Reminder of Both Human Origin and Destiny:

'Dust of dust' is a poignant double-edged metaphor rooted in the biblical 'ashes to ashes, dust to dust' concept. It is a potent 'reminder of both human origin and destiny.' The first 'dust' refers to the creation of man from the earth; the second 'dust' points to the inevitable return to the earth after death. This imagery is profoundly humbling, stripping away all worldly pride and reminding individuals of their transient, material composition. The implication is a call to focus on the eternal rather than the temporary, as all material existence will ultimately disintegrate back to its original, fundamental elements.

The Sleepless Guardian Angel – Constant Providence and Unconditional Love:

The 'sleepless guardian angel' serves as a beautiful and powerful metaphor for presenting the concept of constant divine providence and unconditional love. This imagery suggests a persistent, unwavering presence that offers divine protection far superior to any earthly care. The profoundness is amplified by contrasting it with the 'limitations of the mother,' whose love and protection, though strong, are inherently human and subject to fatigue, absence, or death. The metaphor of 'angel' implies a love and vigilance that is tireless, perfect, and eternal, offering solace and security rooted in the reliable nature of God's care.

God's Kindness and His Mercy – As Unbounded and as Vast and Endless as the Sea:

Presenting 'God's kindness and His mercy' as 'unbounded and as vast and endless as the sea' is a powerful figure of speech that aims to capture the immeasurable nature of divine compassion. Just as the ocean horizon seems to stretch on forever, the extent of God's forgiveness and benevolence is limitless. The profound implication of this imagery offers immense hope and reassurance. It assures the reader that no matter how great human failings (the 'dust' and 'worm' imagery), God's capacity for mercy is always greater and sufficient to encompass and wash away all shortcomings.

A deep reflection on the imageries used by St. Chāvara would help to understand the spiritual depth of his life. Engaging with the metaphors and symbols he employed offers insight into his profound connection with the divine. By focusing on his use of language, one can be motivated to trust in the benevolence of God rather than fearing or avoiding His providential care. This approach encourages a stance of complete faith and humble trust in divine protection.

By intentionally releasing worries and vulnerabilities into God's guiding hand and protective embrace, a space is created within life to experience a deep sense of peace and joy, even during difficult times. This spiritual practice transforms suffering from a source of despair into an opportunity for profound spiritual reliance, reflecting the Saint's own unwavering faith in God's perpetual presence.

Besrauma, Vanavasa, Darsanaveedu, Punyasanketham and *Tapasubhavanam*

Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. "It is written," he said to them, "'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it 'a den of robbers." The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple courts, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant.

(Matthew 21:12-15)

"Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves; and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. He was teaching and saying, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers." And when the chief priests and the scribes heard it, they kept looking for a way to kill him; for they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching. And when evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city."

(Mark 11:15-19)

"Then he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling things there; and he said, "It is written, 'My house shall be a house of prayer'; but you have made it a den of robbers." Every day he was teaching in the temple. The chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people kept looking for a way to kill him; but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were spellbound by what they heard."

(Luke 19:45-48)

"The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he

drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!"

(John 2:13-16)

The cleansing of the Temple, as recounted in the four Gospels, is a significant event in the earthly life of Jesus. The presence of this narrative in all four accounts suggests its importance, and the portrayal of a Rabbi acting in such a manner was notable in that historical context. This event highlights the following key themes regarding the nature and purpose of a place of worship.

Father's House is a House of Prayer:

Jesus refers to the Temple as 'My house' (Luke 19:46) and 'My Father's house' (John 2:16), indicating its divine connection and intended purpose. Quoting from Isaiah 56:7, Jesus states that the Temple is meant to be 'a house of prayer' (Matthew 21:13; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46). This establishes that a place of worship is primarily intended for communication with the divine, a sacred space for prayer and spiritual focus.

It is a House of Prayer for All Nations:

Mark's Gospel includes the phrase 'for all nations' (Mark 11:17), which is also a quote from Isaiah. This emphasizes a perspective of worship that includes everyone. The cleansing was not only about practices within the Jewish community but also about the accessibility of God to people of all backgrounds. The area where the buying and selling took place, the Court of the Gentiles, was the designated space for non-Jewish worshippers to pray. By occupying this area with commerce, access for those outside the Jewish community was being hindered, going against the inclusive intent for the Temple.

The 'Zeal':

In the Gospel of John, it is noted that Jesus' disciples recalled the scripture: "The zeal for your house will consume me"

(John 2:17, from Psalm 69:9). This zeal, or strong devotion, is depicted as an expected characteristic of those who are part of or lead a place of worship. Jesus' actions are presented as being motivated by this intense commitment, serving as an example for individuals within a faith community to protect the sacredness and integrity of their places of worship.

Not a Place for Trade:

The presence of 'those who were selling and buying in the temple' (Matthew 21:12) and the 'money-changers' (Mark 11:15) was a central focus of Jesus' actions. While such services might have been seen as necessary for pilgrims to exchange currency and purchase animals for sacrifice, their placement within the sacred areas introduced a commercial aspect to the place which was supposed to provide a spiritual experience. Jesus overturning the tables and seats conveyed the message that trade should not take the place of worship, illustrating that a physical place for prayer should be kept distinct from commercial activity.

A Den of Robbers:

Jesus' statement, "But you have made it a den of robbers" (Matthew 21:13; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46), is a strong critique referencing Jeremiah 7:11. This accusation suggests more than just simple trading. A den of robbers is a place offering refuge for unlawful activity and a location where individuals might retreat after engaging in wrongdoing. The portrayal suggests that the temple leadership had turned a religious institution into a self-serving operation, using religious authority to profit from worshippers through inflated prices and fees, disguising their actions as religious necessities.

Inmates Made it a 'Den of Robbers':

The responsibility for this situation is placed on the 'inmates' — the religious authorities and merchants present. Jesus' confrontation highlights the potential for institutional neglect

and the possibility of corruption when religious leaders prioritize financial gain and convenience over spiritual principles. The presence of the chief priests and scribes who sought to eliminate him (Mark 11:18) reinforces their involvement in allowing and benefiting from these practices.

Transforming the 'Den' into a 'House of Prayer':

The narrative poses a challenge to religious communities today to examine their own practices. The passage serves as an urgent summoning to action: to ensure that places of worship remain genuine 'houses of prayer for all nations' – welcoming, inclusive, and free from commercialism or corruption. It emphasizes a responsibility on those currently involved in faith communities to maintain the zeal required to protect the integrity of their spiritual homes, actively working to transform any elements that resemble a 'den of robbers' back into spaces dedicated to universal prayer and authentic spiritual practice.

The radical purification of the Temple narrated in the Gospels serves as a definitive restoration of the Father's House, reclaiming it from a "den of robbers" and re-establishing it as a "House of Prayer for All Nations." Jesus' righteous zeal demonstrates that the sanctity of a holy place is not static; it requires a perpetual transformation—a turning away from the transactional spirit of "trade" toward a total immersion in the Divine. This movement from a "den" to a "house" is not merely a change of activity, but a change of identity, where the space is reclaimed for its original purpose: an authentic encounter between the Creator and the created.

For St. Chāvara, this biblical restoration finds its practical and spiritual expression in the life of the religious house, which he envisioned through a rich tapestry of Syriac and Indian concepts. Just as Jesus elevated the Temple above the common marketplace, St. Chāvara viewed the monastery as a *Bes-rauma*, a "house on high" that exists in a state of vertical communion with God. This "house on high" is further refined

into a *vanavāsa*, a spiritual forest dwelling where the "zeal" of the soul finds solitude. In this purified space, the religious house becomes a *darsanaveedu*, a house of vision where the Lord is truly beheld, and a *punyasanketham*, a sacred sanctuary of virtues. Ultimately, like the Temple cleansed of distractions, the religious house is a *tapasubhavanam*—an abode of asceticism where the fire of devotion ensures that the "Father's House" remains a living testament to His presence.

Bes-rauma (House on High):

In the profound vision of Kerala's monastic pioneers, the monasteries - referred to with some terms in its full spiritual meaning such as *Bes-rauma* (a Syriac term meaning, a house on high), *vanavāsa* (forest dwelling), *darsanaveedu* (house of vision or a house to behold the Lord), *punyasanketham* (sacred sanctuary or abode of virtues), and *tapasubhavanam* (abode of asceticism or house of austerity) - are conceived as earthly conduits, where the divine immanence finds a tangible residence. It is in this abode that the inmates practice and live out the evangelical counsels of chastity (*brahmachārithvam*), poverty (*agathithvam*) and obedience (*cholvili*). The ultimate spiritual purpose of the members inhabiting these sacred premises is their personal transformation: to become a true *punyathinte kannādi* - a pristine and radiant mirror reflecting divine virtues.

Bes-rauma, the 'house on high', draws its profound symbolism from the sacred scriptures. This term resonates deeply with the Gospel imperative found in Matthew 5:14-16: "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." Furthermore, it echoes the ancient prophecy in Isaiah 2:2, which foretells: "It shall happen in the later days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains and shall be raised above the hills."

Benny Thettayil in his article "Rising Mountains and Proximity to the Divine: Biblical Ideal of *Bes-rauma*", published in the 'Theological Studies on St. Chāvara 19' states that the biblical mountains have a significant place in the spirituality and ascetic life of the biblical personalities. The mountain of hope (Ararat), the mountain of the covenant (Sinai), the mountain of vision (Nebo), the mountain of zeal (Carmel), the mountain of faith (Moriah/Zion), the mountain of transcendence (Olive), the mountain of transformation (Hermon), and the mountain of assembly (Zaphon) have significant influence in the life of the respective biblical people. The same ideas are concealed in the concept of *Bes-rauma* of our founding fathers.

The deliberate choice of a high location is predicated upon three core theological and practical imperatives:

1. *Visibility and Witness*: Just as the 'city set on a hill', the community serves as a visible beacon, a *darsanaveedu* (house of vision) providing spiritual enlightenment and guidance to all who reside in the surrounding region.
2. *Sacredness of 'High Places'*: The heights inherently command a general notion of sanctity, a location rich in both cultural and spiritual significance, elevating the mind toward God.
3. *Solitude and Segregation*: Situated apart from bustling residential areas, the community is afforded the literal experience of *vanavāsa* (forest dwelling), embracing the profound joy and contemplative isolation of solitude. It was precisely these ideals that inspired the founding fathers to select a hill in Mānnānam as the site for their blossoming community of consecrated men, establishing it as a *Bes-rauma* - a true house on high, both in its physical and spiritual meanings.

Bes-rauma is highly symbolic. It symbolized the elevated nature of life and the height of sanctity that those who lived in the monastery should aspire for and strive to live, so that they would become a symbol of Christian life of the people around

to look at and be inspired and be challenged by. Furthermore, in the words of the founding fathers, *Bes-rauma*, the house built on the hilltop exists for all others to look at and be inspired; it has to be a 'mirror of virtuous life' (*punyattinte kannādi*) looking at which the neighbors and visitors and even the members of the community can learn what it means to lead a virtuous life.

Darsanaveedu, A Tent of Meeting:

The monastery that the founders had in mind was a place filled with the presence of the Lord that anyone who lived there and anyone who entered there would experience the presence of the Lord. Thus, the primary objective of the house where the consecrated people lived was the experience of God. Biblically, *darsanaveedu* is envisaged after the model of the tent of meeting that the Israelites pitched in the midst of the camp in the wilderness during their sojourn in the desert. The tent of meeting along with the Ark of the Covenant, not only signified the Presence of the Lord among the people, but also functioned as a place where Moses went in to consult Yahweh.

Only a select few would enter the tent of meeting. Moses, the leader and the mediator between Yahweh and His people, often went in, in order to meet and consult Yahweh, that the tent came to be called the Tent of Meeting. The tent of meeting is erected to keep a covenant relationship with God and His people. It was a location of divine interaction, a place where the people could place their needs before the Lord. The tent of meeting became a visual representation of the availability of God throughout Israel's journey to the Promised Land.

This idea was behind the conception of *darsanaveedu* and the natural spiritual inclination of the founders Thomas Pālackal, who was "deeply spiritual, prayerful and contemplative, austere, ascetic, detached, committed to the continuous study and teaching of sacred sciences, and a spiritual guide and counsellor for all" and Thomas Porukkara, who "from his younger age, cherished the desire for a life withdrawn from the

world and family affairs" played a decisive role in establishing a house of vision (*darsanaveedu*). St. Chāvara notes the following comment on it: "Since in the absence of such a house in Malabar, even for the spiritual leaders of the community, much good was left undone."

St. Chāvara would see the *dasarsanaveedu* envisioned by his revered teachers as a facility established after the manner of the tent of meeting, where the Presence of the Lord would be guaranteed for those who enter it and dwell in it.

Tapasubhavanam, A Center of Austerity:

The founding fathers of our Congregation envisioned the monastery as a *tapasubhavanam* which could be interpreted and translated as 'a center for spiritual discipline, asceticism, self-denial, abstinence, piety and simplicity'. Asceticism is the practice of the denial of natural physical or psychological desires in order to attain a spiritual goal and is seen in various religions. *Tapas* refers to a variety of austere spiritual meditation practices for self-discipline and inner cleansing to achieve liberation and salvation.

St. Chāvara writes, "Father Thomas Pālackal and Father Thomas Porukkara had yearned to establish a *darsanaveedu*, since in the absence of a house of austerity (*tapasubhavanam*) in Malabar, even for priests, much good was left undone. They were sad at heart as there was no one to give them support, but they went on praying." By moving to such a house of vision and austerity the founders did not mean total withdrawal from the society or lack of concern for the people and their needs. Instead, they wanted to do the many good things that in the absence of a *tapasubhavanam* were left undone.

Punyasanketham, Abode of Virtues or a Spiritual Resort:

The term highlights his vision of religious communities as sanctuaries where individuals could grow spiritually and support one another in their pursuit of holiness. This is achieved through the cultivation of their spiritual life in prayer,

meditation, reading, silence, ascetism, manual work, and perhaps in intellectual pursuits. In a life of solitude, the monk goes beyond all social relationships and social interactions and becomes a *punyasanketham*.

Monasteries are meant to be a spiritual resort (*punya-sanketham*) where all the seekers of God-experience can find refuge and are spiritually refreshed and revitalized. "The basic factor of the life in *Bes-rauma* … was that it was communitarian. As members of the family they lived, prayed and worked together." The members of the community became *koodapirappukal* or *ekodhara sahodarangal* (co-born or who are born of the same mother). The religious community in the monastery becomes a supernatural family. "What a family naturally is, the religious community must, in the light of faith, consciously become."

St. Chāvara reminisces the first community at Mānnānam, "Therefore, following the example of [the early Christians led by] St. Peter, we began to hold in common all our material goods and possessions, and to keep a common account." Thus, the monasteries were a spiritual resort for the members who live in and also for those who approach them. It is from this resort of virtues, vigorous pastoral activities in the Kerala Church took place with various apostolic objectives like, "to instruct the ignorant by means of good example, to receive into the church those who are willing, to reunite the separated Christians, to enhance the growth and wellbeing of the Church, to promote peace and harmony among the nations and world religions, and to realize on earth the community of those called for the eternal kingdom of heaven."

In every sense of the term, the monastery at Mānnānam, a house built on hilltop, was a *punyasanketham*, a spiritual refuge for all kinds of people in the society.

> "The priests used to frequent Mānnānam for their spiritual needs. They came to the community at

> *Bes-rauma* to spend a few days of quiet and prayer, to make their confession, monthly recollection and annual retreat and to take necessary guidance for life. The priests in need of correction or pastoral improvement were sent to the monastery by the bishop. They would spend time under the guidance of the members of the community there and return to him with a certificate of approval. The laity came to the monastery for the daily mass, retreat and confession, and had the members of the community come for the anointing of the sick. The members of other faiths considered the activities in the *Bes-rauma* as a catalyst of socio-cultural renaissance and appreciated the social, education and various other initiatives of the community."

Vanavāsa, An Eremitic Life:

Vanavāsa is the life of the withdrawn or an eremitic life. The idea of a consecrated life first took root in the two senior members among the founding fathers. The word 'hermit' comes from the Greek *eremos*, meaning wilderness or an isolated place, which, in Indian ascetic terms, is *vanavāsa,* literally, a life in the forest. *Malpān* Thomas Porukkara speaks of *vanavāsa* as a means of securing eternal life. The desire to be away from the society and be closer to God comes from the cultural and biblical world vision according to which, God dwells up in heaven and His creation has its place down here on earth.

In his private deliberations, Porukkara noted that life in the world was not very helpful in attaining sanctity of life. This thought was evident early on in his life, for after his diaconate, he is said to have invited his friend Jacob Kaniyanthara, a young man of his home parish in the following words: "After my priestly ordination let us go and stay in some wilderness (*vācca vanavāsattinum poykkalayām*). For living in the world, it may not be easy to secure eternal life." Certainly, as an associate of

Porukkara in later years, St. Chāvara must have been influenced by these thoughts.

Jacob Kaniyanthara narrates how both the fathers approached the bishop for permission. "[Thomas Porukkara and Thomas Pālackal], having discussed the question of taking up religious life, decided to approach the Very Rev. Bishop for permission. Once during the recreation, they said to him: 'Both of us would like to lead a withdrawn life. We beg to be permitted to do so.'"

To this the Bishop retorted: "If you, who are the only knowledgeable priests we have, go away to live in silence and solitude (*mindatakkamayi valletattum othungippārttāl*), who would lead the people?" It is the idea of a literal *othungippārttal* that the bishop objected to. A monk who abstains from all social relationships and avoids all social interactions will not be as useful to the people of God as an active pastor in the parish. And as the bishop surmised, the immediate need of the church in Kerala was adequate local leadership of the people. Hence, with a few conditions attached, the bishop granted their request. "What they meant, for sure, was a life withdrawn from the worldly affairs so that they could serve God and His people without distraction."

Thomas Kochumuttom, in his book *Spirituality of St. Chāvara* summarizes the life at *Bes-rauma* as follows:

> "The life in it is a withdrawn one (*vanavāsam*) in silence (*mindatakkamāyi*) and solitude (*othungippārkkal*); it is house of austerity (*tapasu bhavanam*) and a house of vision (*darsana veedu*); it should blend contemplation and apostolic work; trust in God and His people is the unfailing resource to meet all its needs; it is a house built on hilltop (*Bes-rauma*); in it the basic rules of life are the spirit and practice of evangelical counsels and common life; among its members there should exist genuine love and family spirit; it is not

> man's work but God's, and, therefore, no human or natural forces destroy it while the members' neglect of the divine call can; they should yield fruits like humility (*elima*), obedience (*cholvili*), charity (*upavi*), religious modesty (*sannyāsa atakkam*) and genuine love of God (*pattaanghayaayulla bhakti*); it should be a mirror of virtues (*punyattinte kannādi*) and a resort of virtuous souls (*punyātmākkalude samketam*); and its strength is in the members' zeal and virtue, not in the thickness of the walls."

In the final analysis, the journey from a "den of robbers" to a "House of Prayer" is not merely a historical event, but a perpetual call to interior transformation. We are challenged to move beyond the transactional noise of a distracted life and commit to the intentional building of a *Bes-rauma* - a "house on high" - within the sanctuary of our own hearts. By embracing the fruitful solitude of *vanavāsa* and the purifying discipline of *tapasubhavanam*, we clear the inner courts of our souls, allowing them to become a true *darsanaveedu* - a house of vision where the Lord is not just discussed, but truly beheld.

By following the zeal of Christ and the spiritual architecture of St. Chāvara, we ensure that our lives are no longer a "den" of earthly clutter, but a resonant dwelling of the Spirit. It is in this purified space that we finally move from the "trade" of the world to the "whispers" of the Divine, making our existence a timeless message of grace to all. May our homes and communities be preserved as a *punyasanketham*, a sacred sanctuary of virtues that stands as a resilient "House of Prayer for All Nations."

Kanni-sukham: Vow of Chastity

Then Peter said in reply, "Look, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?" Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man is seated on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold, and will inherit eternal life."

(Matthew 19:27-29)

Peter's honest question - "We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?" - prompts a profound teaching from Jesus on the nature of religious commitment and the radical choice of the evangelical counsel of chastity.

1. The Radicality of 'Leaving Everything':

Religious life begins with a decisive break from the ordinary structures of the world. By mentioning the leaving of 'houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother, and children', Jesus highlights that the call to follow Him is a demand for an undivided heart. Commitment in religious life is not merely about doing a job for the Church; it is a fundamental reordering of one's primary identity. To 'leave everything' is an act of trust that God is a sufficient portion, proving that the religious soul finds its ultimate security and 'home' in the person of Christ rather than in material possessions or biological kinship.

2. Chastity as an Expansion of Love:

The specific mention of leaving 'children' and 'wife' (in parallel accounts) provides the theological foundation for the vow of chastity. This vow is often misunderstood as a 'rejection' of love, but Matthew 19 reveals it as a total commitment to a greater love. By forgoing the exclusive love of a spouse and the creation of a biological family, the religious person becomes a living sign of the Kingdom of Heaven, where 'they neither marry nor are given in marriage' (Matthew 22:30). Chastity frees the heart

from being bound to a single-family unit, allowing the religious person to become a spiritual parent to the 'lost sheep' of the world. In the religious context, chastity is a vow of commitment, ensuring that the heart is wide enough to embrace all of God's children with the same intensity.

3. The 'Hundredfold' Promise - Fruitfulness over Sterility:

Religious commitment is often framed as a sacrifice, but Jesus frames it as an investment. He promises the 'hundredfold' to those who leave their families for His sake. The vow of chastity and the commitment to community life create a new, vast family - a brotherhood or sisterhood of those united by grace. While the religious person may not have biological children, their life becomes immensely fruitful through the souls they 'give birth to' in faith. For a religious this hundredfold is seen in the generations of people whom they serve and love as their own.

4. The Enduring Witness of Commitment:

The phrase 'for my name's sake' is the anchor of the religious vocation. Commitment is not sustained by human willpower or social duty, but by a continuous gaze upon the Name of Jesus. In a world characterized by 'disposable' relationships and fear of permanent choices, the lifelong commitment of religious life is a radical witness. It proclaims that Jesus is worth everything - every dream of a private home, every desire for a personal family, and every impulse of self-will.

5. Eternal Perspective: Inheriting Life

Jesus concludes by pointing toward the inheritance of eternal life. This serves as a reminder that the struggles of religious commitment - the loneliness that may come with chastity or the hardship of poverty - are 'light and momentary' compared to the weight of glory. The vow is a betrothal to the Eternal, a commitment that begins on earth but finds its 'wedding feast' in the life to come.

For St. Chāvara and the founding community, the vow of chastity was so fundamentally ingrained in their spiritual identity that it was largely taken for granted. This likely explains why St. Chāvara's writings lack the frequent instructions or severe admonitions found regarding poverty and obedience; his letters focus on correcting administrative or communal failures rather than fundamental moral lapses in chastity, which the community lived earnestly.

In St. Chāvara's thought, religious chastity is not a negative act of renunciation but a positive state of *kanni-sukham* - the 'joy of consecrated virginity.' Drawing from mystical theology, he understood the essence of this vow as an intimate, personal bond of spousal love between the soul and the Lord. While it entails the sacrifice of human marriage, it is positively embraced as a much more desirable spiritual or mystical marriage. For St. Chāvara, chastity was a joyful participation in the divine, where the renunciation of earthly ties served only to facilitate a deeper, total union with the Divine Spouse.

A theological analysis of St. Chāvara's thought reveals a nuanced distinction between priestly celibacy and the consecrated virginity embraced by religious men and women. While St. Chāvara employs the term *kanni-sukham* (the joy of virginity) across these states, he clarifies that religious virginity is a distinct vocation granted by God to both men and women, differing in spiritual character from the celibacy enjoined by the priesthood.

St. Chāvara further categorizes consecrated life by distinguishing between the virginity of life-long celibates and that of widows. Documenting the origins of the Koonammāvu convent, he notes that Eliswa, a widow, and her daughter Anna expressed a shared desire for *kanni-sukham*. Here, St. Chāvara distinguishes their paths: Eliswa embraced consecrated widowhood, while Anna committed to consecrated virginity in its fullest sense, referred to as *Brahma-cāritvam*.

Consequently, St. Chāvara identifies three distinct forms of consecrated life: priestly celibacy, consecrated widowhood, and the life-long celibacy of *Brahma-cāritvam*. While all three share a practical orientation toward God, the latter is particularly relevant to the discussion of religious life as a state of total, perpetual, and joyful dedication to the Divine Spouse.

Brahma-cāritvam (popularly known as *Brahma-carya*) literally signifies 'walking in Brahma' or 'walking with God.' When applied to a life-long celibate or virgin, the term transcends mere physical abstinence, carrying a deeply significant and personal theological weight. It represents a positive, continuous union with the Lord, where the individual's entire existence is a deliberate journey in the presence of the Divine. Thus, for St. Chāvara, this state was not defined by what was avoided, but by the profound reality of whom the soul was walking with.

For St. Chāvara and the founding community, the essence of consecrated virginity and the religious vocation is defined as a spiritual marriage to Jesus Christ *(Īśo-miśihāyodu kūteyulla mānavālattam)*. Within this framework, the vow of chastity is the foundational bond that solemnizes a mystical union with the Divine Spouse. He perceives the other evangelical counsels as natural outgrowths of this primary relationship; just as a devoted spouse seeks only to please their partner, the religious finds their identity in a radical availability to Christ. This perspective transforms chastity from a mere rule of abstinence into an all-encompassing commitment of love that dictates every other aspect of the religious person's life.

Consequently, the vows of poverty and obedience are seen as practical expressions of this spousal love. Drawing on the wisdom of Father Leopold, Father Chāvara suggests that a spouse of Christ should find joy in sharing the experiences of the Crucified Lord, particularly His poverty and submission to the Father's will. To seek worldly pleasures or material security is seen as a slight to the Divine Spouse, who had 'nowhere to

lay His head.' True religious life, therefore, involves rejoicing in small privations or acts of obedience as precious opportunities to grow in likeness to Christ. By delighting in the service of the Spouse and taking pride in His poverty, the religious demonstrates that obedience and poverty are intrinsically woven into the single, joyful commitment of chastity.

The vow of chastity is a divine invitation to nuptial mysticism, wherein Jesus Christ offers Himself as the soul's life partner. While God's eternal plan in Genesis 1:18—that the human person should not be alone—is typically realized for a common person through earthly marriage, for one called to be a religious, the Lord Himself becomes the lifelong companion. This is a profound honour made possible by the Holy Spirit, who inspires the religious to welcome and commit to Christ with such exclusivity that no space remains for another human partner. Consequently, remaining unmarried is the natural result of this intimate union; one does not first reject marriage and then seek Christ as a substitute. Rather, the spontaneous choice of celibacy flows from a primary, overwhelming love for the Lord that precludes any other earthly union.

In human experience, marriage represents the pinnacle of intimacy, as two become one in a way that transcends even the parent-child bond. This relationship is characterized by a complete absence of barriers and the sharing of a life that is wholly unconditional. St. Chāvara teaches that this same intensity must define the relation between the consecrated person and Jesus Christ, constituting the true 'joy of consecrated virginity' (*kanni-sukham*). Just as earthly spouses disclose their deepest secrets and prioritize one another above all else, the religious soul must enter into a transparent and absolute communion with the Divine Spouse, where no part of the self is withheld.

The decisive element of this spousal love is a solemn, lifelong commitment. Just as a spouse promises to prioritize the needs

of their partner above all others, the religious professionalizes this promise to Jesus Christ through the vow of chastity. St. Chāvara emphasizes that this commitment demands that the Lord and His mission receive absolute priority in the life of the consecrated person. By abiding by this promise, the religious ensures that their love remains a living, active force that directs every action toward the Spouse. Thus, the vow of chastity is not a state of emptiness, but a state of being profoundly 'occupied' by the Presence and the purposes of God.

In a letter addressed to the Sisters, St. Chāvara eloquently distilled the essence of consecrated life, urging them to "Abide in the love of Jesus Christ," to continually remain in His presence, and to walk side by side with Him in an unceasing spiritual conversation. He tenderly portrays Christ as a constant companion who gently redirects misplaced affections. Whenever the consecrated soul is drawn to worldly desires or inordinate delights, the Lord is depicted as lovingly complaining: "Does this silly thing give you more delight than I? Is it not suffering that it after all brings?" This highlights a spiritual dynamism where Christ, full of concern and ever-present, seeks only the profound happiness of His spouse.

St. Chāvara emphasizes that Christ's desire is solely to make the consecrated person truly happy, offering Himself entirely to them. "He has given Himself to you. What else is there?" he asks, pointing to the truth that all of creation pales in value compared to the Creator. The commitment of religious life is thus a response to this overwhelming generosity: to return love for Love. The passage concludes with an ardent prayer:

> "Oh! My Lord, do not leave us until we become one with You!"

This expresses the ultimate goal of the spousal relationship—a total, mystical union with God, where the self is lost in the Beloved and fulfilment is complete.

Agathitvam: Vow of Poverty

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

(Matthew 6:19-21)

"Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

(Luke 12:33-34)

Evangelical poverty is a cornerstone of consecrated life, finding its primary Gospel mandate in the teachings of Jesus regarding wealth and possessions. The foundational message is a call to radical detachment from earthly goods to embrace a richer spiritual inheritance. This is powerfully articulated in the passages give above.

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus instructs: "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:19-21). Luke's version reinforces this with a practical application: "Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Luke 12:33-34). These passages establish that material wealth is fleeting and ultimately insecure. The essence of evangelical poverty is not a lack of resources, but a re-direction of affection and reliance, shifting the heart's focus from temporary comfort to eternal value.

This redirection cultivates a lifestyle of simplicity: 'less luggage, more comfort'. The 'comfort' here is not material ease, but the profound spiritual freedom that comes from minimizing worldly attachments. Just as a traveller moves more efficiently with a light bag, a religious person, by embracing simplicity, is unburdened by the anxieties of accumulating and managing possessions. This freedom allows for a more agile and spontaneous response to God's call, embodying the evangelical counsel as a practical strategy for a life dedicated to mission, rather than a mere sacrifice of goods.

Evangelical poverty is a rich spiritual commitment that transcends a simple lack of possessions; it is a positive affirmation of complete reliance on God, and hence poverty is deeply understood as the realization that 'The Lord is my portion' (Psalm 119:57). This phrase, echoing the Psalmist in the Old Testament who had no land inheritance but God Himself, signifies a total reliance on divine providence. This reliance frees the individual from the need to secure their own future financially, fostering an attitude of radical trust. This trust, in turn, translates into availability for the Church and her people. A person who acknowledges God as their sole portion is available to be sent wherever the need is greatest, unconstrained by the demands of a career path or the responsibility of managing personal assets, thereby living the evangelical counsel as a dynamic force for service.

The first positive dimension centres entirely on divine reliance and spiritual reception. It is a proven spiritual principle that the genuine practice of poverty enables an individual to 'receive more and more from God and people'. By creating a vacuum off self-sufficiency, one opens oneself to the abundant providence of the divine and the generosity of others. A person who truly lives this vow can, in turn, 'expect God's special care and protection as well', experiencing a profound freedom from anxiety about material security because their trust is placed wholly in God's paternal care.

The second dimension, availability, shifts the focus to active, selfless engagement with the world. The practice of poverty 'consists more in *giving to* than *giving up*.' This means that through the vow of poverty, one 'shares one's possessions with those in need rather than uselessly and aimlessly giving them up.' This sharing is not merely philanthropic but is a spiritual commitment to be a Christian *karma-yogi* doing *nishkāma-karma* (selfless service) of God and humanity. Furthermore, this principle extends to the religious community, which should embody the 'practice of poverty by way of spending the resources for the benefit and wellbeing of the needy people and the society at large.' This commitment often requires expending the resources on helping others or common causes, not out of abundance but out of poverty or even from one's livelihood, exemplifying a generosity that truly costs the giver.

Availability also carries the mandate of work and selfless intention. "A second lesson is that the religious with the profession of the vow of poverty should not seek exemption from the rule of work." Hard work becomes a 'sign of poverty which the religious should certainly bear,' counteracting any potential perception of idleness.

Finally, "there is a third lesson which perhaps is still more challenging, namely, that the religious should be selfless in the service of society." This selfless service is defined by pure motives: "The only intention that they had, therefore, was to glorify God and serve the people," embodying a life fully available to God and neighbour.

The word used by St. Chāvara for poverty is *agatitvam*, which literally means 'having no means to live.' St. Chāvara was known to be very fond of the expression *agatitvam*, a term he used quite frequently to describe humility and simplicity. This usage is evident in his writings describing the early, humble beginnings of his religious communities.

For instance, when the basic bamboo-mat convent for the first community of nuns in Koonammāvu was completed, he expressed a sense of satisfaction in its profound simplicity: "With this small amount [of ₹ 358 donated by different individuals] we have constructed a humble house that is truly an abode of *agatitvam*."

He employed the same terminology when recounting the nascent days of the monastery at Mānnānam. The day before the foundation stone was laid, the community hastily erected a temporary shelter to accommodate the visiting bishop, who arrived early for the ceremony. The structure was a simple tent fashioned with a 'bamboo-frame fixed on four pillars and thatched with palm leaves', divided into two small rooms by mats. Describing the evening spent there, St. Chāvara writes: "The bishop was brought already on the previous day. It was in that tent of *agatitvam* that he spent the night. All of us priests, too, slept in it. It was indeed an experience of *vanavāsam* (life in the forest)." This highlights his appreciation for a life stripped of luxury and fully reliant on God's providence.

St. Chāvara was formally initiated into the seminary with the reception of tonsure (*Āsthappādupattam*) from Bishop Peter Alcantra who was at that time the Vicar Apostolic of Varāppuzha. On that solemn occasion he adopted the motto: "The Lord is my portion" (Ps 16:5 and 119:57), and ever since he lived up to it. For him God was everything, as he beautifully sings: "Oh my God! You are my love, my joy, and all my fortune. If not in You, how could I live my life? You are my breath, my *y*āvanapāneeyam (food and drink). What a solace have I in You!"

St. Chāvara really lived a very simple life. He would take only the common food, nothing was specially prepared for him. For breakfast there would be rice gruel with one curry; for lunch, rice and two dishes; then a little rice gruel at 4.00 pm;

and for supper, rice with two dishes. During Lent: for breakfast there would be a little rice gruel (of *ozhak* rice) with salt but no curry; for lunch, rice (of *nāzhuri*-rice) with three vegetable dishes, and for supper, rice gruel (of *ozhak* rice) with pickle. On Good Friday the only meal is lunch consisting of rice gruel with salt but no curry.

His room was ever so ordinary with minimum furniture: a simple table, a plain chair, and a wooden box; a cot with very thin country mat and a single pillow; no bedsheet or provision for mosquito net; there was a clay mug with water, and a few books on the table, and nothing else! The Archbishop once came to visit his Vicar General in his room at Koonammāvu. Seeing there just one chair he was surprised, and making the Prior sit on it, he sat on the box!

St. Chāvara was an exceptionally hardworking individual who rarely had time to rest. Despite his poor health and advancing age, he maintained an intense work ethic, constantly making arduous journeys for various pastoral and official duties. He lived a life of complete self-forgetfulness, spending himself 'uninterruptedly for God and His people'. His life provides numerous examples of this dedication and tireless commitment to service.

We can recall one striking instance that illustrates this dedication: driven by his zeal to construct the convent, St. Chāvara travelled to the parishes in the Malayāttoor region at the onset of the second monsoon season (September–October). While in Cheranalloor, he was struck down with rheumatic fever, falling unconscious for two days. Thoroughly exhausted, he eventually returned to the monastery in Koonammāvu. There, the swelling in his leg worsened and burst, after which he gradually recovered. This episode, among many others, demonstrates that St. Chāvara's life bore all the identifying marks of a truly poor person: 'lack of possessions, simple living and hard work'.

Cholvili: Vow of Obedience

'Master's Will, Slave's Blessing'

"Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away; for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day."

(John 6:37-40)

"Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls and will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with sighing – for that would be harmful to you."

(Hebrews 13:16-17)

Evangelical obedience is fundamentally a loving response to God's love and a profound act of trust, not a mere forced compliance. It is rooted in the example of Jesus' total surrender to His Father's will and is a path to deeper intimacy with God. "May the holy, supreme and true will of God be praised now and forever."

The meaning of evangelical obedience, as listening and alignment, involves both an inner disposition and outward actions in harmony with God's will, which is often discerned through the community and legitimate authority (Superiors) in consecrated life.

The Meaning of Evangelical Obedience

- **Listening (Ob-audire – 'to hear deeply'):** The Latin root of obedience emphasizes a deep, attentive spiritual listening. It is about tuning into the 'still small voice' of God, not just hearing a command. This requires a heart posture

of willingness and humility to receive guidance through scripture, prayer, and the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

- **Alignment (Not my will, but Yours be done):** Alignment is the act of harmonizing one's own desires, thoughts, and actions with God's perfect plan. It reflects the filial obedience of Jesus, who always sought to do the will of the One who sent Him (John 6:38). This surrender is liberating, freeing the individual from the ego's demands and leading to true peace and purpose. "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."

This listening and alignment is done through the Congregation, guided by Superiors: In religious life, the will of God is often discerned and mediated through the community (Congregation) led by the Superior. Obedience here is not to the person of the superior in a servile way, but to God's authority as expressed through the community's charism, rules, and the process of shared discernment. The Superior's role is to animate and guide the community in finding God's will together in a spirit of mutual respect and dialogue.

How can we practice living evangelical obedience?

1. **Cultivate a Habit of Deep Listening to the Whispers of God:** Spend time daily in pondering the Word of God, which is the primary way God reveals His Will. Engage in regular, intimate conversation with God, asking for clarity and courage to follow His lead. Make space for some quiet time to discern God's whispers amidst life's noise and distractions.
2. **Embrace the Process of Alignment:** Consciously choose God's way over personal preferences, comfort zones, or worldly desires. Develop a habit of obedience in daily, mundane choices to build a foundation for obedience in larger, more difficult situations. Be willing to surrender personal agenda, trusting that God's plan is the best.

3. **Engage Humbly with Authority and Community:** Surround yourself with spiritually mature individuals and mentors who can offer wise counsel and help confirm what God is saying. Engage actively and humbly in community discussions and decisions, believing that God's will can be revealed through the collective wisdom of the body. Approach obedience to the Congregation and Superiors with a positive heart full of trust and love, rather than obligation or indifference. Be open and accountable to others in the community regarding your struggles and victories in obedience.

This pathway of listening and alignment leads to a life of profound peace, purpose, and spiritual freedom, mirroring Christ's own life of perfect obedience to the Father.

In the life and communities of St. Chāvara, the dynamic of listening and alignment was a continuous interplay between profound personal prayer and decisive action in harmony, in alignment with God's will, as expressed through Church authority and the needs of the community. His life was a blend of contemplation and action.

Listening – Attuned to the Divine Whispers:

St. Chāvara's 'listening' was rooted in a deep, personal relationship with God, whom he intimately addressed as 'Abba' or 'My Father' in his writings. He was a man of intense prayer, spending long periods in meditation and Eucharistic adoration. It was in this silence and communion that he discerned God's will, seeking divine guidance for all his initiatives.

His listening extended beyond the chapel to the needs of the society around him. He perceived the social injustices, the lack of education for the marginalized, and the need for spiritual renewal in the Kerala Church. This social consciousness was part of his 'listening' to God's voice in the world's cry. His spiritual life and works were saturated with biblical insights, indicating a deep immersion in and attentive listening to the Word of God, which he then interpreted dynamically for his time.

Alignment – Harmonizing Will and Action:

Alignment for St. Chāvara meant bringing his personal insights into harmony with the mission of the Church and the welfare of the community, often requiring humility and a surrender of personal preference.

1. **Alignment with God's Will (Obedience unto Death):** The foundational alignment was with God's will, as seen in his ability to accept immense suffering and personal tragedies (like the death of his entire immediate family in an epidemic) with trust in divine providence. His motto was 'not my will, but Yours be done'.
2. **Alignment with Superiors (Vicar Apostolic):** He demonstrated heroic obedience to his superiors, even when it meant accepting burdensome roles, he did not aspire to.

   He accepted the critical position of Vicar General of the Syro-Malabar Church only after being commanded to do so under obedience by the Apostolic Vicar, Archbishop Baccinelli. This obedience was crucial in saving the Church in Kerala from the schism caused by the intruder Bishop Roccos, a time when many prominent people were divided.
3. **Alignment with the Congregation's Will/Charism:** He worked collaboratively with the founding fathers of the CMI Congregation (Fathers Pālackal and Porukkara) and later with Father Leopold Beccaro for the CMC sisters, ensuring their collective vision and rules were followed. He encouraged members to "obey with a willing heart" for the good of the community and its mission.
4. **Alignment of Prayer and Action:** His deep interior life fuelled his extensive social and apostolic activities. All his actions—founding schools for all castes, introducing mid-day meals, starting a printing press, and establishing a home for the destitute—were practical expressions of his contemplative union with God and alignment with God's love for humanity.

In summary, St. Chāvara's life was a testament to the dynamic of evangelical obedience, where intense listening in prayer seamlessly translated into aligned, selfless action in obedience to God's authority mediated through the Church and the needs of His people.

The founders utilized the term *cholvili* to refer to obedience, translating literally to 'someone is calling you by name'. This powerful imagery suggests a deep, personal relationship where the caller 'knows you personally, is concerned about you and has confidence in you so that he takes the freedom to call you by name'. The expected response is a positive and loving interaction rather than a forced compliance. The individual being called 'expects you to respond positively with respect and love: listen to him attentively, understand his mind, and promptly and unconditionally put it into practice as a matter of your care for and duty to him', thereby transforming obedience into an intimate and duty-bound expression of mutual care and respect.

St. Chāvara's own strong conviction, clearly expressed in his *Testament*, is that "Obedience is the only mark of a consecrated person," and indeed he lived up to his conviction.

In his own words, "From his early age he was resolved to live in accordance with the mind of his *Malpān* Thomas Pālackal." He remained ever so committed to this resolve. For example, we may cite an incident. Ordained on 29 November 1829, the next day Father Chāvara celebrated the first Mass in his home parish Chennankari. It was the first Sunday of the liturgical season of Annunciation. He stayed back there for a month. He felt at home there. Then he moved to Pulinkunnu and enjoyed making some visits here and there. In the beginning of the Lent, he also preached a retreat in the chapel in the southern sector of Pulinkunnu. It was a grand success, much appreciated by the participants. Naturally, he, too, was delighted. Thus, he became a little attached to the place and people there as well.

But he realized that his *Malpān* Pālackal was not very happy about his visits and wanderings. Hence, fearing his scolding he hurried back to Pallippuram. He then writes: "Never again did I ever aimlessly roam about. Then onwards I was determined to be subject in all matters to the *Malpān*'s mind and views. He directed me to go and stay in Mānnānam to look after the construction of monastery. Indeed, there was not anyone else than we three - Father Thomas Porukkara, Brother Jacob Kaniyanthara and myself—who would wholeheartedly leave the family and relations, and engage totally in the work there."

Another incident where his 'alignment' shone forth with the instruction of the Archbishop is narrated below. When he assumed the role of Vicar at Pallippuram, he encountered Father Varkey, a newly ordained priest and nephew of the *Malpān*, who resided in the parish after his first Mass. Periodically, St. Chāvara would delegate parish responsibilities to Father Varkey and travel to Mānnānam to oversee the monastery's construction. During one such absence, a three-day fast in Pallippuram concluded with the traditional distribution of rice pudding at the parish. During this event, Father Varkey struck Itty Kurissinkal, 'a ruffian belonging to an ancient family', with a cane. Kurissinkal's relatives felt insulted and petitioned the Archbishop, stating: "Our Vicar Father Chāvara, having entrusted the parish duties to an inexperienced junior priest of this parish, stays away at Mānnānam to look after the construction of monastery. We feel much hurt that this young priest has publicly beaten a man of gentlemanly conduct among us." In response, "His Grace immediately wrote to St. Chāvara, commanding him to redress the petitioners' grievance and not to be away from Pallipupram for more than eight days at a stretch without his written permission." This was a significant hardship, as eight days were insufficient time for the arduous journey between Pallippuram and Mānnānam. Yet, despite the difficulty, St. Chāvara obeyed.

St. Chāvara's unwavering adherence to the Bishop's instructions, even when it hampered the vital construction at Mannanam, elevates the vow of obedience from a mere rule to a profound spiritual alignment with the Divine Will. By choosing the struggle of overseeing a mission from a distance over the ease of self-direction, he demonstrated that the true success of a kingdom-building project lies not in its speed, but in the integrity of the soul performing the work. His life reminds us that when we align our will with legitimate authority, we are not losing our agency; rather, we are anchoring our efforts in the peace of God's providence, trusting that He who commands the worker will ultimately complete the work.

Community Life:
The Fourth Pillar of Vowed Life

"Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

(Matthew 18:19-20)

The above Gospel passage gives us the several points for discussion. When interpreted through the lens of community in consecrated life, the passage yields the following insights:

1. **The Power of 'Agreement' (***Concordia***):**

The Greek word for 'agree' is *symphōneō*, from which we get 'symphony.' In a religious community, this suggests that the individual 'instruments' (the confreres) must be in tune with one another. When a community acts in unity, their collective prayer and work take on a divine efficacy that an individual acting alone cannot achieve.

In the context of Matthew 18:19–20, the principle of synergy - the idea that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts - transforms the theological understanding of 'agreement' into a dynamic spiritual force.

2. The 'Symphonic' Effect (*Symphōneō***):**

The Greek root for 'agree' in this passage is *symphōneō*, which literally describes a 'sounding together.' Synergistically, a symphony is not just a collection of talented soloists; it is the unique, emergent beauty that occurs only when different notes are played in relation to one another. In religious life, synergy means that when two or three confreres align their wills, they create a spiritual 'frequency' that allows the Father's power to manifest in ways that a solitary prayer cannot trigger.

3. The Presence as the Multiplier (1+1>2):

In a purely mathematical world, two people remain two people. However, in the synergy of the kingdom, when two

or three gathers in Christ's name, a 'Third Presence' emerges - Jesus Himself. This is the ultimate synergistic event: the human gathering acts as a catalyst for a Divine inhabitant. The community does not just represent Christ; they 'become' a vessel for His actual presence, making the group's influence exponentially more powerful than their individual efforts.

4. The Alignment of Interiority:

Synergy requires more than physical proximity; it requires interior alignment. If two people are physically together but internally divided, there is no synergy, only noise. Jesus' promise is conditional on 'agreeing about anything they ask.' This implies a shared interiority where personal egos are surrendered to a common vision. When the interior lives of the brothers are 'in sync,' the community achieves a state of 'flow' where the Spirit can act without friction.

5. Compensatory Integrity:

In a synergistic community, the strengths of one confrere cover the weaknesses of another. This creates a 'Collective Integrity'. While one brother may be a 'captivating preacher' like St. Chāvara, another may be a silent man of prayer or a diligent administrator. Together, their combined integrity presents a complete image of Christ to the world. As St. Chāvara demonstrated in the '*Denha* episode', the synergy of the group's decision was more resilient than any single opinion.

6. Divine-Human Synergy (Theurgy):

The term theurgy is a combination formed from the Greek *theos*, meaning 'god', and *ergon*, meaning 'work'. Theurgy literally means 'divine work' or 'god-working'. Ultimately, this passage describes the synergy between the human will and the divine Will. When humans 'agree' on earth, it triggers a response from the 'Father in heaven'. This is the highest form of synergy: our small, terrestrial movements of faith becoming the 'on' switch for the infinite resources of God.

7. Presence through Relationship:
Jesus does not just say He is with the individual in private prayer; He promises a specific type of presence that occurs *between* people. In a religious house, Christ is made visible not only in the Tabernacle but in the way the brothers treat one another. This is the interiority of the Community - the shared spiritual life that becomes a magnet for the Divine.

8. The Power of the 'Two or Three':
By mentioning such a small number, Jesus sanctifies even the smallest or most struggling communities. He confirms that the validity of a religious life does not depend on large numbers or grand structures, but on the integrity of the intent: gathering specifically 'in His name'.

St. Chāvara envisioned a profound synergy of community life - a new dimension that was added to the life in the Congregation and which transformed the existence of the founders. Individually, these priests were already living consecrated lives, practicing the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience. They were celibate, hardworking, content with minimal comforts, and obedient to their ecclesiastical superiors, functioning as deeply prayerful and zealous pastors.

The establishment of the new Congregation, therefore, introduced a critical new element: the communitarian dimension. By becoming members of a formal religious community, they transitioned from individual priests to a cohesive family unit. They began living, praying, and working together in synergy. This collective approach enabled them to achieve far more than they could alone, allowing them to undertake many good things that had previously been left 'undone' in the absence of a structured religious life. This communal integrity became the bedrock of the CMI mission, ensuring their works had a lasting impact.

This ideal was formally institutionalized in 1840 as the community adopted a more structured way of life. St. Chāvara documents this transition, writing:

> "On 18 June 1840, the feast of Corpus Christi, Fathers Thomas Porukkara, Geevarghese Thoppil and I began living as a community at *Bes-rauma* [Mānnānam]. We were already enjoying spiritual brotherhood; but we wanted to have unity in temporal matters as well. Therefore, following the example of [the early Christians led by] St Peter, we began to hold in common all our material goods and possessions, and to keep a common account [of incomes and expenses]."

Clearly, the early Christian community served as their primary model and source of inspiration.

The foundation stone of the monastery had been laid on 11 May 1831, and over time, a highly organized community emerged. It was composed of members who were prayerful, zealous, and disciplined, fully committed to pastoral ministry and diverse apostolic endeavours. This way of life resonated deeply with the contemporary Church; the Vicars Apostolic, the local clergy, and the laity alike appreciated their presence and selfless service. Even the broader society admired their high ideals and collective witness. In essence, the community at Mānnānam embodied everything required for consecrated life within the grand tradition of the Church.

One of the central apostolic objectives of the nascent Congregation was to manifest a divine reality on earth: "to realize a community of those called for the eternal kingdom of heaven" (*ennanneykum adutta ākāśa-rājitattinu viliykapetta-kūttam)*. For St. Chāvara, this religious life was built on a dual foundation of *othunghippārkkal* (life in solitude) and *mindadakkam* (disciplined silence), ensuring that communal activity never overshadowed inner depth.

St. Chāvara profoundly enjoyed the fraternal life of the Congregation, finding a sense of belonging that transcended biological ties. He cherished the family atmosphere created by

his loving confreres, once writing from Elthuruth: "I have my brethren here who love me more than my own brothers and sisters. Tomorrow if I go to the monastery in Koonammāvu, I will have the same experience there as well; so also, if I go to the monastery at Mānnānam or Vāzhakkulam."

His vision of leadership was equally transformative and ahead of its time. In a letter to Kuriakose Porukkara, then vicar at Mānnānam Monastery, he explained that a superior is a partner with God in tending His flock. As such, leadership was not about power, but about a deep, paternal love and a genuine concern for the well-being of every member of the community.

The Mānnānam community embodied these ideals so perfectly that it became a 'lighted lamp placed on a stand', illuminating the spiritual path for all who observed it. Appropriately named *Bes-rauma* (a house on a hilltop), it stood as a visible beacon of hope and a model to be emulated. By witnessing their good works and disciplined life, the society gave glory to the Father in heaven (Matthew 5:14-16), reinforcing the timeless truth that consecrated life serves as the ultimate symbol of the Christian calling.

Despite his failing health - burdened by elephantiasis and the eventual total loss of his sight - St. Chāvara laboured tirelessly, traveling extensively for pastoral and official duties. He lived a life of self-forgetfulness, spending himself without interruption for the service of God and His people. History provides many testaments to his industrious spirit. For instance, driven by his zeal to establish the convent, he journeyed to the Malayāttoor parishes during the peak of the second monsoon. During this mission, he was stricken with rheumatic fever at Cherānalloor, falling unconscious for two days. Though he eventually returned to the Koonammāvu monastery thoroughly exhausted, his physical condition worsened as the swelling in his legs intensified and burst. Even as he slowly recovered, his letters to the nuns frequently revealed the toll of his labours, as he often

mentioned feeling 'tired' or suffering from 'headaches.' But he never took exception from the community activities.

As time passed, St. Chāvara observed emerging laxities within community life that threatened the foundational spirit of the Congregation. In a strongly worded letter that remains remarkably relevant to this day, he addressed these 'spoilers' of religious life:

> "Since some time, humility, obedience, charity, religious discipline, genuine devotion, etc., are not considered as religious virtues to be practiced, but they are seen as impossible, not needed and meant only for 'saints'. It has become quite common to act against these virtues without any fear or remorse. These monasteries which were established to be 'mirrors of virtues' and 'abode of saints', have, now, become associations of self-willed stewards and administrators and abodes of fence-sitters doing the minimum. They pay attention to observing serious rules only; spiritual conversations have become not desirable, religious modesty and devotional practices are considered to be meant for the foolish and less intelligent. It is considered foolish not to react to the unpleasant words and actions of our brethren. It has become very common: to seek physical wellbeing eagerly, to seek luxury, to be worried about minor ailments and on such occasions, to be sad and complaining, if everything is not available as one want. It has become a habit: to speak during the time of silence; to have curiosity to know the affairs of other monasteries; to start a conversation the moment any two meet. You have no remorse or guilt feeling in wandering around and entering your rooms only to sleep. For the reason of any slight ailment or a small assignment or work, you excuse yourself from common prayers

> and community exercises. You do not feel that permission of the superior is to be sought."

With prophetic foresight, St. Chāvara further remarked on the dangers of seeking personal comfort over divine will, particularly during travel and transitions between houses:

> "Thinking that during the journeys one can do whatever he wants, you halt at places and meet persons as you like. Meditation, spiritual reading and other religious exercises are completely abandoned during journeys, considering that time as one of total freedom. Everyone has a thousand likes and a thousand needs. To fulfil all the needs of some, one superior is not enough. For the sake of the community and on account of sanctity of life, if some comforts and desires are to be renounced or some inconveniences are felt in some actions and ways of doing things, you escape from the situation on one or other pretext. Some in search of superiors and conferrers of their liking and looking for comfortable and pleasant places, are moving around visiting all our four monasteries. Finally, they find only inconveniences, sorrows and thorns everywhere. If at all, these brethren would seek God and His holy will alone, they could find joy and satisfaction everywhere. But, since they seek not God, but their own will and pleasure, they would never get joy and comfort."

Deeply troubled by the erosion of the communal spirit, St. Chāvara expressed his concerns with great emphasis, noting a decline in work ethic and spiritual discipline:

> "Our own brothers… do not have humility, obedience and devotion as earlier. Their interest in doing work has come down painfully. Work is done not for the glory of God, some out of fear,

> and others out of habit; doing things without any lasting fruits. Some of them go for the sacrament of confessions rarely. Their disobedience pains the superiors. To enquire about the news of their own monasteries and of other monasteries, to get involved in the matters related to the priests, to hold secret discussions among themselves, etc., are there engagements now. O beloved brethren, is it your vocation? Is it what you practiced when you joined the monastery?"

St. Chāvara's pastoral concern and his deep reliance on his patron saint are evident in how he encouraged his fellow priests to prioritize their spiritual renewal. He viewed the invitation to a retreat not as a mere administrative notice, but as a divine summons, as shown in his gentle yet persistent reminder: "I reminded the former Vicar of Vaikom that St. Joseph is calling him to Mānnānam. Please remind the Vicars of Vechoor, Vadayār and Vaikom that there is a retreat at Mānnānam. The entire things above are jotted down only to remind you. May St. Joseph protect and help both you and me."

St. Chāvara's invitation to the retreat is a masterclass in pastoral gentleness and humility. Rather than issuing a cold, authoritative command as a superior, he frames the spiritual exercises as a personal invitation from a heavenly father, stating that "St. Joseph is calling him to Mānnānam." By attributing the summons to St. Joseph, he removes the weight of human ego from the request, presenting the retreat not as an obligation to a monk, but as a grace-filled opportunity for the soul. His politeness is further underscored by his self-effacing conclusion: "The entire things above are jotted down only to remind you. May St. Joseph protect and help both you and me." In these words, he places himself on the same level as his fellow priests, acknowledging that he, too, requires the protection and help of St. Joseph. This lack of pretension reveals a leader who governs through fraternal love rather than rigid

power, embodying the interiority and integrity that defined his entire life.

In this simple exhortation, St. Chāvara demonstrates his belief that a retreat is an encounter with the Divine, mediated by the saints. By invoking the protection of St. Joseph, he reaffirms that both the leader and the led are equally in need of heavenly guidance to maintain their spiritual fervour and integrity.

He concluded with a call to humility, insisting that even the leadership must lead by example in the most modest of tasks: "No one should take exception from humble works like cleaning the monastery. The Reverend priests should become good examples, being the first in doing such works." This call for integrity and interiority continues to serve as a vital guide for the CMI Congregation and all religious communities seeking to preserve their original fervour.

St. Chāvara's profound emphasis on community life reveals it not merely as a shared living arrangement, but as the essential furnace in which religious virtues are refined. By calling his brethren to uphold the communal life with unwavering commitment, he demonstrated that the individual's response to their religious vocation is inseparable from their responsibility to the "common heart" of the Congregation. For St. Chāvara, a vibrant community is the primary landscape where the will of God is discerned and fulfilled; it is where the Gospel becomes visible through mutual charity and sacrifice. Ultimately, he reminds us that the strength of one's religious call is best measured by the depth of their communion with others, ensuring that the collective mission of the Church is carried forward with a single, harmonious spirit.

Kūtappirappu-sukham

(Spiritual Brotherhood)

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this; to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father."

(John 15: 12-15)

In this Gospel passage, Jesus elevates his followers to a new, intimate relationship with Himself and with God the Father. A servant (or slave) simply follows orders without necessarily understanding the master's plans or intentions. A friend, however, is taken into confidence and shares a relationship of mutual trust and shared purpose.

By calling His disciples as 'friends,' Jesus indicates a deep bond where He has revealed God's Will and plans to them, giving them insight and partnership in His mission that goes beyond mere duty. This friendship is conditioned on obedience, not as a burdensome obligation, but as a natural expression of love and commitment to Him.

St. Chāvara's usual way of addressing his confreres was *kūtappirappukal* (those born of the same womb/mother). But in his testament, he calls them *priyamulla-kuñjunghal* (beloved little children)! In many of his letters to the sisters he addresses them, too, likewise. In the letter to his parishioners of Kainakari, he fondly calls them *sahodaranghal* (born of the same womb) and *makkal* (children)! The life and joy the *kūtappirappukal* enjoy at the monastery is described as *kūtappirappu-sukham*. It is the joy of living with the *kūtappirappukal*. He writes about the *kūtappirappu-sukham*:

> "On 18 June 1840, the feast of Corpus Christi, Fathers Thomas Porukkara and Geevarghese Thoppil, and

> I started living together as a community in *Besrauma* [at Mānnānam]. We were already enjoying *kūtappirappu-sukham* (spiritual brotherhood) that held us spiritually united. We wanted to have unity in temporal matters as well. Therefore, following the example of [the early Christians led by] St Peter, we began to hold in common all our material goods and possessions, and to keep a common account [of incomes and expenses]."

They already had experienced *kūtappirappu-sukham* which was a style of living in community where they were spiritually united with each other. The observance of evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience strengthened their joy. The vowed life is understood not merely as an ascetical life but as a sign of 'the oneness of heart and soul,' not only in spirit but also in bodily matters.

St. Chāvara's vision about the growing Congregation is that of enjoying *kūtappirappu-sukham*: "Many in number may be the monasteries, but the entire Congregation should be like a single family of members born of the same mother, growing up drinking her milk. This sincere love among you should never diminish but keep becoming ever stronger day by day. You must consider this to be the most important of my advices." This is the kind of love (*kūtappirappu-sukham*) that he had not only for his confreres but for the entire humanity.

St. Chāvara, in his testament, has a beautiful instruction to his confreres regarding the kind of love that should exist among them. He advises them to be like children of the same mother:

> "No matter how many monasteries there may be, they should be like a single family, and all the members should be like children born of the same mother growing up drinking her milk. This kind of genuine love among them should never diminish, but keep increasing. All should consider this as the

> greatest of my advices. In order to ensure that this love never decreases, the superiors of monasteries should take interest in responding to the requests of one another rather than merely meeting the needs of their own respective communities. Meeting together from time to time they must settle the accounts, and through frequent letters keep mutually informed of matters concerning the wellbeing of members, and take care of the needs of one another."

St. Chāvara considers an ideal religious community to be a family so that there should be a family spirit among its members. For him, the model for all families is the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, which, in turn, is a shadow of the Holy Trinity of Godhead on earth. Therefore, according to him, the Holy Trinity is the prototype of all families and, for that matter, of the religious communities as well.

In the Gospel passage given above, Jesus presents love as a commandment, not just a spontaneous feeling, which resonates strongly with the commitment required for *kūtappirappu-sukham*. In John 15:12, the mandate is clear: "Love each other as I have loved you." This kind of love is not a passive sentimentality but a deliberate, active choice of the will. *Kūtappirappu-sukham* (joy of unity/ spiritual brotherhood) requires a consistent commitment to treating every community member as a cherished family member (*kūtappirappu* or one born of the same mother), especially when natural human feelings of affection may be challenging or absent. This prompts a vital question for self-examination: Am I actively choosing to love my community members in the same self-giving way Christ loved me, or am I passively waiting for the feeling of affection to appear before I act in love?

The ultimate test of both Christ's friendship and *kūtappirappu-sukham* is self-sacrifice, as articulated in John 15:13: "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's

friends." This is the very essence of genuine, deep family love. St. Chāvara's vision of an ideal religious community demands a consistent willingness to prioritize the needs and well-being of the *kūtappirappu* over one›s own personal comfort, ingrained preferences, or self-centred desires. A poignant question for reflection is: What aspect of my 'life' - my personal time, my comfort zone, my long-held opinions, or my material resources - am I being called to lay down today for my spiritual brothers in the community?

Further, obedience acts as the essential foundation for both the intimacy of friendship and the unity of the spiritual family. In John 15:14, Jesus states: "You are my friends if you do what I command." This directly links the cherished state of friendship (and thus *kūtappirappu-sukham*) to one's obedience to God's Will, which, in a religious context, is often discerned and mediated through the community, the Constitution (Rule of life), and the legitimate Superiors. This obedience is not the heavy burden of a servile duty but the free and loving response of a committed friend who understands the 'master's business' (John 15:15) and shares wholeheartedly in the family's common mission. The reflecting individual must ask: Does my obedience foster true unity and genuine trust within my spiritual family, or does my individual resistance and wilfulness disrupt the necessary *kūtappirappu-sukham* (joy of unity)?

Finally, Jesus highlights the profound shift from a hierarchical servant-master relationship to one of intimate friendship in John 15:15, stating, "I no longer call you servants... Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you." This elevation signifies that members of the community founded on *kūtappirappu-sukham* share more than just living space or a common daily schedule; they share the core charism, the mission, and the discernment processes of the founder and the Church. They are intimate partners in the 'family business' of establishing God's Kingdom. This leads to a final reflection point: Do I view myself

as a mere dutiful employee working for the community, or do I participate as an intimate, beloved family member and friend who shares fully in the common mission and the shared vision of our founder, St. Chāvara?

In conclusion, the rich lexicon used by St. Chāvara - from *sahodaranghal* to *priyamulla-kuñjunghal* - highlights a vision of religious life not as a mere association of like-minded individuals, but as an intimate, familial communion. The concept of *kūtappirappu-sukham*, the 'joy of living with those born of the same womb/mother,' stands as his central and most vital instruction. This spiritual brotherhood is the bedrock of community life, a unity that extends beyond shared meals or prayer to encompass a profound 'oneness of heart and soul,' including the holding of all material goods and possessions in common, following the example of the early Christians (Act 4:32).

St. Chāvara insisted that this 'sincere love' must never diminish. His vision was clear: regardless of how many monasteries were established, the entire Congregation should function as a single, unified family. He elevates this mutual love to the highest priority, declaring that "All should consider this as the greatest of my advices." The practical steps he mandated - such as superiors meeting to settle accounts and mutual care for one another's needs - serve as the infrastructure for maintaining this bond. This *kūtappirappu-sukham* transforms the religious community into an earthly reflection of its prototype: the Holy Family, which itself mirrors the perfect communion and love of the Holy Trinity. The ultimate takeaway from St. Chāvara's life and testament is that this family spirit is the true sign of a life dedicated to God and humanity.

Vocation to Religious Life/Priesthood

"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you."

(John 15:16)

The above Gospel passage brings the following points for our reflection.

Calling or Vocation: The phrase, "You did not choose me, but I chose you," reminds believers that their relationship with Christ and their capacity for good works originate in God's sovereign grace, not human merit. This counters modern tendencies toward self-sufficiency and emphasizes gratitude. The understanding that one is 'chosen' by Jesus Christ provides a profound sense of identity and security in a world often marked by feelings of insignificance or being overlooked. It assures believers they are not mere accidents but part of a divine plan.

Every believer is 'appointed' for a specific, meaningful purpose, which applies not just to church ministry but to all areas of life. This helps individuals find meaning and direction in their daily work and relationships, viewing them as a divine assignment rather than random circumstances.

To Bear Lasting Fruit: 'Fruit' encompasses growth in both internal character such as love, joy, peace - as in Galatians 5:22-23 - and external actions, such as good works and evangelism. In the present-day context, this means actively pursuing personal holiness and demonstrating God's love and character in tangible ways to the world. The 'fruit that will abide' (*or* last) emphasizes investing time and energy into things with eternal significance, such as disciplining oneself and those entrusted thus contributing to God's Kingdom, rather than solely focusing on the fleeting worldly achievements. And the mandate to bear fruit reinforces that this productivity is

only possible by 'abiding' in Christ. Modern Christians must prioritize a deep, dependent relationship with Jesus through prayer and pondering upon His Word, recognizing that 'apart from [Him] you can do nothing'.

Purpose-Aligned Prayer: The promise of answered prayer ("Whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you") is tied directly to living a fruitful, obedient life aligned with God's vision. It encourages believers to pray boldly for the resources, strength, and opportunities needed to fulfil their divine appointment. And this praying 'in Jesus' name' is not a formula, but the reflection of a heart and will submitted to His purposes. This implies that as believers align their desires with God's mission to bear fruit, their prayers become more effective and are answered by the Father.

St. Chāvara took his vocation seriously. His seriousness about the vocation was evident in his unwavering commitment to prayer, discipline, and selfless service, which he pursued with extraordinary zeal despite innumerable challenges. He viewed his life as an unbroken dedication to God and the welfare of others, considering a day empty if he had not done good to someone. Several incidents from his life highlight this deep-seated vocation or divine call and his commitment to it.

Overcoming Personal Tragedy: When he was thirteen years old, he joined the seminary at Pallippuram for his priestly training. While in the seminary, a smallpox epidemic claimed the lives of his parents and only brother. The death of the dear ones posed a major challenge to him. Since he was the only male member in the family, he was admonished by his relatives, neighbors and well-wishers to discontinue his studies at the seminary and take up the responsibility of perpetuating the family name. One of his uncles, who did not favor young Kuriakose going back to the seminary, even locked him up in a room. Notwithstanding the stiff opposition from his relatives, he was convinced that God had definite plans for him. Another relative by name

Thoppil, whom none in the family dared to oppose, intervened and young Kuriakose was allowed to follow his yearning to return to the seminary. Later on, when St. Chāvara had to face challenges, he firmly believed that with the help of the Lord who has called him to be His priest, he would be able to overcome all challenges. He never felt heartbroken because he believed that 'nothing is impossible for God' (Luke 1:37).

Spiritual Foundation from the Family: Though he lost his parents and only brother to an epidemic while still a seminarian, the strong spiritual foundation they provided allowed St. Chāvara to continue his priestly studies and dedicate his life to the service of the Church and humanity. In his *Compunction of the Soul*, St. Chāvara reminisces his early spiritual life under the tutelage of his mother. She was a profound spiritual guide from the early infancy of her child. His mother infused in him "thoughts of heaven, and words of grace so pure," to shape her child's mind as soon as reason began to develop. She patiently ensured that the child learned 'matters sublime' of faith, specifically teaching him to articulate holy names. This instruction was gentle and constant, beginning with subtle influence mixed into daily nurturing and progressing to direct repetition of religious names as the child developed the ability to speak.

The mother's personal devotion is central to his religious education. She maintained a rigorous prayer routine, rising at midnight for 'long hours' of kneeling in prayer, 'warding off sleep' to offer praise to 'the Mother of God and Christ, King of Kings.' The child observed these devout sessions while huddled close to her feet or reclining on her knee. The mother's fervent prayers, spoken in a 'melodious voice' with a heart 'strung with solid faith,' served as a formative, soothing 'lullaby sweet,' embedding the act and language of prayer into his earliest, most cherished childhood memories.

Gratuitous Vocation: Regarding his vocation to priesthood, St. Chāvara writes, "Remember what the Lord has done for you. He chose you from out of thousands. There were many worthier than you were. Yet, wonder of wonders, He chose you, called you to His home, endowed you with many gifts of body and spirit."

Heroic Charity during Epidemic: His commitment to priestly duties was so serious that he was willing to put his life at risk to administer the Sacraments. Once, when a person was suffering from the contagious disease of smallpox and desired the last sacraments, many warned him against going. However, St. Chāvara did not hesitate, saying, "Now it is my duty to take care of this person. God will take care of me".

Strict Observance of Monastic Discipline: St. Chāvara considered the monastery a 'miniature heaven' and insisted on the strict observance of the rules. He himself was a perfect model, always anxious to have his frugal meals with the community and seeking permission even for necessary relaxation during sickness or old age. He was often found lost deep in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, sometimes in tears, so absorbed that others had to remind him when the meditation time was over.

Commitment to Church Unity: As the first Vicar General of the Syro-Malabar Church, he faced a critical schism (the Roccos Schism) that threatened the unity of the community. He took a strong stance and provided effective leadership to counter the intruder Bishop Thomas Roccos, a fight for which he received a letter of appreciation from Pope Pius IX.

Through his life, St. Chāvara exemplified the maxim, 'sanctification of oneself and the salvation of others,' through a blending of contemplative prayer and tireless, selfless action. His life of discipline, obedience, and unwavering faith serves as an enduring model of serious commitment to one's vocation.

Archbishop Baccinelli, in a letter to the OCD Superior General, perhaps with an element of exaggeration, speaks of the heroism of the candidates to the monastic life. "He extols the extraordinary zeal of the priests who had given up their parishes and possessions; of adult laymen, some of them even renouncing marriages that had already been arranged; of young boys 'who ran off from home, as if naked, even refusing the inducements the parents offered them to dissuade them, or even suffering great torture meted out by the parents and relatives'. They insisted: 'we want to be Carmelites'; 'we want to join the monastery', or 'I am rich enough with the scapular and I do not need your money'". This may be exaggeration but the fact is that many priests, many grown up persons, many youngsters enthusiastically entered the new Congregation making great sacrifices in the face of immense challenges.

In a circular letter addressed to all the members of the Congregation, written on 01 July 1869, St. Chāvara reminds the members of the Congregation thus: "Beloved brethren, this humble community of ours is not founded by humans but by God Himself. He has founded it miraculously; you are all witnesses to the truth that God has nurtured and brought it up. Hence, persecution by human rejection or obstructions by creatures cannot destroy it. But one thing can annihilate it, that is, if we forget the meaning of our call, forsake the responsibilities of our religious life and fail in humility, obedience, charity, religious discipline and genuine devotion and are satisfied with appreciating them in words and not in deeds."

St. Chāvara's life offers a potent and relevant model for present-day vocations to religious Congregations, urging a shift from inward-looking piety to a dynamic, socially engaged spirituality. His conclusion that true strength lies in service, education, and equality directly challenges today's religious communities to reinvent their relevance and vitality by addressing contemporary societal needs.

Today's potential vocations are often searching for a life of meaning and impact, not just contemplation within secure walls. St. Chāvara's legacy particularly speaks to the necessity of adaptability and innovation. His example demonstrates that a religious calling is fundamentally a call to action rooted in Christ. Modern Congregations can draw inspiration by emphasizing this active mission: fostering vocations among those who seek to be catalysts for change, champions of justice, and educators of the marginalized. The 'strength' of a Congregation in the 21st century still does not lie in the thickness of its walls, but in its members' willingness to step outside to serve the poor, challenge systemic injustice, and build communities rooted in compassion and dignity.

St. Chāvara embraced new technologies and methodologies for evangelization and service. This offers a compelling, yet challenging, model for present-day vocations. This approach involves connecting with young people in their own spaces, leveraging modern communication tools, and confronting complex challenges such as environmental stewardship, digital ethics, and global inequality. His life ultimately affirms a religious calling that seamlessly integrates deep prayer and practical action, ensuring that the virtues of his Congregation actively transform the world, echoing his work in the 19th century Kerala.

Let us see how St. Chāvara laments over his 'inability' to live up to the expectations of the One Who called him to religious life:

> The spotless garment, Baptism bestowed on me
> That I a beacon light would shine for those
> In my wake, who walked, as to what I am,
> I rudely sailed and turned all virtue to vice.

And Oh, the pity of it! The older I grew,
My lamp, its oil consumed held a smoking wick!
Who else so unfortunate as worthless as me!
Its flame extinguished, ere I was aware!

The torch, lit in my soul to light others' feet,
I put out; and brought pitch darkness around.
This even in my days of childhood; and
Destroyed all well-being unhappy me!

St. Chāvara's poignant reflection serves as a powerful testament to the radical accountability he felt toward his divine calling. By framing his early shortcomings not merely as personal flaws but as a failure to be a "beacon light" for others, he highlights the communal weight of the priesthood. For St. Chāvara, a religious vocation was never a private journey toward sanctity; it was a public stewardship of grace. His lament over a "smoking wick" underscores his belief that a leader without spiritual fervour does more than stumble—they leave those following in their wake to navigate the "pitch darkness."

Ultimately, this raw admission of unworthiness is what fuelled Chāvara's transformative impact on the Church and society. It reveals a man who understood that true leadership begins with profound humility and the constant rekindling of one's inner flame. By acknowledging the "worthless" moments of his past, he reinforces the necessity of lifelong conversion, proving that the most effective guides are those who have intimately known the dark and consciously chosen to sail back toward the light. His life stands as a reminder that the garment of baptism is kept spotless not by the absence of struggle, but by the relentless pursuit of virtue.

For today's vocations, St. Chāvara's legacy offers a timeless model of contemplative action and "personality integration". In a world of increasing secularization and complexity, he

challenges modern religious to move beyond a "narrow-bound cultic priesthood" toward an inclusive mission that addresses the "here and now" of the people. His example teaches that authenticity is the true source of authority, and that a successful vocation requires the constant "rekindling of one's inner flame" through prayer, silence, and service. By emphasizing that the "strength of the monasteries" lies in the virtues of their members rather than the thickness of their walls, he reminds current generations that the ultimate goal of any vocation is personal sanctification for the sake of communal transformation.

'The Little Way' of St. Chāvara

So, he said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of others; but God knows your hearts; for what is prized by human beings is an abomination in the sight of God."

(Luke 16:15)

Here, Jesus directly affirms the principle that intention is paramount, specifically by contrasting human judgment (based on outward appearance) with God's judgment (based on the heart).

Human versus Divine Perspective: People can be easily impressed by external acts of piety, generosity, or strict adherence to rules. The Pharisees in this passage were experts at appearing righteous publicly (they 'justified' themselves before men) but were motivated internally by a 'love of money' and pride. God, however, sees through this façade. He is omniscient and looks directly at the heart (Matthew 5:6) and the true motivations behind actions.

The Problem with Self-Serving Motives: The things highly esteemed by humans—wealth, status, social prestige, and public approval—can be an 'abomination' (utterly detestable or revolting) in God's sight if the motivation is self-centred pride or greed rather than genuine love and devotion to God. An action may look like a virtuous offering to others, but if it is done with the intention of gaining praise or justifying oneself, its spiritual value is nullified.

The Importance of Inner Purity: The verse strongly implies that true righteousness is a matter of the heart, not just external observance. In order to offer something acceptably to God, the intention must be pure—focused on pleasing God alone, not seeking human approval. This aligns with the previous discussion on transforming daily acts into virtuous offerings by consciously directing them to the Lord.

In short, this passage is a potent reminder that God weighs the motives and intentions of the heart above the visible act itself. True worth lies in cultivating a genuine, humble heart that seeks God's approval alone, making our offerings authentic rather than merely performative.

St. Chāvara and the Mother Superior of the CMC Congregation were suffering from arthritis. With a sense of humor, he prescribes a spiritual medicine for their common ailment. The medicine is to unite their sufferings with those of Jesus and to offer them for the purposes for which Jesus suffered. That is, in order to do penance for the sins committed earlier and to do atonement for the present failures, doing virtuous acts is necessary. But, it is not practiced. For such persons there is a short cut, which is given here below:

1. We are punished, not only for our own mistakes. We will be punished for rejoicing at the mistakes of others. Similarly, if we rejoice at the virtues of others, we will be blessed. Therefore, remember and rejoice at the virtues and penances of great saints, martyrs, Mary Magdalene who was a sinner and other saints from the beginning and offer them to God as if these were our own.
2. Let us promise to our Lord that we offer Him as prayers the movements of our nerves, winking of our eyes, breathing, listening to the chirping of birds, etc., each separately and all together.
3. Join all these with the actions of Our Lord; then our sins will be wiped off, and we will earn great merit of virtues.
4. All these could be multiplied. For example, when the nerve on my left leg moves, I pray as follows:
    - First, Lord, by the blood that flowed from Your left leg cleanse me of all the sins that I have committed with my left leg.
    - Second, by this movement of the nerve, I desire the fruits of the virtues of all the saints.

- Third, this movement of my nerve is for the purpose of the movement of the sacred foot.
- Fourth, multiply the above.

For the first movement of the nerve, remember the virtues of all saints; for the second movement double the intention; for the third movement, again double; thus make an intention that every movement is doubled and offered.

Later, daily by a single remembering offer everything to the Lord. When I pray, "Lord have mercy on me!" I join all the intentions of prayers offered in all the chapels. Since we are united to the Lord through the vows, when we recite once, "Lord have mercy on me!" we share in the prayers of all the consecrated. Teach the novices these prayers.

St. Chāvara reminds us that growth in spiritual life is to climb up a mountain until you reach its summit, which is nothing but the perfection of love. You should make sure that you keep moving upward, never stopping anywhere on the mountain-slope or slipping down from the heights. The early stage of the journey—the ascetical part—consists mostly of one's own efforts, of course with God's help, by means of the avoidance of wasting time in useless conversations, reading Bible and other spiritual books, observance of silence and solitude, etc. In the latter stage—the mystical part—however, God takes over the work to which one unconditionally surrenders and cooperates. When you, thus, come to love reading spiritual books, you will love solitude. When the soul delights in solitude, Jesus Christ will come to meet it in solitude, and start conversing with it!

Religious life, fundamentally a life of companionship with Jesus Christ, follows a similar demanding path. Initially, one may feel confident in fully aligning with His teachings, but Christ ultimately proves to be intensely demanding and uncompromising. The call is to patiently and steadily accept and endure this challenge, as it is the certain path to profound purification from selfishness and related negative inclinations.

Ultimately, achieving complete union with Him leads to sharing in the eternal glory of His resurrection.

To safeguard this spiritual journey, one must remain vigilant against potential dangers and employ necessary spiritual precautions some of which are enlisted below:

- *Prayer and Sacramental Life*: Essential practices include daily Mass, Holy Communion, and regular Confession and spiritual guidance.
- *Devotion and Virtue*: Fostering devotion to the Virgin Mary and actively practicing virtues like humility and modesty are crucial safeguards.
- *Discipline and Study*: Maintaining custody of the senses, reading the Word of God, and engaging with other good spiritual books provide necessary discipline and nourishment.

In essence, the pursuit of religious life cannot be taken for granted. Continuous personal effort and unwavering vigilance are indispensable for enduring the demands and reaching spiritual union. The teachings of St. Chāvara highlights a practical and accessible approach to Christian spirituality, thus suggesting that salvation and purification of the soul are achieved not merely through grand gestures, but through consistently offering one's daily life as an act of devotion. This approach is built upon two core principles: the transformative power of everyday actions and the importance of conscious presence in God's sight.

Every action, whether a formal penance or a simple act of love and charity, is valuable in the eyes of the Lord. The aforementioned Gospel text moves beyond a narrow definition of piety to suggest a holistic spiritual life. Acts of service to others, moments of patience during trials, or quiet self-discipline are all elevated to virtuous acts when performed with conscious intent. By treating every moment as an opportunity for charity to others or denial of self, the individual transforms a mundane

existence into a continuous stream of offerings pleasing to God, thus making the entire life a prayer.

Central to this philosophy is the practice of living and moving consciously in the presence of the Lord. This 'awareness of presence' is the mechanism by which outward actions translate into inner sanctification. It requires discipline to remain centred in the current moment and to direct one's attention toward God throughout the day. When every task—from the most basic chore to the most complex duty—is undertaken with the explicit intention of offering it to the Lord, the soul undergoes a process of purification. This conscious offering purges selfishness and affinity to worldly distractions, rendering the soul pure and 'worthy' of attaining the joy of resurrection. This continuous vigilance and intentionality help to ensure that no time is wasted, and every experience serves the ultimate goal of spiritual union with the Divine.

'God's Will is Done. It will Always be Done!'

"Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one."

(Matthew 6:9-13)

The Lord's Prayer is a foundational guide not only for how to pray, but also for how to live in complete reliance on the Providence of God. The structure of the prayer, moving from acknowledging God's sovereignty to requesting daily needs, provides a profound template for trusting in divine providence.

The prayer begins by setting the proper perspective: God is our Father in heaven, and His agenda is the priority. The first petitions centre entirely on His will and Kingdom, not our needs. "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." (Matthew 6:9-10) Relying on providence starts with surrendering our own plans to God's perfect, heavenly plan. Praying this part of the 'Our Father' is an act of trust, declaring that we desire God's perfect Will - which is always good and wise - to be fulfilled in our lives and in the world, even when it differs from our own immediate desires. This acknowledges that God has a master plan and we submit to His governance.

This prayer calls us to trust in daily sustenance. This is perhaps the most explicit statement of reliance on providence in the entire prayer. Jesus instructs us to pray for only what we need for the immediate future: "Give us this day our daily bread," (Matthew 6:11). The Greek word for 'daily' (*epiousios*) is rare and often interpreted as 'supernatural' or 'for the coming day.' This petition teaches several aspects of reliance on providence:

- *Daily Dependence*: We are not instructed to pray for a year's supply or a lifetime of wealth. This mirrors God's provision of *manna* in the wilderness (Exodus 16), where the Israelites had to gather only what they needed for that specific day, teaching them consistent reliance on God's provision.
- *A Rejection of Material Anxiety*: This petition is directly in line with the exhortation against worry found immediately after the prayer in Matthew 6:25–34. Trusting God for 'daily bread' means letting go of anxious accumulation of wealth for the future, trusting that the Provider will meet our needs when they arise.

This prayer reminds us to rely on divine provision and protection. Providence is not just about material needs; it is fundamentally about our spiritual journey and eternal well-being. The latter half of the prayer focuses on God's provision for our moral and spiritual lives: 'and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." (Matthew 6:12-13). These petitions acknowledge that we are spiritually vulnerable and cannot navigate life's moral dangers or manage our own sinfulness without divine intervention.

St. Chāvara's declaration "God's will is done and it will always be done" summarizes the practical application of the Lord's Prayer. The Lord's prayer *petitions* that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10), a constant aspiration for believers. St. Chāvara's declaration takes this a step further, proclaiming it as an established, sovereign reality: "God's will is done, and it will always be done." This shift from a plea to an affirmation demonstrates a deep internalization of the prayer's message - a complete surrender to the belief that God is active and in control of all circumstances of the past, present, and future.

When St. Chāvara said *"The Lord is my portion"*, he meant that God Himself was his treasure, sustenance, and future. It was a

declaration of complete dependence on divine providence, lived out in simplicity, trust, and communal sharing. He used the biblical phrase "*The Lord is my* portion" (Psalm 119:57) to show a consecrated person should not rely on wealth, possessions, or human guarantees, but entirely on God's providence. For him, poverty was not deprivation but freedom: by renouncing material claims, he could claim God Himself as his portion. This conviction shaped both his personal life (living simply, without private possessions) and the community life where everything was held in common. He insisted that this attitude must be practiced even before formal vows, so that the heart is trained to trust God alone.

The structure of the Lord's Prayer teaches us to rely on God for *daily bread* as well as *spiritual protection*, releasing our anxious grip on future outcomes. St. Chāvara's declaration "God's will is done, and it will always be done" is the verbal expression of this release. It signifies that he had adopted the attitude of radical trust that Jesus taught: stop worrying about tomorrow because the Father provides daily (Matthew 6:25-34). For St. Chāvara, affirming God's will meant finding peace in the face of uncertainty, including death, because he was secure in the knowledge that his life's provisions and outcomes were entirely within God's providential care.

Throughout his life, numerous incidents demonstrate his complete dependence on the providence of God for his community's daily needs. He maintained a consistent practice of taking recourse to prayer in every instance of need, all the while responsibly utilizing every means within his power to address the situation. A notable example occurred when the Mānnānam Monastery faced severe financial distress, lacking the means to pay the daily wages to the workers. Given the situation, the Prior retreated to the chapel to pray. At that very moment, a man named Itty Nellipuzha from the parish of Cherpunkal arrived unexpectedly. He announced he had brought 500 *chakram* and promised to send another 500 if someone accompanied

him back. Upon hearing this providential arrival of funds, St. Chāvara heaved a sigh of relief and gave heartfelt thanks to God. This incident clearly illustrates how divine providence worked in response to prayer with total trust, confirming St. Chāvara's deep faith that God provides for those who trust Him fully while actively seeking solutions.

The Lord's prayer asks that earth should reflect heaven. St. Chāvara's declaration that "God's will is done and it will always be done" reflects a life lived in harmony with this request. He had cultivated a virtuous life precisely by seeking to align his daily actions and decisions with the divine will, just as Christ did in Gethsemane ("not my will, but Yours, be done," as in Luke 22:42). The following incident from the life of St. Chāvara reveals his total submission to the will of the Father:

> "Then one of those days while visiting the Sisters in the convent he [St. Chāvara] disclosed the plan to go to Mānnānam. Sad at the thought of missing him they requested him not to go. His characteristic answer was: 'Have I my own will? I desire neither to go there, nor to stay here. I am ready to do as I am told. I do not wish to do my will. I am ready to do whatever I am commanded to do'. As the Prior returned to the monastery Father Gerard inquired how he felt about going to Mānnānam. His response again was: 'Father, is my will different from yours? I am prepared to do whatever you wish me to do. I've no will of mine own to go there or not!'"

His peaceful confession on his deathbed was a testament that he felt confident he had lived according to the divine will, making the statement an ultimate expression of his preparedness to accept whatever God ordained, including the moment of his own death.

Ultimately, St. Chāvara's life, his declaration that "God's will is done, and it will always be done," and the teachings

of the Lord's Prayer converge into one cohesive theological conclusion: the highest form of Christian living is complete, active reliance on Divine Providence. This reliance is not a passive resignation to fate, but a dynamic trust in a loving Father who governs all details of existence. The commitment to living a virtuous life, coupled with persistent prayer for daily needs and spiritual protection, allowed St. Chāvara to view every circumstance - from financial hardship to his own mortality - as an unfolding of God's perfect, benevolent will. His peaceful confidence exemplifies the ultimate goal of faith: to find serenity and security in the profound truth that God is sovereign, and His perfect plan is always in motion.

Authority and Authenticity

"On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." And, leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

(Mark 4: 35-41)

In the narrative of Mark 4:35-41, we witness a profound encounter between the chaotic power of nature and the serene command of Christ. As Jesus stills the storm with a mere word, "Peace! Be still!", the disciples are left in awe, questioning the nature of the Man whom even the wind and sea obey. This moment serves as the ultimate bridge between divine authority and spiritual authenticity. It demonstrates that true authority is not a title to be claimed, but an inherent power that flows from a perfectly authentic identity. Before we delve into the linguistic roots and practical implications of these two pillars, we must first look to the deck of that storm-tossed boat to see how Christ's absolute transparency of being gave Him the absolute right to command.

Authority is the power or right to give orders, make decisions and enforce obedience, typically derived from position, office or earned respect. Authenticity is the quality of being genuine, real and true to oneself, free from pretense or being a copy. It focuses on genuineness, sincerity and being one's true self. It is about being genuine in the process of exercising authority.

Jesus' authenticity, as presented in the Bible, is established through His divine origin, His miraculous works, the testimony of witnesses, and the fulfillment of Scripture. Jesus' authority was frequently and openly questioned, primarily by the Jewish religious leaders (chief priests, scribes, and elders, e.g., Mark 11:27-33, and Luke 20:1-8). This occurred because Jesus' actions and teachings did not align with their established religious hierarchy and traditions.

The most notable instance is after Jesus cleansed the Temple courts and began teaching there, the religious leaders approached him and demanded: "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" (Matthew 21:23).

The religious leaders questioned Jesus' authority for several reasons: He lacked formal training, He challenged the status quo, He claimed of divine prerogative and Jesus' growing popularity among the people and His powerful miracles threatened their positions of power and influence. Their intention was to know the source of His authority—whether human or divine—to trap Him in a statement that could be used against Him. Jesus did not give a direct answer to their question. Instead, He responded with a counter-question to expose their hypocrisy: "John's baptism—was it from heaven, or of human origin?" (Matthew 21:25). Because they refused to answer his question, Jesus, in turn, refused to answer theirs, demonstrating their lack of a genuine desire for the truth.

It may seem that Jesus was evading their question by raising a question to them in response to their question. In fact, if they had answered Him sincerely, they would have received the answer to their own question.

St. Chāvara's authenticity was fundamentally driven by humility, a spirit of service, and profound obedience to God and his superiors, rather than a desire for power or position. This 'servant leadership' model, inspired by Jesus, meant that

positions of authority came to him as a result of his inherent authenticity and holiness, which his contemporaries widely recognized. Positions of power were endowed on him as a consequence of his inherent leadership qualities and reputation for humility and integrity, not the result of St. Chāvara seeking them out for his own personal gain. He took on the responsibilities of positions like Vicar General of the Syro-Malabar Church or Prior of his Congregation out of obedience and a sense of duty to his community and the Church. The qualities – inclination to prayer life, creative vision, proactive initiative, and a focus on serving the marginalized - were evident from his youth, long before he held formal authority.

The best example for his authenticity can be seen in his dealing with the Roccos schism. The Roccos schism caused a significant crisis: 86 of the total 154 parishes fully embraced the Roccos faction, and another 30 were partially swayed. The reigning bishop and the current ecclesiastical administration were completely at sea and were unable to contain the situation. In response to this widespread defection, Bishop Baccinelli issued a formula of faith, demanding an oath of allegiance from the faithful. A number of priests, both from the diocese and religious orders, were tasked with carrying these oaths to the parishes. As Father Mathias Mundadan would note, "only a minority swore by the formula and many ignored it and others criticized."

This incident describes a pivotal moment when the Bishop appointed St. Chāvara as Vicar General to manage the complex situation involving the contentious Roccos schism within the Church. St. Chāvara was given complete authority to resolve the issue. Despite facing immense pressure from his friends and colleagues to compromise with Roccos, St. Chāvara remained steadfast in his convictions. He refused to yield an inch but handled the matter with notable magnanimity, upholding the rights and privileges of Roccos without seeking any vengeance.

His ability to convince the people stemmed from his known authenticity and integrity; he further solidified trust by declining to use the title of Vicar General when signing circulars, demonstrating humility and a focus on resolution rather than status. It is St. Chāvara's resolute integrity, coupled with his magnanimous approach and humble refusal to leverage his new title, that ultimately allowed him to navigate a challenging schism, secure the trust of his community, and resolve the conflict without resorting to punitive measures.

This example invites us to surrender every part of our lives—relationships, work, finances, and desires—to Christ's care and direction. From where does my authority come? Am I clear about the source of my own authority in my work, family, or personal mission? Is it derived from a title, a position, or from God's calling? Jesus used his divine authority to heal, teach, and serve, not to control or coerce others. His authority came from complete trust and obedience to the Father's will. The religious leaders, who appeared righteous outwardly, were blind to the truth because their hearts were closed to the Spirit of God.

Do I use whatever influence or authority I have to build others up and serve them, or to protect my own position, power, or comfort? Do my actions reflect a humble submission to God's will, or do I cling to my own agenda and pride? When I ask questions or challenge others, what are my underlying motives? Am I seeking the truth, or trying to trap someone, win an argument, or preserve my own reputation? Am I open to the new ways God might be working, even if it challenges my established beliefs or practices? Or does my religiosity prevent me from recognizing God's presence in unexpected places or people?

Credentials and Credibility

At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. So, the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." Jesus answered, "I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand. The Father and I are one."

The Jews took up stones again to stone him. Jesus replied, "I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these are you going to stone me?" The Jews answered, "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you, but for blasphemy, because you, though only a human being, are making yourself God." Jesus answered, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, you are gods'? If those to whom the word of God came were called 'gods' - and the scripture cannot be annulled - can you say that the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said, 'I am God's Son'? If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father." Then they tried to arrest him again, but he escaped from their hands.

He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing earlier, and he remained there. Many came to him, and they were saying, "John performed no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true." And many believed in him there."

(John 10:22-42)

Credentials are the formal tangible evidence of a person's qualifications, while credibility is the quality of being trustworthy and believable, often built upon those credentials

and actions over time. Credentials are the starting point; they provide the initial basis for belief. Credibility is the earned trust that comes from consistently delivering on the promise implied by those visible credentials.

Jesus held no formal religious training or human-approved credentials in the traditional sense of His time. Instead, the New Testament presents His 'credentials' as a demonstration of divine authority, affirmed through various testimonies and acts. His credentials, from a biblical perspective, are: At His baptism, a voice from heaven declared, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," which is presented as a direct divine testimony. The events of His birth, life, death, and resurrection were seen by His followers as the fulfilment of numerous Old Testament prophecies, which served as powerful validation of His identity as the Messiah.

Jesus performed many 'signs and wonders' (healings, exorcisms, raising the dead) that His followers cited as proof that the Father had sent Him and was at work in Him. People were consistently astonished at His teaching because He spoke with an authority that contrasted sharply with the typical rabbinic style of quoting other esteemed authorities. His resurrection from the dead is presented as the ultimate and most significant credential, a victory over death that validated all His claims and remained the core of the Christian faith. His sinless life, willingness to die for His cause, and identity as fully human and fully divine are all considered part of His unique credentials.

He was a preacher and teacher without a formal degree yet people called him 'Rabbi'. He had profound and deep Old Testament scriptural knowledge without a formal seminary training. His teachings were simple yet deep, using everyday illustrations and parables to convey profound spiritual truths that men of all classes could understand. He was a great philosopher. He lived what He preached, practicing a life of

humility, compassion, and obedience to God, which gave His words immense weight and credibility.

Jesus was a healer without a medical doctorate; Jesus performed numerous instantaneous healings of various ailments (blindness, leprosy, paralysis, etc.) through a mere word, touch, or command, demonstrating power over all forms of disease and physical brokenness. He was an exorcist without official certification; He cast out demons with a simple command, demonstrating his direct authority over evil spiritual forces. He had authority over nature even without scientific training; He calmed storms, walked on water, multiplied a few loaves and fish to feed thousands, and turned water into wine, showcasing command over the physical world. His 'credentials' were the visible manifestations of God's power and love, serving as signs that He was the Messiah and the Son of God, authenticating His message and inviting people to believe.

Father Thomas Kochumuttom narrates St. Chāvara's credibility as his credential. Even though St. Chāvara had no significant credentials to his credit, his credibility was high from the young age and he earned these internally through his prayer life, behaviour, actions, expertise, integrity, and character over time. Credibility was his inherent character and reputation. This is what made people *trust and follow* him, regardless of his formal titles. The following incident speaks volumes on the credibility of St. Chāvara.

During a retreat he was preaching to the priests in the Vicariate, St. Chāvara clearly explained the Roccos issue, hoping to allow the participants to continue the retreat in peace. However, the agitation and discussions continued during intervals. Going against his usual practice, the Prior took a bold step: he swore on the altar's crucifix that the schismatic bishop lacked papal authorization and warned that lack of submission would incur the Archbishop's excommunication. His listeners, knowing his impeccable character, were convinced by the strength of his assertion and accepted his certainty.

The incident highlights St. Chāvara's credibility by demonstrating that his character and known integrity were sufficient to resolve a major ecclesiastical crisis (the Roccos Schism) that rational arguments alone could not settle. The priests present were aware of St. Chāvara's 'unimpeachable character' and reputation as a holy 'man of God'. This deep personal trust meant his solemn oath carried more weight than ongoing debates or external information. As the Vicar General, his success in this instance did not come from his administrative position, but from his moral credibility as a committed religious priest. The listeners were convinced by the *strength of his assertion* rooted in his life of obedience and prayer, not simply his office.

The fact that the agitation ceased and the priests accepted his certainty shows that his personal credibility was a decisive factor in preserving the unity of the Catholic Church in Kerala during a critical period. He effectively countered Thomas Roccos' intrusion through his strong stance and leadership.

St. Chāvara exemplified integrity and credibility through his unwavering adherence to Catholic principles and simple lifestyle, resilience and positivity in the face of numerous adversities. His commitment to the renewal of the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church was evident in his hard work with utmost pastoral prudence and diligence. Clearly communicating the goals to his followers was key to his leadership, especially in conflicting situations. These attributes present a significant challenge for modern followers, urging a re-evaluation of personal values in a world often prioritizing expediency over authenticity and instant gratification over enduring commitment. Emulating his life demands a similar dedication to hard work, clear moral compass, and resilient optimism in the face of contemporary complexities and societal challenges.

Interiority and Integrity of St. Chāvara

No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit; for each tree is known by its own fruit. Figs are not gathered from thorns, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks.

(Luke 6:43-45)

To reflect on the interiority and integrity of St. Chāvara, we must first define these two pillars of spiritual life and examine how they converged to make him a 'man of God' and a 'man of the people.'

Interiority refers to the depth of one's inner life - the 'inner sanctuary' where the soul communicates with God. It is the practice of constant prayer, mindfulness of the Divine presence, and the cultivation of a rich spiritual landscape that remains undisturbed by external chaos. For St. Chāvara, interiority was the 'conversation with a friend' that he described in his writings on meditation.

Integrity is the quality of being undivided. It is the seamless alignment between one's inner convictions and external actions. A person of integrity lives the same truth in private that they profess in public. In St. Chāvara's life, integrity meant that his administrative duties and social reforms were not distractions from his faith, but the direct, visible fruit of and fuel for it.

1. The Interior 'Storehouse' (Interiority):

In Greek, the word used for 'storehouse' is *thesauros* (treasure). A reflection on this passage suggests that the 'good things' a person produces are not accidental; they are the result of a deliberate, interior accumulation of grace. For St. Chāvara, his interiority was the 'good storehouse' of his heart. His hours spent in conversation with God as with 'a friend' were not passive; they were the moments he was filling his interior

treasure chest. Even while building monasteries or printing presses, he maintained a 'hermitage' within his heart. His work *Dhyānasallapangal* (Colloquies in Meditation) reveals a man who talked to God with the intimacy of a spouse. Without this deep interiority, his massive social projects would have been mere 'social work.' Instead, because they came from a heart full of God, they became 'good fruit' that has lasted for over 180 years.

2. The Integrity of the 'Good Tree':

Integrity is the state of being 'whole' or 'undivided.' The metaphor of the tree and fruit used by Jesus is the ultimate definition of integrity: the outside (the fruit) must match the inside (the nature of the tree). A person of integrity does not have a 'split personality' where their spiritual life and professional life is at odds with each other. St. Chāvara exemplified this integrity by ensuring that his external actions were always a perfect reflection of his internal convictions. He believed that sitting in silence with God was as fulfilling as a long-drawn speech. This interior silence allowed him to hear the 'whispers of God' regarding the needs of the poor and the Church. When he faced the *Denha* episode, his calm, hospitable, yet firm response was the 'good fruit' of a tree that was deeply rooted in the soil of divine obedience. He did not need to 'act' holy; he simply produced the fruit of his true nature.

3. The 'Abundance of the Heart' and the Written Word:

The passage concludes by stating that the "mouth speaks what the heart is full of." This is profoundly evident in St. Chāvara's literary legacy. His interiority was so saturated with love for Christ and Mary that it naturally overflowed into his writings. When we read his *Āthmānuthāpam* (Compunction of Heart), we are not just reading poetry; we are hearing the 'overflow' of a heart that had meditated on the mysteries of the incarnation for decades. His integrity is seen in the fact that he wrote in the simple, accessible language of the people; he did not seek

to show off his erudition, but simply to share the 'good things' stored in his heart with his fellow human beings.

4. The 'Holy Fool' as the True Fruit:

Sometimes, the 'fruit' of a good tree looks like 'foolishness' to the world. A tree does not grow for its own sake, but for others. St. Chāvara's willingness to be seen as a 'fool' for the Kingdom - by undertaking tasks others thought beneath a learned priest - proves his total integrity. He was not serving his own ego; he was serving to realize the plan of God. Like St. Joseph, whom he so deeply admired, his integrity was proven by his silent service. He was a 'good tree' planted by the waters of the Spirit, whose fruit continues to nourish the Church even today.

In St. Chāvara, interiority was the root, and integrity was the fruit. He did not live a 'split life.' His 'interior' union with Christ as his 'Spouse' (as he wrote in his meditations) provided the 'integrity' or the strength to face schisms, social inequality, and the rigors of leadership without losing his peace. Like St. Joseph, he, too, believed that professional excellence (integrity of work) was a form of worship. Whether he was editing the Syriac Breviary with academic precision or cooking a rooster for an intruder (*Denha*), his actions were always consistent with his calling to be a 'servant of all.'

His integrity was tested when he was mocked or misunderstood. A man of lesser integrity would have defended his ego; St. Chāvara, however, maintained his 'cool' and remained quiet. His commitment to God's plan was more important than his social reputation. His counsels to families (*Chāvarul*) demonstrate his integrity. He did not just teach theology; he taught the 'integrity of the home' - how parents should treat children and how families should live in honesty. Pope Francis described him as 'both active and contemplative.' This is the ultimate expression of interiority and integrity. He did not leave God to go to work; he brought Him *into* his work. Even his writings show a man who recorded faithfully even

his community's faults and the 'corrections' from bishops with total honesty. He had nothing to hide because his interior life was transparent before God.

The following excerpts from Roccos' letter to St. Chāvara – spitting the venom of harsh threat and the dire consequences - alongside St. Chāvara's eventual efforts to facilitate Roccos' return to Baghdad, provide a profound testament to the Saint's interiority and integrity.

> "… you went to Bishop Bernardino, head of the unruly, and you have received the office of his Vicar General by giving a good sum of money, and he maliciously promised you to make you the bishop of Malabar. And for this reason, you go around, falsely spreading lie in all the churches and places that you have gone to Bishop Thomas and have seen that he has no order from the Pope or from anyone else. What a liar! What a traitor! How deceitful! When did you ever come to us? When did you ever speak to me? When did you know whether or not we have any order? Oh senseless! Oh ignorant! Why do you say such lies? Going around with all this, was not enough for you. You are continuously spreading and announcing in all the churches that Bishop Thomas is suspended, excommunicated and is a heretic. Awkward! Doomed! Infatuated with the desire to become a bishop! From where have you come to know that we are excommunicated and heretic? Have you received any letter from the Pope or from the Prefect of the Propaganda, or from the Patriarch? Perhaps you may say that Bishop Bernardino has told you! If our brother Bishop Bernardino would tell you that there are five gods, will you believe? Bishop Bernardino is not God, nor the Pope. Therefore, oh irrational, I suggest you to cut off one part of your tongue. Stop

> making turmoil. If you do not obey, I will give you severe punishment for the soul and for the body, and perhaps I will drive you out from the convent. Stop preventing people from coming to me saying that there is excommunication. Do you not know the order of the king and his ministers not to give rise to disorders? Know all this and that is enough."

The vitriolic letter from Roccos to St. Chāvara provides a stark backdrop against which the interiority and integrity of the St. Chāvara are most vividly revealed. Faced with venomous accusations – "you went to Bishop Bernardino, head of the unruly, and you have received the office of his Vicar General by giving a good sum of money, and he maliciously promised you to make you the bishop of Malabar", 'liar,' 'traitor,' and 'doomed' seeker of power – St. Chāvara's response was not one of retaliatory anger, but of a centred, prayerful calm. This is the hallmark of his interiority; he was so deeply anchored in his 'conversation with God' that the storms of human malice could not disturb his inner peace. While Roccos' words were fuelled by 'turmoil' and a 'desire to become bishop', St. Chāvara's silence was fuelled by his desire to preserve the truth of the Church. He exemplified the biblical wisdom that a heart full of God has no room for the bitterness of the world.

His interiority and integrity were equally evident in his final dealings with the departing intruder. Rather than seeking retribution for the slanders he endured, St. Chāvara acted with the compassion of Christ, facilitating Roccos' confession and ensuring he received the necessary funds for his journey home. This mastery over his emotions and his commitment to charity - even toward an adversary - reveals a man whose external actions were perfectly aligned with his internal spiritual life. Through this encounter, St. Chāvara proved that true spiritual authority is rooted not in power, but in the humility of a life hidden in God.

This is how Roccos was forced to leave Malabar: Roccos received a second letter from Audo to return while he was visiting Malayattoor. He fell sick and was taken to Kochi and from there he wrote to Vicar Apostolic expressing his desire to return to Bagdad. Vicar Apostolic entrusted the matter to St. Chāvara. The Prelate was for giving all reasonable and possible help. He authorized St. Chāvara to convey the decisions of the Prelate to Roccos. The money needed for the return journey also would be made available to him. St. Chāvara showed no hostility to Roccos. But Roccos' best friend and supporter, Pārāyi filed a civil case against Roccos. But the suit failed and Roccos returned.

His interiority and integrity were further manifested in the masterful way he balanced justice with radical charity during Roccos' eventual downfall. Despite being personally threatened and slandered, St. Chāvara showed 'no hostility' toward the man who had sought to destroy him. When the Archbishop authorized St. Chāvara to hear Roccos' confession and facilitate his return journey, he did so with the same diligence he applied to his most beloved confreres. His integrity meant he did not see Roccos as an enemy to be crushed, but as a soul to be reconciled and a brother in need of 'reasonable and possible help.' He distinguished between the schism - which he fought with the sagacity of St. Joseph - and the person, whom he treated with the compassion of Christ.

Ultimately, this episode serves as a powerful testament to a life that was perfectly integrated. St. Chāvara's interior life gave him the strength to endure the 'dire consequences' Roccos threatened him with, while his integrity ensured that his victory over the schism was won through holiness rather than malice. By refusing to engage in a war of words and instead focusing on the spiritual welfare of the Syro-Malabar Church, he proved that his authority came not from 'giving a good sum of money,' but from a life hidden in God.

To speak of the interiority and integrity of St. Chāvara is to speak of a perfectly calibrated compass. His interiority directed him toward God, and his integrity ensured that every step he took in the world followed that divine direction. As he famously said, he sought the 'sanctification of self' (interiority) and the 'salvation of others' (integrity). Even now, this legacy remains a beacon for us, reminding us that true leadership is found in the ability to forgive our persecutors and remain steadfast in the mission of salvation. Today, in 2026, he remains a model for any confrere or lay person seeking to live a life that is deep on the inside and consistent on the outside.

Solitude and Silence

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.

(Mark 1:35)

But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

(Luke 5:16)

The Gospel accounts of Mark 1:35 and Luke 5:16 reveal a profound and recurring pattern in the life of Jesus: the intentional pursuit of solitude for prayer. In the narrative of Mark, we see Jesus rising "very early in the morning, while it was still dark," to withdraw to a lonely place. This was not an occasional retreat but a foundational rhythm, establishing that before He engaged with the world, He first anchored Himself in the presence of the Father. Even as His popularity soared and the "whole city" gathered at His door, Jesus did not allow the urgency of human need to dictate His spiritual priorities.

Luke's observation that Jesus "often withdrew to lonely places and prayed" further emphasizes that this was His regular habit, rather than a singular event. It highlights a striking contrast between the external pressure of the large crowds seeking healing and teaching and the internal necessity of divine communion. Despite the staggering demands of His public ministry—where the sick, the broken, and the curious clamoured for His attention—Jesus maintained a disciplined boundary, recognizing that His capacity to pour into others was fuelled by His private time in the sanctuary of silence.

This consistent withdrawal highlights Christ's extraordinary discipline in prioritizing the spiritual over the sensational. By seeking God "before the demands of the day began," He demonstrated that true mission is birthed in the quiet. This pattern served as a silent instruction to His followers: that the more the world demands from us, the more essential our retreat

to God becomes. For Jesus, solitude was not an escape from responsibility, but the very place where He received the clarity and strength to fulfil it.

These passages provide a clear, compelling biblical mandate for the essential role of solitude and silence in the spiritual life of a religious person. These passages highlight Jesus' consistent personal practice of withdrawing from the intense demands of His public ministry to commune with His Father, setting a non-negotiable example for all who want to dedicate themselves to growth in spiritual life.

Habitual Withdrawal and Re-centring: Luke emphasizes that this was Jesus' regular habit, using the continuous tense 'would withdraw'. The context is crucial: immediately preceding this, the text mentions that news about Jesus was spreading, and crowds were gathering to hear Him and be healed (Luke 5:15). For a religious who is involved in active life, this verse teaches the necessity of a rhythm of retreat and re-entry into ministry. The more the demands upon a person of faith, the more critical the intentional withdrawal becomes. Jesus, though fully divine, demonstrated His reliance on the Father for strength and guidance through prayer in 'lonely places'. This shows that ministry, power, and charity do not come from endless 'doing' but from 'abiding' in God's presence.

Intentional Priority and Self-discipline: 'Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.' Mark's account underscores the intentionality and self-discipline required to find solitude. Jesus prioritized this time even before the day's demands began, physically removing himself from the busy household of Simon Peter. This act demonstrates that communion with God is the top priority that must be actively scheduled and protected, even at the cost of physical rest. The purpose of finding a 'solitary place' and embracing silence is to

remove external noise and distractions, allowing one to focus solely on God and hear His voice more clearly.

For a religious, these passages are not optional suggestions but a core template for spiritual vitality. Solitude is the setting for developing deep intimacy with God, where a person can lay the burdens down and receive peace and strength. Jesus sought solitude before making major decisions, such as choosing His twelve apostles (Luke 6:12). For religious leaders, this highlights the necessity of silent prayer for wisdom and guidance in leadership and discernment. In silence, the soul can be re-centred on God's will and purpose, preventing burnout and pride that can arise from constant success in the public realm.

The example of Jesus teaches that solitude and silence are not mere signs of isolation, but sacred spaces where a religious person can be filled by God's presence to effectively serve the world.

St. Chāvara perfectly encapsulated the spiritual discipline demonstrated by Jesus Christ in Luke 5:16 and Mark 1:35 through his own practices of *othungippārkkal* (retreating/staying aside) and *mindatakkam* (silence and calmness of mind). These concepts were his practical interpretation of the Gospel mandate for solitude and silence. *Othungippārkkal* was St. Chāvara's intentional, physical act of withdrawal from the constant demands of the monastery and society to a solitary place of prayer, much like Jesus in desolate places. This deliberate creation of external quiet enabled the state of *mindatakkam*, the internal silence and stillness of the heart necessary to listen to God's 'whisper' and to discern His will. His life of active service was sustained by this rhythm, proving that true apostolic energy flows from the wellspring of contemplation, a testament that authentic Christian leadership requires both vigorous action and profound inner silence.

Othungippārkkal – A Life in Solitude:

The founding fathers used terms like *othungippārkkal* to describe a particular form of religious life, emphasizing a modest existence that one spent in solitude. According to Fr. Thomas Kochumuttom, this phrase literally translates to 'a withdrawn life'. In practice, this implied a life in solitude, distancing oneself from worldly noises and distractions in order to facilitate an easier and more focused connection with God through prayer. The core meaning is to be centered on achieving a recollected state of mind, rather than strict physical isolation from the society.

When the founding fathers presented their aspiration for a life of quiet retreat to the bishop, the bishop retorted: "If you, who are the only knowledgeable priests we have, go away to live in silence and solitude, (*mindatakkamāyi valladathum othungippārttāl*) who would lead the people?" His resolution to the predicament facing both himself and the people, should the priests pursue an eremitic style of living, was to establish a monastery within the community itself. This concept of practicing *othungippārkkal* within a communal setting was likely inspired by the Lord's promise of Presence: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them." (Mt. 18:20)

Othungippārkkal is a venerable form of monastic life characterized by profound solitariness. In this sacred style of life, the social dimension of human existence is entirely or largely offered up as a sacrifice to attain a deeper spiritual experience of the Divine. Christianity has traditionally venerated the life of solitude as one of the most perfect ways of life, wholly consecrated unto God.

While other religious vocations strive to bring the fruits of spiritual experience to bear upon human relationships and the world, the life of a recluse has always maintained a purely contemplative thrust. These holy recluses surrender their lives

solely to the cultivation of their inner spiritual garden through unwavering devotion: ceaseless prayer, meditation upon the Sacred Scriptures, study, holy silence, rigorous asceticism, manual labour, and the pursuit of sacred intellectual truths. In embracing the discipline of solitude, the monk transcends the ordinary bonds of social relationships and worldly interactions to cleave solely to God.

The bishop initially opposed the idea of a literal *othungippārkkal* because he believed the most pressing need for the Church in Kerala was developing sufficient local leadership. He not only approved of their desire for a modest life but actively went out of his way to support the project. However, the bishop eventually granted the fathers' request with certain stipulations attached.

Mindatakkam – A Life of Silence:

The founding fathers intended to pursue a lifestyle - one of silence, or *mindatakkam*. Their choice was a significant challenge to the prevailing human inclination – relevant even to this day – which saw individuals constantly seeking recognition and clamoring to be heard.

The pursuit of a life of silence demands considerable dedication. It requires deliberately shielding oneself from incessant external and internal noise in order to calm an active mind to access a profound, divine stillness. This dedication was evident in the founding fathers, whose inclination toward monastic life granted them purpose through the intentional practice of silence. They understood silence not merely as quietude, but as an opening to the tangible presence of an ineffable reality. Motivated by appreciation of their bishop to embrace this life of solitude for the good of others, these founding fathers established their monastery, uniquely combining significant erudition with a natural gift for pastoral leadership. This highlights that the capacity for such a life is

a purposeful pursuit, joyfully accepted by those who actively seek it out.

After establishing the first monastery at Mānnānam, much emphasis was placed on silence, solitude, and contemplation in order to promote greater interiorization. St. Chāvara was keen about the process of self-transformation through a holistic integration of spiritual, human, pastoral and intellectual dimensions of priestly and religious life. Later, St. Chāvara stressed this kind of a life of solitude and silence in the seminary as well as in the monasteries. The shift in focus of seminary formation instructed the seminarians to practice virtues, especially simplicity of life, obedience, accountability, transparency and genuine concern for the poor. He also promoted devotion to the Most Blessed Sacrament, Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Joseph, and the Holy Family.

This discussion ultimately affirms that solitude and silence are not optional spiritual practices, but essential components of an authentic and effective religious and, even basic Christian life. Jesus Himself modeled the necessity of withdrawing to lonely places for prayer, demonstrating that spiritual strength and clarity come from intimate communion with the Father and not from ceaseless activity. St. Chāvara translated this divine example into tangible concepts for his religious community, balancing the demands of revolutionary social action and education with the non-negotiable need for internal and external quietude. His legacy teaches all believers that true spiritual vitality arises from a disciplined rhythm of active service balanced by contemplative retreat, allowing the soul to be continuously realigned with God's will and filled with the grace necessary to face the inevitable storms in life.

This same spiritual discipline was the bedrock of St. Chāvara's life, allowing him to remain a calm «house of prayer» even while labouring as a revolutionary social reformer. Much like his Master, St. Chāvara was constantly sought after for

guidance, yet he never sacrificed his deep interiority for the sake of external activity. His practice of waking in the early hours for contemplation and his ability to retreat into the "interior castle" of his soul were not escapes from his mission; rather, they were the very source of his tireless energy for education, social justice, and church leadership.

By prioritizing this sacred silence and solitude, St. Chāvara demonstrated that the secret to a transformative life is not found in more activity, but in deeper communion. He showed that one could be a "man for others" only by first being a "man for God." His example serves as a powerful reminder that when we ground our busiest days in the quiet of the morning and the discipline of solitude, our work stops being a mere human effort and becomes a radiant expression of the Divine will.

Count Your Blessings

On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, they called out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" When he saw them, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were made clean. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" Then He said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."

(Luke 17: 11-19)

This Gospel passage of the ten lepers provides a profound explanation for the simple imperative to 'count your blessings.' The narrative highlights that acknowledging God's grace is not merely a polite act of etiquette, but an essential component of true faith and the pathway to holistic salvation. The story reveals a critical distinction between receiving a gift and recognizing the Giver, urging believers to foster an active disposition of gratitude.

This reflection begins with the act of receiving the blessing itself. All ten lepers received the same miraculous healing from Jesus. This demonstrates that God's grace is often generously poured out upon everyone, regardless of their immediate spiritual disposition. However, the crucial point is the *response* to this grace. The nine who continued on their way failed to make the connection between the benefit they received (clean skin) and the Benefactor (Jesus). Their focus remained entirely on the gift rather than the Giver, leading them to miss the deeper spiritual implication of their encounter with the Messiah.

The returning Samaritan provides the model for 'counting one's blessings.' His act of turning back, praising God in a loud

voice, and falling at Jesus' feet was a public acknowledgment that his healing was a divine intervention. This act of gratitude transformed a physical cure into a spiritual awakening. Jesus' response ("Your faith has made you well!") uses a language that implies a holistic salvation, indicating that the Samaritan's thankfulness completed the work of grace within him. The message is clear: while all may receive God's benefits, only those who actively count their blessings and return thanks experience the fullness of salvation and a saving relationship with Christ.

Furthermore, the passage underscores that gratitude is a conscious choice that deepens our awareness of God's constant providence. The nine who walked away quickly became accustomed to their blessing, integrating it back into their normal lives without pause. The Samaritan, however, paused, reflected, and returned. This act of intentional acknowledgment is what 'counting your blessings' truly means - it keeps the heart humble, prevents spiritual complacency, and ensures that we remain centred on God as the source of all life and goodness.

St. Chāvara starts his *Colloquies* with the heavenly Father first confessing as follows:

> "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 purity and modesty, I realize that I am not worthy to receive the spirit of contemplation and to attain perfection. Again, I am reminded of my mother's warning to keep away from pride and complacency."

It is precisely this attitude of profound gratitude, modelled by the thankful leper in the Gospel, that enabled St. Chāvara to initiate his intimate spiritual dialogues, the *Colloquies*, with the heavenly Father. He began by engaging in a deeply humble self-reflection, methodically counting his blessings and challenging his own worthiness for the gifts he had received. This process was driven by a series of searing questions directed toward himself and God, ensuring that he attributed all success solely to divine providence.

His introspection began by questioning his perceived power and personal skill, asking: "For is it because of my power and skill that I did things whatsoever?" He immediately dismissed the notion that his achievements were his own doing. He extended this line of questioning to the pivotal moments of his life and vocation: "How is it that you came hither?" and "Who called me from home?"

He continued this self-examination regarding his status within the Church and his community, transforming his titles into prompts for humility. He questioned his very path to priesthood: "How did I become a priest?" and "How could I join the community and become a member of the Congregation?" The titles he held were not sources of pride but mysteries of grace: "Why should anyone address me as Prior?" and "How did I come by the present status?"

The culmination of this profound inventory of his life's blessings was a final, humbling realization. He asked himself a poignant rhetorical question: "Do you think I deserve any one of these favours?" His clear answer was, "Not at all, for sure." He concluded that every aspect of his life was an unmerited gift, reinforcing the truth that "it is God's will that is being accomplished" in all things. This attitude of gratitude and humility was the true foundation of his ongoing, intimate conversation with the Lord.

In the beginning of his seminal work, the *Āthmānuthāpam* (Compunction of the Soul), St. Chāvara repeatedly engages in a deeply humble examination of conscience, counting his blessings from a different, foundational point of view: the sheer gratuitousness of his existence and upbringing. His reflections begin with a sense of wonder at his creation, pondering: "Why did you create me a son of Adam?" In profound humility, he contrasts his nature with God's majesty, considering himself as a 'brute' and 'a worm creeping on the face of the earth' in comparison to the divine Source of all being.

His gratitude extended to God's constant providence and protection throughout his vulnerable early life. He reflects on how God's hand was present from the very beginning: "You shielded me from all dangers during my birth," and continued to guard him "during each passing moment." He praised God for the gifts of family and sustenance: "You gave me a mother to nurture me," and even extended this gratitude to the unseen spiritual protection he received, noting that while he slept, "you sent me a 'sleepless angel' to guard me."

St. Chāvara gave thanks for the spiritual gifts bestowed upon him through his upbringing in a devout home. He recognized the specific grace received in the sacrament of initiation: "Your 'crystal streams of grace' you gave me in baptism." He was deeply grateful for his formative environment: "You gave me parents grounded in faith." He cherished the profound spiritual nurturing he received from his mother, whom he poetically praised because she "mixed in her sweet milk, she regaled me with thoughts of heaven, and words of grace so pure." This deeply personal enumeration of blessings formed the spiritual bedrock of his entire life's work and his intimate *Colloquies* with God.

The life and legacy of St. Chāvara offer a powerful testament to a life lived in intimate 'friendship with Jesus Christ,' characterized by authenticity, profound humility, and tireless pastoral zeal. His intimacy with the Lord made him stand up for Catholic faith particularly during the tumultuous period of the Roccosian schism. He responded by providing restorative guidance through his spiritual writings, liturgical reforms, educational initiatives, and the founding of robust religious communities. The thriving, vibrant global Syro-Malabar Church today is the direct fruit of his deep interior life, which he 'poured out' in service to God and humanity, leaving an enduring model of how private contemplation must translate into visible, transformative public action.

St. Chāvara: A Captivating Preacher

Jesus told the crowds all these things in parables; without a parable he told them nothing. This was to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet: "I will open my mouth to speak in parables; I will proclaim what has been hidden from the foundation of the world."

(Matthew 13:34-35)

With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.

(Mark 4:33-34)

God does not overwhelm the human mind with His infinite complexity but rather meets us at our level of understanding. Jesus' use of earthy stories (seeds, lamps, storms) demonstrates that the Divine is accessible through the ordinary. Truth is not reserved for the elite but is tailored to the spiritual maturity and 'readiness' of the audience.

Matthew 13:35 cites Psalm 78:2 to show that Jesus' parables were a fulfilment of a messianic prophecy to "utter things hidden since the foundation of the world." The parables are not merely 'illustrations' but acts of unveiling. They reveal that God's plan for the Kingdom was present before creation but remained 'veiled' until the arrival of Christ. His teaching bridges the gap between ancient shadows and the present realities.

The Gospels note that Jesus "did not speak to them except in parables". This creates a distinction between the 'crowds' and the 'disciples.' Parables act as a spiritual filter. To the 'outsider' (the resistant or merely curious), they remain riddles or simple farm stories. To the 'insider' (those who follow in faith), they become life-giving mysteries. This respects human freedom, as only those who 'lean in' and ask for an explanation receive the deeper interpretation.

Mark 4:34 specifies that Jesus "explained everything in private to his disciples." True understanding is born from

intimacy, not just intellect. By explaining parables only to those who stayed with Him, Jesus teaches that the 'secrets of the Kingdom' are a gift shared within the context of a personal relationship with God. Preaching is thus an invitation to move from the crowd into the circle of discipleship.

The extended reading of Mark 4:35–41 (the Calming of the Storm) immediately follows the teaching in parables. This serves as a 'living parable.' After teaching the crowds about the Kingdom, Jesus demonstrates His power over the 'chaos' of the world. It reveals that the King who speaks in parables is the same Lord who has authority over nature, calling His disciples to a faith that transcends fear.

St. Chāvara's preaching was life-oriented. Despite his vast knowledge of seven languages and complex theology, he translated these truths into 'clear and vivid terms' and 'with just sufficient' points. Like Jesus, he prioritized the listener's ability to grasp and retain the message over an abstract display of scholarship.

He was a creative storyteller. His narrations of the Prodigal Son and the Passion were not mere recitations but vivid re-imaginings designed to arouse attention. By using 'striking points' and 'convincing examples from the lives of saints,' he followed his Master's method of using the 'known' (stories/ examples) to explain the 'unknown' (divine mysteries).

St. Chāvara's preaching was characterized by intense conviction. When he swore on the crucifix to protect his flock from the 'Roccosian trouble,' he was acting as a prophetic voice for his time. His preaching was a tool for discernment and protection, ensuring that the 'hidden' truths of the faith remained intact against contemporary errors.

This dual approach of public proclamation and private formation is evident in his mission retreats. While he addressed the 'crowds' in parishes, he also focused on the formation of the 'disciples' - his fellow religious and priests. By leading groups

of priests to conduct 30 retreats a year, he created a 'school of preachers' who could explain the mysteries of faith more deeply to the community, just as Jesus did with the Twelve.

He raised his voice to seek the rights for the marginalized. His pragmatic style, exemplified in his writings like the *Chāvarul* (Testament), addressed the real-life problems of his society. His preaching was not an elitist exercise but a tool for social and spiritual liberation for all.

In 1849, Vicar Apostolic Ludovic Martini formally designated the religious community at Mānnānam, under the leadership of St. Chāvara, as the official preachers of spiritual exercises for the entire Vicariate. This appointment was a testament to the community's spiritual depth and missionary zeal. Archbishop Baccinelli further affirmed St. Chāvara's personal calibre, describing him as a "good, prudent, and obedient person," while noting his unique gift as a "captivating preacher." These virtues allowed St. Chāvara to connect deeply with the faithful, bridging the gap between rigorous theology and the hearts of the simple people.

Following the resolution of the Roccosian schism, the ministry of preaching underwent a transformative shift in both style and intensity. Recognizing the need to fortify the faith of the laity, St. Chāvara introduced a collaborative 'mission' approach: groups of four or five priests would descend upon a parish to conduct intensive eight-day spiritual retreats. This systematic effort was prolific, with approximately thirty such retreats conducted annually across various parishes. By mobilizing a collective of preachers rather than a solitary voice, the community was able to provide comprehensive spiritual renewal to the entire community.

Furthermore, St. Chāvara and his confreres sought to make spiritual nourishment a consistent part of Catholic life, rather than just an occasional event. They pioneered the practice of delivering structured sermons on Sundays and major feast days

- a tradition that had not been widely established in Malabar. This commitment to the 'ministry of the Word' ensured that the faithful were continuously educated and inspired. Through these retreats and regular preaching, he exemplified the integrity and interiority he held dear, proving that a heart full of God naturally overflows into the sanctification and salvation of others.

St. Chāvara was a man of immense intellectual breadth, possessing an expansive knowledge of Holy Scripture and a deep mastery of global theological traditions. A gifted linguist, he was proficient in seven languages - including Malayalam, Sanskrit, Syriac, Latin, Italian, Portuguese, and Tamil. This linguistic versatility allowed him to serve as a bridge between cultures, as he translated numerous sacred and scholarly texts into the vernacular to make them accessible to the local faithful. As a versatile and voracious reader, he drew from a vast treasury of knowledge, ensuring that his spiritual and social reforms were grounded in both ancient wisdom and contemporary thought.

His preaching and writing were marked by an extraordinary talent for clarity and narrative precision. St. Chāvara possessed the rare ability to distil complex theological concepts into vivid, understandable terms, speaking exactly what was necessary without excess. His arguments were consistently bolstered by convincing biblical citations and enriched by compelling examples from the lives of the saints and other virtuous figures. This didactic clarity ensured that his message was not only intellectually sound but also deeply persuasive, moving the hearts of both the learned and the simple.

In his literary compositions, St. Chāvara demonstrated a mastery of classical and local poetic forms. He was particularly skilled in the intricate art of arranging lines according to alphabetic or rhythmic order, a technique that showcased his disciplined creativity. His style was inherently captivating,

using vivid imagery and a rhythmic flow to command the reader's attention. Whether writing prose or verse, his narration was designed to arouse a spiritual awakening, proving that his literary genius was always placed at the service of his mission to enlighten and sanctify the people of Kerala.

Beyond his profound spirituality and disciplined leadership, St. Chāvara possessed a sharp and endearing sense of humour. His writings reveal a man who observed human nature with both keen insight and a playful wit, often using light-hearted irony to describe the colourful personalities of his contemporaries. This ability to find humour in the complexities of human character humanized his leadership and showed that his deep interiority did not make him distant, but rather more attuned to the quirks of those around him.

A classic example of his wit is found in his description of Antony Kudakkachira. With a rhythmic and nearly exhaustive list of talents, St. Chāvara writes that Antony "showed himself to be good at so many things: fasting, praying, drawing, writing, singing, playing the instruments, discussion and even quarrelling". By placing 'quarrelling' at the end of a list of pious and artistic skills, St. Chāvara playfully highlights the man's spirited temperament, acknowledging his virtues while gently poking fun at his argumentative nature.

His humour could also be brilliantly metaphorical, as seen in his assessment of Father Philip Edavazhikkal. St. Chāvara described him as "a crooked fellow resourceful enough to tie together even hairless heads". This clever idiom illustrates Philip's extraordinary - if perhaps overly cunning - ability to find negative connections or create 'knots' where none should exist. Through these candid and humorous observations, he left a literary legacy that captures the vibrant, human spirit of its founding members.

St. Chāvara was a man who spoke from a place of deep conviction, always grounding his words in the absolute truths

he had verified through his own life and research. During a pivotal retreat, he addressed a group of priests who were wavering in their loyalty and continuing to debate the legitimacy of the intruder Bishop Roccos. To settle their doubts once and for all, St. Chāvara made a daring and solemn declaration: he was "ready to swear with his hand on the crucifix on the altar that this bishop [Roccos] had come without any order from the Pope, and that anyone who submitted to him would fall under the excommunication announced by the Archbishop." This powerful statement, a characteristic of his preaching style, highlights St. Chāvara's firm belief in the authority of the Church and his dedication to its unity. His goal was to emphasize the importance of following the established hierarchical structure and to guide the priests towards a clear understanding of the situation, ensuring their continued alignment with the teachings of the Church.

This absolute transparency, paired with his willingness to stake his spiritual honor upon the truth, confirms that St. Chāvara was far more than an orator; he was a true witness. By integrating such profound personal conviction with his vast theological knowledge and vivid storytelling skill, he possessed an unmatched ability to move hearts and clarify minds. Because he spoke from the 'abundance of a heart' that was entirely aligned with the Divine, there is no doubt that he remains one of the most captivating and credible preachers in the history of the Syro-Malabar Church.

St. Chāvara: A 'Level 5' Leader

Who among you would say to your slave who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field, 'Come here at once and take your place at the table'? Would you not rather say to him, 'Prepare supper for me, put on your apron and serve me while I eat and drink; later you may eat and drink'? Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded? So, you also, 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!'

(Luke 17:7-10)

Here, Jesus presents the challenging image of the 'unprofitable servant,' a passage that serves as a vital corrective to worldly notions of leadership. In the context of Catholic leadership, this scripture outlines a spirituality of service that prioritizes duty, humility, and a radical decentring of the self.

1. The Leadership of 'Total Availability':

The imagery of the servant coming in from the field only to be told to 'prepare supper' highlights that a Catholic leader's work is never truly 'finished.' Unlike secular leadership, which often seeks a 'work-life balance' based on personal rights, Catholic leadership is defined by apostolic availability. A leader in the mould of Christ understands that his/her time and talents belong to the Master; they are called to serve the 'little ones' at all hours, recognizing that the mission of the Kingdom takes precedence over personal comfort or the desire for a 'break.'

2. Guarding Against the 'Entitlement Trap':

Jesus asks, "Does he thank the servant because he did what he was told?" This is a profound warning against the temptation of spiritual or professional entitlement. Catholic leaders—whether priests, educators, or lay administrators—often fall into the trap of expecting special recognition, honours, or 'gratitude' for their hard work. This passage reminds the leader that performing one's duty is not to be seen as an 'extra' merit

but the very baseline of their vocation. True zeal does not seek the spotlight; it finds satisfaction in the quiet fulfilment of God's will, independent of human applause.

3. The Grace of Holy Humility: "We are Unprofitable Servants":
The phrase 'unprofitable servants' ('worthless slaves' or 'unworthy servants' - *achreioi douloi* in Greek) does not mean the leader is worthless, but rather that the Master (God) does not *depend* on them. He chooses to use us, but He does not 'need' us as God is self-sufficient. This keeps the leader humble, preventing the messianic complex where they believe the institution or the mission would collapse without them. It reinforces the idea that the 'harvest' belongs to God. The leader is merely a steward. By declaring 'we have only done our duty,' the leader acknowledges that the power to heal, teach, and lead comes from God's grace, not their own brilliance.

4. Leadership as an Act of Justice, Not Charity:
In the cultural context of the passage, the servant is simply doing what is expected. For a Catholic leader, service is a matter of justice. We owe our service to God because of the life and gifts He has freely given us. When a teacher, missionary or a parish leader goes the 'extra mile,' they are not performing a 'super-act' of charity; they are simply fulfilling the debt of love they owe to Christ.

5. Integration with the 'Conversation with the Friend':
Reconciling this with our earlier meditation on 'friendship with God,' this passage suggests that servanthood and friendship with God are two sides of the same coin. We sit close to God as friends in meditation so that we can serve Him as dedicated labourers in the mission. The intimacy of the 'friendship' is what makes the rigorous demands of the 'servanthood' joyful rather than burdensome.

Evaluating St. Chāvara through the lens of Luke 17:7–10 reveals a striking alignment with Jim Collins' concept of the

'Level 5 Leader.' By synthesizing the profound humility of the 'unprofitable servant' with a relentless, indomitable will, St. Chāvara embodied the paradoxical formula: 'Humility + Will = Greatness'. His leadership was not defined by the pursuit of personal prestige or the spotlight of social reform; rather, it was rooted in a radical decentring of the ego, where he viewed himself as a mere instrument in the hands of the Master.

1. The Paradox of Duality – Humility and Resolve:

The defining characteristic of a Level 5 leader is the seamless integration of two seemingly antithetical traits: profound personal humility and intense professional will. Personal humility manifests as a quiet, grounded confidence that displaces the need for an expansive ego. These leaders instinctively deflect praise toward their teams while assuming full accountability for setbacks or failures. Conversely, their professional will is marked by a relentless, unwavering resolve to fulfil the mission at hand. This paradoxical combination—a gentle, unassuming demeanour paired with an unstoppable drive—creates an exceptional leadership style capable of steering organizations toward enduring success.

2. The Equilibrium of the 'Golden Mean':

A Level 5 leader understands that greatness lies in the 'golden mean'—the perfect balance between a humble heart and a 'steel spine.' Most leadership failures are rooted in an imbalance of these traits. A strong will devoid of humility often descends into an authoritarian, ego-centric culture characterized by fear and volatility in the community or organization. On the other hand, humility without professional will results in benevolent but ineffective leadership, leading to organizational stagnation and an inability to make difficult but necessary decisions. The Level 5 leader maintains this equilibrium, ensuring that kindness never compromises courage, and that mission-driven focus never overrides human dignity.

3. The Christological Blueprint of Leadership:

This leadership model finds its ultimate expression in the life of Christ and the Saints. Jesus perfectly synthesized these traits: He was 'meek and humble of heart,' yet His professional will was unshakeable, which He exhibited in His commitment to 'do the will of the Father.' Figures like St. Chāvara, St. Mother Teresa, and St. Francis of Assisi mirrored this blueprint, demonstrating that true spiritual authority comes from a place of deep personal humility paired with an uncompromising commitment to a divine mission. In this context, humility provides the foundation of the leader's character, while divine grace bolsters their unwavering resolve.

4. Spiritual Maturity – Surrender and Courage:

In a spiritualized framework, the Level 5 leader redefines humility as an active openness to discerning and accepting a higher plan, rather than a passive weakness. Simultaneously, 'will' is interpreted not as human stubbornness, but as the 'divine courage' required to execute that plan effectively. This reflects the height of Christian maturity: it is the perfect union of the surrender found in the prayer of Jesus at Gethsemane, "Not my will, but Yours be done" (Luke 22:42) and the proactive, heroic commitment found in the response by Prophet Isaiah, "Here I am, send me." (Isaiah 6:8).

5. Adaptability in the Face of Volatility:

In today's era of rapid technological shifts and social fragmentation, the Level 5 leader possesses the specific characteristics required to navigate complexity. Today's environment demands leaders who can learn, unlearn, and listen deeply—qualities rooted in humility. This humility provides the adaptability needed to pivot when new information arrives, while professional will provides the unwavering direction required to cut through digital noise and maintain focus on the core mission. By avoiding the pitfalls of ego-driven decisions,

these leaders inspire a profound, stabilizing trust among stakeholders in a volatile world.

6. The Transformer of Organizations:

Ultimately, Level 5 leadership serves as the transformative catalyst that elevates an effective leader into a visionary reformer. Humility makes the leader a servant, ensuring they remain open to growth and learning from others; professional will makes them a leader, providing the fierce determination and essential direction needed to build a lasting legacy. By balancing a 'humble heart with a steel spine,' the Level 5 leader transcends the limitations of self-interest, fostering an environment where trust flourishes and greatness is achieved through collective effort and divine purpose.

Today, the legacy of St. Chāvara continues to be a definitive model for this 'unprofitable servant' spirituality. His life demonstrates how a Catholic leader can be both a powerful visionary and a humble labourer who seeks no personal reward.

1. Leadership as Sacred Duty, Not Personal Ambition:

St. Chāvara's multifaceted endeavours was never about building a personal empire. He operated with the profound realization that these were the Master's tasks, and he was merely the appointed steward for a time. When he successfully implemented the 'school with every church' (*Pallikkudam*) mandate, he did not seek the title of a social reformer or a national hero. Instead, he viewed these monumental achievements as the simple fulfilment of his 'duty' to God and His people. Like the servant in Luke 17, he moved from the 'field' of social labour to the 'table' of spiritual service without demanding rest or recognition.

2. Radical Humility in Success:

Despite his immense influence and ecclesiastical authority, St. Chāvara remained a 'servant' at the feet of the marginalized. He did not let the successes of his mission inflate his ego. This is

most evident in his Last Will and Testament to his parishioners and fellow monks, where his focus remained entirely on their spiritual welfare rather than his own legacy. By viewing himself as an 'unprofitable servant,' he avoided the 'entitlement trap.' He understood that the growth of the Church was the work of the Holy Spirit; he was simply the instrument through which God chose to work.

3. The Decentring of the Ego:

St. Chāvara's leadership was characterized by a radical decentring of self. He was always ready to 'prepare the supper' for others—be it providing food for the poor at the *Upāsana Bhavan* or spiritual food through his writings. He modelled the Catholic leadership quality of being fully present but never possessive. Once he completed a task, he moved to the next with quiet obedience, never lingering to collect the 'thanks' of men. For him, the intimacy of being a 'friend of God' in meditation was the reward in itself, making the rigorous demands of the servant's role a labour of love rather than a burden of law.

4. A Witness to Eternal Perspective:

Ultimately, St. Chāvara's assessment of his own life was in perfect tune with Luke 17:10. Even as he transformed the social and religious landscape of the 19th century, he remained convinced that he had 'only done what was commanded'. This perspective allowed him to face opposition and 'weeds' with an undisturbed heart. By considering himself a servant of the Great Shepherd, he ensured that his missionary zeal was never tainted by the pursuit of human glory. In his eyes, the greatest honour was not the success of his institutions, but the privilege of being found faithful at his Master's post.

This servant-leader paradigm allowed him to manifest a steely resolve to transform society while maintaining the quiet posture of a labourer who had 'only done his duty'. In the spirit of Catholic leadership, his 'Level 5' qualities were not a product

of secular ambition but of a spiritual maturity that channelled every success back to its divine source. St. Chāvara proves that the most compelling leadership is found where professional excellence meets profound personal humility, creating a legacy that remains 'good to great' because it is anchored in the eternity.

The leadership qualities combined with his missionary zeal, exemplified by the life of St. Chāvara, is a profound synthesis of intimate friendship with God and radical service to humanity. By viewing the fields of activity as a sacred mission field and people as a 'plentiful harvest,' St. Chāvara transcended his role from a Prior to become a herald of the 'Good News' and a conduit of 'life in its fullness'. This vocation requires a delicate balance: the patience to allow 'wheat and weeds' to coexist without losing one's inner peace, the prudence to navigate modern legal and technological challenges with 'new wineskins', and the humility of the 'unprofitable servant' who finds supreme satisfaction in duties performed for the beloved Master. Ultimately, as St. Chāvara demonstrated, the most effective mission is not found in eloquent discourses but in a life of prayerful presence and 'missionary attraction', where one serves as a living role model of love, mercy, and transformative truth.

Mission Mode

The Style of St. Chāvara

So, the Jews said to the man who was cured, "It is the sabbath, it is not lawful for you to carry your pallet." But he answered them, "The man who healed me said to me, 'Take up your pallet, and walk.'" They asked him, "Who is the man who said to you, 'Take up your pallet, and walk'?" Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place. Afterward, Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, "See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse befall you." The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. And this was why the Jews persecuted Jesus, because he did this on the sabbath. But Jesus answered them, "My Father is working still, and I am working." This was why the Jews sought all the more to kill him, because he not only broke the sabbath but also called God his Father, making himself equal with God.

(John 5:10-18)

We can enumerate certain points for reflection based on this Gospel passage: Jesus effected a healing on the Sabbath, a day when carrying even a mat was prohibited; thanks to the added regulations imposed by the Jewish leaders. Pastoral work should prioritize human needs and acts of mercy. It should be addressing genuine human needs (physical, emotional, and spiritual) over rigid adherence to man-made rules or traditions that miss the point of God's law, which is love and restoration.

Pastoral ministry demands an unwavering proclamation of the divine identity and authority of Jesus, even when it is unpopular or offensive to modern cultural sensitivities. After healing the man physically, Jesus sought him out again and told him to "sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you" (John 5:14). This emphasizes that physical healing was a means to a spiritual end. Pastoral work must focus on the eternal destiny of people and their need for salvation from sin, not just their temporal, physical, or social issues.

We need to expect opposition while following God's Will and, despite the opposition and criticism, we need to continue our deeds of compassion and mercy. Jesus' act of compassion on the Sabbath led to intense persecution and several attempts to kill him by the religious leaders. Pastors should be prepared to face criticism, even from within religious communities, when they try to align their actions with God's Will, rather than popular opinion or established but unbiblical customs. As animators of the people of God, pastors need to help people distinguish between core biblical commands and secondary cultural or denominational traditions, ensuring that the focus remains on God's grace and true biblical priorities. This passage demands that pastoral work be driven by compassion, focused on holiness and spiritual healing, grounded in biblical truths, and ready to continue the deeds of God even in the face of opposition where the world's ways clash with that of God.

To foster our spiritual works and acts of compassion, we can adopt a 'mission mode' — a structured, focused, and coordinated approach characterized by clear objectives, defined timelines, and measurable outcomes. This methodology translates broad spiritual aspirations into a tangible plan of action. By treating spiritual development as a personal mission, individuals move beyond vague intentions to engage in deliberate and purposeful growth, aligning daily routines with core values like compassion and service, thereby giving life a clearer purpose.

A mission-mode approach requires setting clear objectives and visions while establishing measurable outcomes. Instead of abstract goals like 'be more spiritual', specific objectives can be defined, such as 'meditate for 20 minutes daily for the next 30 days'. Success, even for non-material goals, must be defined tangibly; for instance, one might track instances of patience in a journal or note feelings of inner peace after a specific practice. This allows for essential self-reflection, adjustment, and personal transformation.

To maintain momentum, it is crucial to set timelines and milestones. Long-term spiritual growth is best broken down into manageable steps with associated timelines - for example, reading a specific spiritual text within three months and reflecting on a chapter each week. This structured approach fosters discipline and perseverance, ensuring goals do not remain mere abstract ideals. Simultaneously, mobilizing resources and support, such as connecting with others on a similar path, provides encouragement, accountability, and a reminder to rely on a support system and not on individual strength alone.

Finally, the mission mode emphasizes action and embodiment, countering an exclusively inward or 'other-worldly' spirituality. It grounds spiritual development in embodied practice by propelling individuals to translate inner growth, such as cultivating kindness, into outward action, like acts of service to others. This makes the spiritual message visible, impactful, and 'enfleshed' in the real world, ensuring that personal transformation benefits the community at large. By adopting a mission mode in your spiritual life, you transition from self-preservation to a purpose-driven existence, requiring sacrifice, boldness and a reliance on a higher purpose or God's plan to achieve a more focused and impactful spiritual life.

St. Chāvara demonstrated a life entirely dedicated to a 'mission mode' approach, seamlessly integrating profound personal spirituality with zealous pastoral action. In his personal spiritual life, St. Chāvara's commitment to mission was the driving force. He drew unwavering strength from the Blessed Sacrament, the daily reading of the Bible, and various other devotional practices. This internal mission fuelled an active community life; he was a constant presence within his community for shared prayers, meals, writing chronicles, literary pursuits, and all monastic duties. He was not just a silent observer. He was a man who understood the value of

time. His life was a testament to purposeful existence, never remaining idle or spending time wastefully in useless pursuits.

This same zealous dedication extended to the people entrusted to his care. St. Chāvara was perpetually on 'mission mode' concerning his flock, especially during times of crisis. He tirelessly undertook the difficult tasks assigned by the Bishop, for instance the call to curtail the effects of the schism that threatened the local Church. Once steadiness was restored, his mission shifted to revitalizing the faith of the people. He engaged them in robust spiritual renewals through retreat preaching, delivering homilies, and providing clear direction to sustain their Catholic faith. His relentless efforts in this apostolic work undoubtedly contributed to the deterioration of his health, leading to his departure from the world at a relatively young age of 66 years.

Ultimately, St. Chāvara recognized his calling as an unceasing mission. This clarity of purpose enabled him to accomplish more in 66 years than most could achieve in several lifetimes, especially given the turbulent and backward socio-political and religious context of his era. His legacy is one of a life wholly consumed by his zeal for the mission of God, leaving a profound impact on the Church he served.

Rise above the Challenges!

As he approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard a crowd going by, he asked what was happening. They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by." Then he shouted, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Those who were in front sternly ordered him to be quiet; but he shouted even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus stood still and ordered the man to be brought to him; and when he came near, he asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?" He said, "Lord, let me see again." Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has saved you." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him, glorifying God; and all the people, when they saw it, praised God.

(Luke 18:35-43)

The narration about Jesus healing the blind man Bartimaeus, offers powerful lessons on overcoming adversity through perseverance, clear goal-setting, and leadership traits essential for navigating difficult times. The passage highlights a structured approach for moving from a position of hardship to one of achievement and influence.

The initial step in overcoming a crisis is 'acknowledging the reality of the situation while defining a precise goal'. Bartimaeus is blind and marginalized, but he knows exactly what he needs: restoration of his sight. When given the opportunity to state his desire clearly ("Lord, I want to see"), he does not speak in generalities. This illustrates that effective leaders and resilient individuals must clearly define the problem and articulate an unambiguous vision for success. You cannot solve a crisis until you have identified the specific desired outcome.

Crucially, the path to achievement involves resistance. As Bartimaeus calls out to Jesus, the crowd attempts to silence him, representing the external pressures, negativity, or conventional pessimism one faces during a struggle. Bartimaeus's response is to cry out even louder. He demonstrates remarkable

perseverance and is undeterred by the noise and doubts around him. This resilience is a key leadership trait: 'maintaining focus on the objective' even when criticized, mocked, or being told by others that the goal is impossible.

Furthermore, Bartimaeus exercises wisdom by directing his plea specifically to Jesus, recognizing the 'true source of authority and solution'. This highlights the importance of seeking the right kind of help - whether from mentors, experts, a robust support system, or faith - rather than listening to the discouragement of onlookers. True leaders leverage appropriate resources and authority to navigate challenges effectively.

When the opportunity presents itself, Bartimaeus 'acts with decisiveness'. He jumps up and discards his cloak - a symbol of his past life as a blind beggar - demonstrating his readiness for fundamental change and leaving past limitations behind. This willingness to discard old, limiting habits and act with conviction is essential for seizing opportunities in a crisis. Ultimately, the successful outcome does more than just heal an individual; it impacts the community. Bartimaeus achieves his goal and immediately follows Jesus, praising God, which inspires the entire crowd to offer praise as well. This final action demonstrates the ultimate trait of a good leader in difficult times: 'achieving transformation and then using that success to inspire and guide others from adversity to triumph'.

Dr. Palanivel Thyagarajan, former finance minister of Tamil Nadu, once stated that "We have enough and more human and financial resources; the problem is in its proper utilization and implementation". The minister's assertion that resource scarcity is not the primary issue, but rather failure is in its proper execution, highlights a universal truth: abundant human power and potential often lie dormant or misdirected due to systemic inefficiencies. The principle that effective resource utilization can achieve seemingly impossible goals is profoundly illustrated in scripture through the healing of Bartimaeus in Luke 18:35-43.

The blind man, despite being initially silenced by the crowd, persistently cried out to Jesus for sight, utilizing his voice - his available resource - to its full potential. Jesus responded to this determined faith and clarity of purpose, restoring his sight and demonstrating that a focused, persistent approach can overcome significant limitations.

This principle was exemplified in the life of St. Chāvara when he ventured to learn Latin. In the seminary, Scholastic Kuriakose was both his *Malpān's* favourite disciple and a model for his fellow students. He was selected with two others to study Latin. So, *Malpān* Pālackal took the trio to Varāpuzha and arranged for their lodging, intending to enrol them in the seminary›s Latin language course. However, the students were humiliated and rejected. They were denied permission to attend the classes and sent back. This negative experience did not deter young Kuriakose from his resolve to master Latin; instead, he achieved proficiency through private tuition and dedicated self-study.

Similarly, the pioneering efforts of St. Chāvara to establish St. Joseph's Press at Mānnānam exemplify overcoming seemingly insurmountable challenges at the level of execution. This pioneering spirit established the first Catholic, indigenous printing press in Kerala, which went on to publish the first Malayalam daily newspaper, *Deepika*, fundamentally advancing the community's intellectual and spiritual life. These examples affirm that with vision, determination, and the effective execution and utilization of the resources at hand - whether it be persistent faith or local ingenuity - we can achieve extraordinary transformations.

The determined initiative of St. Chāvara to establish a printing press commenced in 1843, assisted by a skilled worker named Ittikuruvila Thoppil. St. Chāvara was deeply convinced of the necessity of a press for the mission. While others might have dismissed it as an unnecessary exercise due to its near

impossible execution or exorbitant expenses involved, St. Chāvara, who had a clear vision went forward with seeking ways to tackle the situation. The path to establishing the press, known as the Mānnānam Press, was challenging and it took more than two years to materialize. However, he never wavered from his objective. He demonstrated remarkable perseverance, overcoming numerous hurdles by relying on deep faith in the Lord while simultaneously ensuring he secured cooperation and support from all possible quarters. His efforts culminated in the operational launch of the press, which became a vital tool for education and the spread of religious texts in Kerala.

His pursuit of knowledge regarding printing technology in 1844 was marked by significant struggle and repeated rejection. Driven by the urgent need for a press at Mānnānam, he made two difficult journeys to the Church Mission Society (CMS) Press in Kottayam with the simple request to observe the machinery; both times, he was flatly denied permission. These early setbacks highlighted the competitive and often secretive nature of the printing trade at the time, yet he refused to abandon his project.

His perseverance led to further arduous journeys and disappointments the following year. In 1845, he travelled to Kollam hoping for access to another press, only to be refused once more. Still undeterred, he explored options to purchase equipment, traveling to Thankassery to source ink and a machine from Puduchery or Chennai. He was met with a dual crisis: the necessary ink was unavailable, and the printing machine itself cost ₹ 500 — a sum far exceeding the resources he possessed.

Facing a series of closed doors, financial constraints, and a complete lack of access to existing technology, St. Chāvara exhibited remarkable determination. Instead of losing heart, he pivoted his strategy entirely. He began a grassroots effort, actively 'going about asking people who were in the field' for

technical information. This perseverance eventually bore fruit when he travelled to Thiruvananthapuram with his seminary colleague, Father Paulose Parampil of Muttuchira, a man noted for his expertise in handicrafts.

This breakthrough relied on informal connections. Catholic workers employed at the government press secretly facilitated their access. Once inside, they spent considerable time observing and learning 'everything about the working of the press as much as they wanted'. This hard-won knowledge was the turning point. Upon returning to Mānnānam, Father Parampil constructed a detailed operational model of the machine using a plantain stem. This model served as the blueprint for skilled local artisans, who successfully built a functional printing press using wood and a granite base, overcoming every obstacle through ingenuity, faith, and sheer persistence gathering inspiration from their leader – St. Chāvara.

With the printing press successfully constructed from wood and granite, the next challenge was sourcing the necessary components and skilled labour to make it functional. St. Chāvara with the influence of Pazhukkāchan of Kottayam secured the service of Shivarāman, a goldsmith from the CMS press, to cut the crucial square-shaped metal letters (types). There were police notifications issued with a demand to reinstate this skilled laborer to his original employer and when CMS people came to forcefully take him back, they hid him at Pulinkunnu! Staffing the operations required recruiting specialized talent from another field: Kuriyan was brought from the government press at Thiruvananthapuram for printing operations, and a Jew from Kochi, trained in Mumbai, managed bookbinding. These experts then trained local people at Mānnānam in the necessary trades.

By March 1845, ecclesiastical permission from Rome to print books was secured, clearing another major hurdle. However, the struggle to acquire essential materials like ink and paper

continued. St. Chāvara and others travelled to Ālappuzha, where they arranged with a merchant named Kameesa to import supplies worth ₹ 100. The initial transaction and a small advance were manageable, but in September 1845, they faced a severe financial crisis when the goods arrived. The shipment of ten bundles of paper and a barrel of ink totalled over ₹ 400 — money they simply did not possess.

The Fathers found themselves in significant *mana-vishādam* (agony) when the merchant refused to sell just a portion of the ink, insisting they take the entire expensive consignment. A providential intervention by a local man, Thomman Chennakat, negotiated the purchase down to a more manageable half-barrel of ink and paper, but the cost was still a prohibitive ₹ 300. With only ₹ 100 in hand, the venture seemed poised to fail once more. In a moment of ingenuity and community trust, Thomman instantly instituted a *chitty* (chit fund) in St. Joseph›s name to raise ₹ 100 on the spot and provided a promissory note for the remaining balance, ensuring the Fathers could finally return to Mānnānam with their supplies.

With the press operational, all accessories secured, and ecclesiastical approval granted, the final administrative hurdle was obtaining formal royal sanction. This potential obstacle, too, was smoothly overcome through the diplomatic efforts of the Vicar Apostolic Ludovic Martini, who secured the necessary authorization via the British Resident Mr. Kallan in 1846. Thus, through persistent faith, community support, and sheer determination in the face of financial and logistical adversity, St. Chāvara realized his long-held vision of establishing the Mānnānam Press. It is incredible to read how courageously St. Chāvara confronted all these snags in order to achieve the goal of establishing the printing press in Mānnānam which was realized on 03 July 1846.

The successful establishment of the Mānnānam Press, despite numerous hurdles, stands as a testament to St.

Chāvara's exceptional leadership, mirroring the perseverance demonstrated by the blind man in Luke 18:35-43. Like Bartimaeus, who clearly articulated his need and refused to be silenced by the crowd's rebuke, St. Chāvara remained focused on his clear objective when others dismissed his vision as too expensive or unnecessary. He demonstrated profound faith and persistence, pushing louder for a solution when initial attempts to learn the nuances at certain presses fell flat. His ingenuity in seeking expertise from various sources, securing a blueprint through help by certain benevolent hearts at the Thiruvananthapuram press, and wading through severe financial crises through community organization with Thomman Chennakat reflects a leader who leveraged every available resource and never lost heart.

In the end, his journey from initial rejections and apparent financial impossibility to achieving his transformative goal mirrors the transition from begging on the roadside to following Jesus after healing. Both illustrates how determination and vision can turn profound struggle into lasting achievements.

The Window and the Mirror

But Jesus called them to Him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

(Matthew 20:25-28)

This Gospel passage demands a fundamental attitudinal change from worldly ambition to servant leadership. Great leaders embody a specific ethos of accountability and humility, often encapsulated by the powerful metaphor of the 'window' and the 'mirror.' This model provides a clear framework for how effective leadership manages both success and failure, fostering a positive culture and building trust among colleagues and partners.

The 'window' represents how leaders handle success. Instead of claiming personal credit or basking in the limelight, great leaders consciously look *out the window*, attributing achievements and positive outcomes to their team members, partners, and external factors that contributed to the win. By deflecting praise, they empower their team, validate the hard work of others, and foster an environment where colleagues feel valued and motivated. This behaviour reinforces collaboration and teamwork, making everyone feel like a vital part of the victory.

Conversely, the 'mirror' symbolizes the crucial moment when something goes wrong. When faced with a setback, error, or failure, these leaders deliberately look *in the mirror* and take full responsibility. They do not blame subordinates, shift fault to external circumstances, or make excuses. By shouldering the responsibility ('The buck- stops-here' attitude), they demonstrate integrity, ownership, and accountability. This

action protects their team from undue criticism, encourages a safe environment for learning from mistakes, and maintains morale, ultimately reinforcing credibility as a leader who prioritizes the team's well-being over self-preservation.

The 'Window' of Service (Attributing Success to Others):
Jesus explicitly challenges the conventional exercise of authority seen in the secular world: "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them" (v 25). Worldly leaders place the window on themselves, claiming all status and success. In contrast, Jesus introduces a paradigm shift: "whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant" (v 26). The attitudinal change here is one of humility. Instead of viewing their position as an entitlement to glory (looking to themselves as the source of success), leaders are called to redirect focus *out the window*, toward the people they serve. Success is not measured by the leader's elevation but by the well-being and growth of those they serve. They function as a conduit, attributing all positive outcomes to the collective effort and the divine grace that enabled the work.

The 'Mirror' of Accountability (Taking Responsibility for Failure):
The passage culminates in the ultimate act of accountability and sacrifice: "just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (v 28). When things go wrong, or when sacrifice is needed, the leader looks *in the mirror* and takes full responsibility for the cost. The attitudinal change requires a leader to prioritize the welfare of the team above their own safety or comfort. They do not deflect blame but absorb the impact of failures or crises, even to the point of self-sacrifice («give his life as a ransom»). This mirror reflection forces the leader to own the consequences of the situation, demonstrating integrity and a profound commitment to the people they are called to lead.

The 'window and mirror' leadership philosophy, which emphasizes attributing success to others and taking responsibility for failure, aligns closely with the above Gospel passage centred on humility, service, and accountability. Great leaders look out the window to apportion credit to factors outside themselves when things go well (and if they cannot find a specific person or event to give credit to, they credit good luck). At the same time, they look in the mirror to apportion responsibility, never blaming bad luck when things go poorly.

The 'window and mirror' philosophy is an attitude we should develop as a fundamental approach to accountability, leadership, and interpersonal relationships. This 'bend of mind' primarily revolves around how an individual assigns credit for success and responsibility for failure, inherently accommodating the opinions and interests of others in the process.

The 'window' aspect of this philosophy applies when things go right. When successes are achieved, an individual should look through a window to acknowledge and highlight the external factors and the contributions of others. By doing so, they demonstrate humility and leadership by deferring praise to teammates, mentors, or supporting circumstances. This approach makes others feel valued and recognized, thereby nurturing a collaborative environment and accommodating the interests and opinions of the group over personal ego.

Conversely, the 'mirror' attitude applies when faced with setbacks or failures. The individual must look in the mirror and accept personal responsibility for the outcome. Instead of blaming others, bad luck, or external systems, they internalize the problem and ask, "What could I have done differently?" This act of taking ownership demonstrates integrity, facilitates learning and growth, and shows respect for others by not pushing blame onto them.

Ultimately, internalizing the 'window and mirror' philosophy creates a selfless and team-oriented mindset. It is an

attitude of mind where shared success is celebrated collectively (looking through the *window*), while personal responsibility for failure is accepted entirely (looking in the *mirror*) making no excuses whatsoever. This builds trust, strengthens relationships, and ensures that the well-being and interests of the community are prioritized.

When documenting his achievements, St. Chāvara consistently attributed success primarily to God's grace, while simultaneously ensuring his co-workers remained in the limelight, almost keeping himself in oblivion. This profound humility is particularly evident in the case of the foundation of the convent in Koonammāvu. The convent was the realization of a shared inspiration he had along with Fathers Pālackal and Porukkara, because they regretted that the centuries-old Syrian Christian community in Malabar still lacked consecrated religious men and women. The establishment of a women's congregation was part of this original vision, a goal that St. Chāvara, assisted by Father Leopold Beccaro, eventually realized with the opening of the first convent in 1866-67. In his records, however, St. Chāvara humbly minimized his personal role. He recorded the foundation as a blessing that "the Almighty God showered on them in response to his prayers for a long time, making him more indebted to the same God," deflecting all praise from himself and redirecting focus to divine providence and the collective effort of the community. Again, while inaugurating the new convent building in 1867, the Prior wrote: "Thus by the honesty and sagacity of Father Delegate everything was completed."

St. Chāvara gave credits to Father Jacob Valiyāra for his earnestness in taking care of the cook of Mānnānam Monastery.

> "Think of Father Jacob Valiyara, your brother and the first to die from among those who joined the monastery at Mānnānam. I am not saying that he became a saint but his character of earlier days

changed; he preached many retreats; became a cause for the salvation of many souls. The reason for this change in him is known neither to you nor to him. But what I understand is this: I know him from childhood. There were occasions when I had to correct him even after his ordination. The cook of Mānnānam Monastery Geevarghese of Koilmuck was suffering from severe piles. His rectum was rotten and the intestine came out infested with worms and stinking. He was lying in the barn of the monastery. It was difficult even to administer the sacraments to him. But Father Jacob nursed him and prepared him for a blessed death. After his death because of his memory Father Jacob could not eat anything, he managed to eat only some roasted rice. I came to know about all these only later. After this incident there was great change in the character of Father Jacob. He started preaching retreats. I have sent him to many churches to preach retreats. Since this event, I never had to correct him for anything."

On the occasion of the laying of the foundation stone for the monastery on 11 May 1831, Bishop Maurilius Stabilini, Father Pālackal, Father Porukkara and St. Chāvara were present among others. There was a discussion about who would officiate the ceremony as the Bishop was not well to officiate at the ceremony. Father Pālackal's name was suggested as he is the senior most member, but finally Father Porukkara was persuaded to be the celebrant. How smoothly they resolved the differences and came to an agreement!

A question arose regarding the new foundation's patron saint, which led to differing opinions among the leaders. The Bishop suggested St. John the Baptist, while Father Pālackal, having a strong devotion to St. Dominic (whom he felt aligned with their developing identity), favoured that saint. Father

Porukkara, a great devotee of St. Joseph, naturally proposed his name. While such disagreements might stall projects today, this issue was settled instantly and harmoniously. The Bishop and Father Pālackal graciously deferred to Father Porukkara's desire, and St. Joseph was unanimously adopted as the patron. This incident stands as a beautiful example of how great individuals collaborate effectively, prioritizing their shared goal over personal preferences.

It was the vibrant community life at Mānnānam that inspired many people. The laity too invariably had recourse to the monastery for daily Mass, Confession and Holy Communion, retreat, anointing of the sick and other rites. Even the non-Christians looked at the monastery as an agent of socio-cultural renaissance, and appreciated the community's initiatives in the fields of education, media and social work. The credit was indeed given to the 'window' mindset of the leadership of the founding fathers.

There are many instances where St. Chāvara took the brunt of the failures by himself showing his 'mirror' mindset. In 1855, after twenty-five years of waiting, the Fathers received permission from Archbishop Baccinelli to profess their religious vows. However, the Archbishop imposed the rigid rule of the Discalced Carmelites (OCD) and rejected appeals to modify it for their Syrian traditions and the Congregation's original mixed charism of contemplative and apostolic life. St. Chāvara duly shared with the Archbishop the community's serious reservations about the Rule. But the prelate would not mitigate it in any way. St. Chāvara persuaded himself and others to respect his stand. This imposition was seen as a significant disregard of their identity and basic rights, yet the Fathers, led by St. Chāvara, chose to tolerate the decision and cooperate.

The strictness of the imposed rule had immediate and painful consequences. Fearing they could not meet the severe demands, nearly half the candidates - eleven out of twenty-two -

decided at the last minute not to make their profession. When St. Chāvara informed the Archbishop of this painful development, Baccinelli responded with cold indifference: "Do not worry about the dropouts. Only those of good will and determination need to be admitted. I shall pray for the remaining few!" St. Chāvara, demonstrating remarkable grace and humility, bore the significant pain of losing so many members after training them for almost 20 years and accepted the Ordinary's lack of empathy and understanding without complaint.

There is another incident. Archbishop Baccinelli grew suspicious of the Mānnānam monastery project due to rumours spread by the rival group that Father Porukkara was misusing donations for his family. In response, the Archbishop unexpectedly issued an order transferring Father Chāvara to be the Vicar of Pallippuram Parish, a move that others suspected was designed to halt the monastery construction entirely, as he was the only capable person left to supervise the work.

Following the advice of senior priests to first plead their case, but ultimately to obey, he humbly explained the situation to the Archbishop. He argued that his transfer would jeopardize the construction, especially with others unavailable. The Archbishop curtly dismissed his concerns and sternly rebuked the young priest for questioning his authority. 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 St. Chāvara withdrew and at once obeyed the order, taking charge as Vicar of Pallippuram Parish.

A subsequent incident created further distress. While St. Chāvara served as Vicar at Pallippuram but occasionally returned to supervise construction at Mānnānam. Once, while he was at Mānnānam, Father Varkey happened to beat with a cane Itty Kurissinkal, a ruffian belonging to an ancient family. The man's

influential family complained to the Archbishop, accusing St. Chāvara of negligence and staying away from his assigned post. The Archbishop ordered St. Chāvara to immediately return to Pallippuram and not to leave for more than eight days without written permission. Although the immediate parish issue was resolved upon his return, the constraint on visiting Mānnānam was deeply vexing, threatening the progress of the entire monastery project.

Believing the Archbishop might be more favourably disposed due to positive reports about the fathers' obedience and ministries elsewhere, he went to plead his case again. He humbly requested that Father Varkey be appointed Vicar in his stead so the Mānnānam work would not cease. However, his persistence was misinterpreted as obstinance. The Archbishop sternly reprimanded the 'young priest' for trying to have everything his own way and threatened immediate suspension. St. Chāvara's immediate response was one of profound obedience: terrified by the reprimand, he instantly knelt, kissed the Archbishop's hand, and withdrew, demonstrating a 'Mirror' attitude of complete submission to the Ordinary's authority despite his personal distress and the potential harm to his life's work.

The example of St. Chāvara encourages us to cultivate the 'window and mirror' concept by encouraging his followers to be humble, avoid taking personal credit, and accept responsibility for challenges under their leadership. "You can accomplish anything in life, provided that you do not mind who gets the credit" (Harry S. Truman).

Trendsetter: Institution Builder

He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it."

(Matthew 16:15-18)

The above Gospel passage offers profound insights into the qualities necessary for leaders called to establish enduring institutions rather than merely managing temporary projects. This passage illustrates that effective spiritual leadership involves building a lasting organizational framework, specifically the Church, that embodies permanence and resilience.

As contemporary pastors and community leaders, our mandate extends beyond simply running isolated initiatives or completing short-term tasks. We are called to function as institution builders or ecosystem architects within the communities where we serve. This means focusing efforts on cultivating specific, sustainable cultures and fostering robust structures that embed core values and provide continuous societal function, ensuring a lasting impact that transcends temporary endeavours.

A project is fundamentally a temporary undertaking designed to produce a specific, unique product, service, or outcome. It is defined by its finite nature, possessing clearly established start and end dates and it successfully concludes once its precise objectives have been met or the endeavour is formally terminated. The focus is narrow and targeted, aiming to achieve a predefined set of deliverables within strict constraints, including budget, resources, and timeline. The organizational structure supporting a project is inherently

flexible and temporary; specialist teams are assembled for the duration of the task and typically disband once the project is complete. A formal project plan, along with specific rules and regulations set by project management, primarily guides all activities.

In contrast, an institution is an enduring and established entity that provides essential functions and services valued by society. It offers a permanent, overarching framework for organizing and regulating societal activities and encompasses a much broader scope than a single project. Institutions are specifically designed for longevity, possessing the capacity for continuous operation, growth, and adaptation over generations. They serve a wider purpose related to general, ongoing societal needs such as education, governance, healthcare, or cultural preservation. Structurally, institutions maintain stable, formal organizational hierarchies with established roles and responsibilities that persist regardless of the changes in personnel. Their operations are governed not just by a plan, but by established customs, shared values, and long-standing norms, which can be formal and informal.

The first essential quality of an institution-building leader is operating from a place of *foundational revelation* and deep conviction, rather than simply pragmatic human logic. When Simon Peter declares, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God," Jesus responds that this understanding came not from "flesh and blood," but from "my Father in heaven." A project leader might identify a practical need and manage resources to meet it efficiently. In contrast, an institutional leader is driven by a transcendent, core truth or value that forms the non-negotiable cornerstone of their entire enterprise. This divine or deeply held conviction gives the institution a higher purpose and moral authority that transcends temporary goals and market trends.

Secondly, the leader must identify and secure the correct 'rock' - the enduring element upon which the entire structure will

rest. Jesus identifies Peter as the 'rock' upon whom "I will build my church." A project leader identifies temporary resources, personnel, and a budget that are necessary for the finite duration of a task. These elements are fluid and replaceable. An institution builder, however, identifies a permanent foundation, whether it is a core mission, a set of unshakeable values, or a critical structure that ensures stability. This foundation is designed to bear the weight of an organization that scales and adapts over generations, not just for the completion of a single task.

Furthermore, an institution-focused leader has a long-term vision for building a *permanent structure* designed for a continuous function, as opposed to a simple deliverable. Jesus speaks of building "My Church", an enduring assembly or organization, rather than just launching a mission or constructing a single building. A project leader aims for a specific deliverable, and once that outcome is achieved, the project is complete. The institutional leader's vision is not for an outcome but for a living, adaptive body or system that endures time and serves an ongoing purpose in society.

Finally, the passage illustrates the quality of designing for *resilience* and *permanence* against existential threats. The assurance that "the gates of Hades will not prevail against it» signifies built-in strength and foundational stability. A project leader plans for successful completion within defined risks and constraints, wrapping up the project when risks are mitigated. An institution builder, conversely, builds an entity with the inherent strength and foundational stability to withstand severe, even existential, challenges. They do not just plan for success; they build for perpetual operation and survival long after the initial building phase is over.

Leaders, who start institutions rather than projects, typically possess a specific blend of vision, a focus on enduring impact, and the ability to build sustainable systems that outlast their personal involvement. Here are the basic qualities and attributes they possess:

1. Long-Term Vision and Endurance:

- *Enduring Purpose (Mission)*: While project leaders focus on achieving a specific goal within a defined timeline, institution builders possess a transcendental vision focused on a permanent, societal function or value. They aim to solve systemic problems rather than temporary needs.
- *Patience and Persistence*: Building an institution takes time, often decades. Leaders need incredible resilience to navigate continuous challenges, secure long-term funding, and withstand societal shifts without giving up when immediate results are not visible.
- *Succession Planning*: True institution builders design organizations that can function effectively without them. They focus heavily on building strong foundational principles and developing future leaders, ensuring the entity outlives the founder.

2. A Focus on Systems, Culture, and Norms:

- *Systemic Thinking*: They do not just solve one problem; they create frameworks, structures, and processes that can adapt and scale to address ongoing needs. They build reliable systems rather than single initiatives.
- *Cultivating Values and Culture*: Institutions are often defined by their culture and shared values. Leaders do not just build institutions; they instil a culture of inclusivism and humanitarianism that becomes part of the DNA of the institution.
- *Establishing Authority and Credibility*: They inspire trust and legitimacy. An institution needs societal buy-in to become permanent, and these leaders possess the moral authority or influence to convince diverse stakeholders that their vision is essential and trustworthy.

3. Ability to Galvanize Broad Support:

- *Charisma and Influence*: They can persuade large groups of people - donors, politicians, and the public—to align with their long-term vision, even when the immediate gratification is low.
- *Resource Mobilization*: While project leaders secure resources for a finite period, institution builders excel at attracting sustained funding, often through endowments, government partnerships, and widespread community support that guarantees perpetual operation.

The transition from leading a project to founding an institution requires moving beyond management skills to possessing visionary leadership that focuses on permanence, societal change, and scalable systems, rather than just temporary outcomes.

Based on the historical record of his life and work, St. Chāvara possessed the essential qualities required to start, nurture, and sustain an institution, rather than merely completing a series of projects.

1. **Vision Rooted in Enduring Values (The 'Rock' Foundation):** St. Chāvara's initiatives were not temporary fixes; they were built upon deeply held convictions about human dignity, equality, and the transformative power of knowledge, irrespective of caste or creed. He established educational institutions (*Pallikkudam*) and printing presses not as one-off charitable projects, but as foundational pillars for a new, literate society. Leaders like St. Chāvara did not just build schools; they instilled a culture of inclusive education and humanitarianism that became part of the institution's DNA. These actions were radical for his era and aimed to change societal norms permanently. St. Chāvara mandated a systemic, universal policy designed to endure across all parishes for generations.

2. **Focus on Systems, Culture, and Permanence:** He did not just manage tasks; he created structures designed for longevity and adaptability. He co-founded two indigenous religious Congregations (CMI and CMC). These Congregations are enduring organizations with established rules, governance, and a mission that continues to flourish even today, about two centuries since their inception. They provide a stable, permanent structure dedicated to education and charity. St. Chāvara created organizations designed to outlast him and carry his mission forward despite his physical absence.

3. **Resilience Against Societal Opposition (Withstanding the 'Storms'):** St. Chāvara's initiatives faced significant social resistance because they challenged established systems of his time. His commitment to providing education to all including the marginalized communities, especially offering Sanskrit education (traditionally reserved for upper castes) to the Dalits required immense resilience and the conviction that his mission was fundamentally sound. His institutions not only survived those storms but also eventually became the accepted societal norm, proving their foundation in a strong vision of the founder - St. Chāvara.

He demonstrated the qualities of an institution builder par excellence. He had a clear and enduring vision based on deep values, created permanent organizational structures, designed systems that fostered long-term societal transformation, and ensured that his work could survive long after his lifetime. His legacy is measured in the continued existence and impact of the institutions he founded, not just the successful completion of a few tasks.

Take Care of What is Entrusted to You

"For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

After a long time, the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'

Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so, I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' But his master replied, 'You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return, I would have received what was my own with interest. So, take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what

they have will be taken away. As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'"

(Matthew 25:14-30)

To illustrate St. Chāvara's meticulous care for temporal resources and his view of stewardship, the above Gospel passage is quite appropriate.

The Theology of Entrustment: In the parable, the master entrusts his property to his servants, expecting them to manage it according to his interests. St. Chāvara viewed the land, property, and donations given to the CMI Congregation not as the personal wealth of the monks, but as a 'sacred trust' from God and the faithful. His insistence on keeping precise accounts of donors was a manifestation of integrity - recognizing that he was a steward of the Master's resources.

- ***Industrious Interiority:*** The 'good and faithful servant' is the one who is active and enterprising. St. Chāvara's instruction to the members of the monastery to care for the temporalities "as their own" mirrors the biblical call to work with total devotion. He understood that managing money and land with excellence was a spiritual exercise, proving that his interiority was not detached from reality but was the engine for his practical diligence.
- ***Accountability to the Giver:*** The master eventually returns to settle accounts. By keeping detailed records of every donation at Mānnānam, St. Chāvara practiced a 'proleptic' (anticipatory) accountability. He treated the donors with the same respect the servants showed the master, ensuring that their sacrifices were documented and utilized for the "sanctification of others."
- ***The Small Things Matter:*** The master rewards the servant because he was 'faithful in a few things.' St. Chāvara's attention to 'minor' administrative details proved he was fit for 'great things'—like leading an international religious

Congregation. He knew that if a monk could not be trusted with a piece of land or a small donation, he could not be trusted with the spiritual care of souls.

St. Chāvara lived with a 'Just Man' professionalism similar to St. Joseph, the Carpenter. He did not see a conflict between being a 'holy monk' and an 'efficient administrator'.

- ***Gratitude toward Donors:*** By recording names and gifts, he ensured that the community remained rooted in a spirit of gratitude, never taking the generosity of the people for granted.
- ***Collective Stewardship:*** He empowered his confreres to treat the monastery's property as their own, fostering a sense of shared responsibility. This synergy of stewardship ensured that the first Catholic printing press and the first Catholic schools were not only founded but sustained through disciplined management.

St. Chāvara's insistence on the meticulous care of temporal goods was rooted in a profound theology of stewardship and integrity. He viewed every cent of land and every coin not as the personal property of the monastery, but as a sacred trust built upon the sacrifices of the faithful. With a deep sense of accountability, he reminded his confreres that because these resources were either charitably donated or acquired through the hard-earned money of the people, they carried a divine obligation. He exhorted the members of the Congregation to care for these properties with the same diligence and personal investment as if they were their own, yet with the detachment of a servant. This just man's approach to administration ensured that material wealth was always a transparent tool for spiritual mission, transforming temporal management into an act of worship and gratitude toward both God and the community.

The land acquired for the various monasteries and institutions was primarily donated by generous people; construction works were completed through gifts and contributions freely given by

the faithful. Associations, institutions, and convents were all built with substantial aid from the community, underscoring a deep synergy between the religious mission and the supporting laity. The practice of remembrance ensures that gratitude for these foundational gifts is perpetual.

> In the Lord, the families of Thayyil and Perumalil must be lovingly remembered for their donation of land for the Mānnānam monastery. Similarly, members of the Carmel Monastery (Vāzhakkulam) should always recall the Pārāi family; those at Elthuruth should remember the Tharakan and Kallookāran families; and the members of St. Teresa's Monastery, Ambazhakādu, should hold in their memory Ittoop, who graciously donated the land for the mother house of St. Teresa.

St. Chāvara was also a man of exemplary moral integrity in the handling of finances. When the convent at Koonammāvu was under construction and an urgent need for funds arose, Father Geevarghese Thoppil returned with ₹ 400 in donations. Having met the immediate need with exactly half the amount, Chāvara was clear about what to do with the surplus sum of ₹ 200: "Gratefully give it back to the donors!" he instructed, a powerful lesson in financial transparency and honesty.

There is another incident that bears similar testimony to the Fathers' acute sense of honesty in handling money, also related to the construction of the Koonammāvu convent. St. Chāvara writes:

> "As we planned to construct the convent we had no money with us. But God inspired good people to contribute money. Thus, we received as donations ₹ 8000 with which the work was completed. Apart from it, there was an amount of ₹ 100 which, according to the conscience of the missionary Father Leopold, was not honest money. Hence, we

> refused to use it for the construction works. Instead, with the Archbishop's permission we distributed it among the poor as alms."

This stands as a vital lesson for our modern times, where corruption and illicit money are rampant; even the religious must remain vigilant to avoid such pitfalls.

St. Chāvara's meticulous approach extended to business agreements, ensuring clarity and spiritual accountability in all transactions: "Pāppi had come here. A written agreement was signed that within two months he would remit 4,000 *chakram*, the cost of the land purchased from the monastery and that the construction of the monastery would be completed. He also promised that he would give 10,000 *chakram* for the profession of his elder brother and 2850 *chakram* as patrimony for his son. Thus, he agreed to pay total 12,850 *chakram*, but I said that 12,750 *chakram* was enough. He was very happy and gave me one pound (gold coin) as mass stipend."

His integrity also incorporated the spiritual welfare of the dead into temporal agreements: "In order to celebrate Holy Masses for the souls in purgatory the land deed of Ammanam Paddy fields, worth 8000 *chakram* has been handed over to the monastery. The possession of the paddy fields has also been handed over. As per the conditions agreed, the monastery will manage the fields, pay the taxes and celebrate one *Raza* and ten ordinary masses for the souls in purgatory every year without fail."

St. Chāvara maintained that every single *chakram* must be strictly accounted for, as financial transparency was a direct reflection of spiritual integrity. He personally instructed the nuns on the meticulous art of bookkeeping, emphasizing that an account book must always tally to be considered honest. He provided clear templates for documentation, such as: Income, Expense, Balance (in store box), and Stock (in store house). He was quick to identify discrepancies, once noting during an

audit: "When I looked into your account, the amounts are not tallying. It is entered as expenses ₹ 672.75. It is not clear whether the amount ₹ 38 for Father Delegate is included or not. Balance is shown as ₹ 23. But this too does not tally with other entries."

This rigorous attention to detail was equally applied to the management of Mass stipends, which he insisted be kept with absolute clarity to ensure spiritual obligations were met. Regarding a specific case, he clarified:

> "There was no reason for any confusion regarding the requiem mass for Late Kuncheriya Chiramel. It has been decided that till his first death anniversary 19 Holy Masses are to be celebrated for that intention. It was agreed that the stipend for these Holy Masses would be paid in the current year, together for both years, (in kind, as paddy). The account of these Holy Masses might be written separately. So, your confusion may be regarding the sixty-three-para paddy. Since it is written together with last years' account, if you look into the account I have written, you can see how many obligations of Mass are remaining to be fulfilled."

His system of accounting was highly sophisticated and designed for long-term accuracy. He taught that every month, new Mass obligations received should be added and those fulfilled deducted, with the balance carried forward. At the end of the fiscal year, a total reconciliation was performed. He even practiced a specific formula for stipends, noting: "The balance of Mass intentions is carried forward to the next year. Total stipend received annually is noted down. One third of it is deducted from the total. The remaining two third of stipend is accounted as stipend received for 12 Mass intentions and correctly noted down. The 19 Holy Masses for Mr Kuncheriya might have been separately noted. If not, 19 Mass obligations are to be carried forward with the rest to the next year."

St. Chāvara's instructions to his community reveal his vision of work as a disciplined, professional, and sacred endeavour. He did not view manual labour as a mundane chore, but as an essential part of stewardship and integrity. To him, a well-managed monastery was a physical manifestation of an orderly spiritual life, where even the prevention of termites and the cleaning of coconut trees were acts of worship.

His approach to maintenance was marked by technical precision and preventive care. He issued specific architectural commands, such as raising platforms for store boxes and installing them on stone floors to safeguard against decay. By insisting that floors be 'well-beaten' and 'cow-dung-plastered', he ensured the practical durability required for measuring paddy and seeds. This attention to detail demonstrates that St. Chāvara's interiority did not lead to a neglect of the world; rather, it compelled him to seek excellence in every physical structure entrusted to the Congregation.

In his horticultural instructions, he displays a profound understanding of the synergy between nature and labour. He commanded a comprehensive regimen for the coconut saplings: tilling the soil, removing surface roots, and providing nutrient-rich leaf moulds. He understood the biological necessity of cleanliness, noting: "Only when the top and the bottom of the coconut trees are kept clean, they would yield fruits. By this the trees grow well and we get sufficient firewood." To St. Chāvara, a tree that was not tended was a missed opportunity to provide for the community, reflecting his belief that industriousness is a prerequisite for God's blessing.

Finally, his leadership style perfectly balanced practical urgency with radical faith. While he urged the procurator to hire masons and specialized workers (*Velas*) to complete the tasks efficiently, he remained untroubled by financial constraints. His concluding exhortation, "Do not worry about how we can find money to pay the wages. Get works done; God will provide

us with the necessary funds," reveals the heart of a 'holy fool'. He believed that if the community did their part with absolute integrity and hard work, God would honour their efforts with what was necessary. Even today, this remains a cornerstone of the CMI legacy: that manual labour, when done with excellence, is a pathway to the sanctification of the soul.

The management of the *kāri* paddy fields - specifically the 2,150-para portion under the name of Okkanada Pothan— highlights St. Chāvara's commitment to collaborative but disciplined stewardship. Originally, the Mānnānam monastery shared the cultivation and development expenses equally with Okkananda Pothan and Jacob Thuruthimaly. Together, they cleared the bunds and planted coconut saplings, with Pothan acting as the manager for the trio. However, a rigorous audit after two years revealed a lack of synergy: the monastery had contributed significantly more resources, including the provision of a professional overseer, while the partners provided only basic labour. To ensure integrity and fairness, it was eventually decided that the monastery would manage its crop separately, leading to the successful clearing of bushes and the planting of 1,000 saplings through coordinated efforts.

Despite these successes, St. Chāvara remained vigilant against the erosion of communal responsibility. He observed with concern a growing detachment among some members, stating: "To look after the things of the monastery is useful and it is the responsibility of all. Instead, you behave as if they are the property of someone else. If the Superior has not commanded, there are only a few who use them carefully with the conviction that they belong to the community." He identified this lack of personal investment as a spiritual failing, noting that some members, rather than tending to their local duties, spent their time "moving around visiting all our four monasteries" in a restless search for comfortable places and preferred companions.

St. Chāvara's primary intention was to preserve the temporalities of the Congregation as a sacred trust. He taught that the material flourishment of the monasteries was not an end in itself, but a result of every member treating communal property with the same care and 'conviction' they would apply to their own. Even to this day, this legacy of meticulous stewardship continues to serve as a reminder that the spiritual health of a religious community is inextricably linked to the integrity with which it manages its earthly resources.

Recognizing that the management of extensive material resources could become an impediment to spiritual growth, St. Chāvara displayed remarkable pastoral prudence. When he perceived that the burden of overseeing the backwater paddy fields—intended to fund the monasteries—was instead becoming a spiritual trap for his members, he moved decisively to delegate these responsibilities. He addressed the community with a clear mandate for detachment:

> "Our paddy fields, *kāri*, in the backwaters, meant for creating revenue for the maintenance of our monasteries like Mānnānam, will be useless if they are managed as they are now. Our other similar paddy fields also will gradually become useless. Caring for and managing these temporalities would be a permanent hindrance and a trap for the spiritual life of the members. Hence, this chapter has decided as follows: Separate the fields and bunds of the Monastery from the block of common fields in the backwaters. Find someone who will cultivate the fields on a fifty-fifty lease and entrust them for a period of no less than eight years and no more than sixteen years. I hereby oblige you to execute this decision so that the burden on your shoulders may be removed.

Through this action, St. Chāvara demonstrated the perfect balance between integrity and interiority. While he remained a meticulous steward of the Congregation's assets, he refused to let material wealth compromise the primary vocation of his confreres. By transitioning to a lease-based system, he ensured the monasteries remained financially sustainable while liberating the monks to return their full focus to prayer and the sanctification of souls. This strategic withdrawal remains a vital lesson for us today: that true stewardship includes knowing when to let go of earthly burdens for the sake of the Kingdom.

St. Chāvara was meticulous in clarifying transactional doubts to ensure proper financial management and transparency within the community. He clarified directives regarding expenditure with precision, ensuring that the limits were understood: "The directive that ₹ 400 shall not be spent for a single transaction does not mean that such an amount cannot be spent in a year. Never such an order is given and never will be given. What we meant is that for food and dress, more than ₹ 400 shall not be spent in a single transaction." This instruction highlights his practical approach to stewardship and integrity, ensuring that community funds were managed with both foresight and common sense, while preventing excessive spending on non-essential items in a single instance. The call for integrity and stewardship remains a vital reminder that the preservation of our common heritage depends on the personal investment of every confrere.

St. Chāvara strictly prohibited the members of the Elthuruth monastery from becoming entangled in the legal and financial conflicts of the laity. He emphasized that a religious vocation is defined by spiritual leadership rather than administrative interference, issuing the following mandate:

> "You are hereby prohibited from getting involved in the property disputes of the lay people, even if

> you feel the matter would cause great loss or bring about enormous good. You are not expected to involve yourselves in property disputes, partition deals, or the settlement of rights. As religious, your duty is to help the faithful grow in spiritual matters. Kindly do not get involved in temporal affairs, the settlement of disputes, quarrels, or legal cases, and do not bring such matters into the discussions and conversations within the monastery."

This directive underscores his commitment to interiority and integrity. He understood that for a monk to remain a 'captivating sign' of the Kingdom, his mind must remain unburdened by worldly litigation and secular 'turmoil'. By barring these topics from monastic conversation, he sought to protect the sanctity of the community, ensuring that the monks remained focused on their primary mission: the sanctification of souls. This remains a vital principle for maintaining the boundary between pastoral service and secular distraction for all religious.

In *Oru Nalla Appante Chāvarul*, St. Chāvara provides practical and prophetic counsel to parents regarding the responsible management of their legacy. He admonishes them as follows:

> "Parents, ahead of their own demise, should take steps to settle their children in their own homes. Apportion the properties among the children while you are still in full possession of your faculties. If you delay, discord may arise among the children over the division of property, and you will be held responsible for the sins resulting from such dissensions and conflicts."

This instruction highlights his concern for the integrity of the family unit. He understood that ambiguity in temporal matters often leads to spiritual ruin and 'acrimony between brothers.' By urging parents to settle inheritance matters with

clarity and foresight, he sought to prevent the 'subtle seduction' of greed from destroying the peace of the family. Even now, this wisdom remains a vital guide for ensuring that a family's material inheritance does not become a spiritual trap for the next generation.

In a letter to the sisters, St. Chāvara gives meticulous instructions to the Mother Superior on the matters regarding the storehouses to be put together for collecting, cleaning and storing the grains from the fields. He also tells them the need to be prepared for any unexpected twists and turns in the climate. At the same time, he does exhort and assures them to trust the divine Providence with regard to the financial matters.

> "Request the procurator to ask the masons to come for work Friday too and finish all the work. Raise a platform around the store box and raise the pillar from there. Store boxes, small as well as large, must be installed on stone floors so that termite attack may be prevented. The whole floor must be well beaten to form a strong floor and should be cowdung-plastered so that paddy or paddy seeds could be measured out on to the floor. Coconut saplings planted inside the fence and outside should be tended. Till around each tree; remove the branch roots on the surface; make a bed around and fill it with leaf moulds. Get the service of the *Velas* who climb the coconut trees and get the top cleaned; remove the dry leaves, dry and empty bunches etc. Only when the top and the bottom of the coconut trees are kept clean, they would yield fruits. By this the trees grow well and we get sufficient firewood. Tell the procurator to get all these works done. Do not worry about how we can find money to pay the wages. Get works done; God will provide us with the necessary funds."

The profound flourishing of the CMI and CMC Congregations till date is the direct fruit of the meticulous stewardship practiced by its founding fathers, particularly St. Chāvara. By treating every donation of land, property, and capital as a sacred trust, the early members ensured that the generosity of the faithful was preserved and multiplied through disciplined administration and professionalism of a 'just man'. This legacy of integrity in managing temporalities has resulted in communities today that enjoys both material stability and spiritual abundance. Their historical commitment to accountability and gratitude transformed simple gifts into a lasting foundation, proving that when the 'talents' of the people are managed with holiness, they yield a harvest that sustains the Church's mission for generations.

Update or Be Outdated

No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak, for the patch pulls away from the cloak, and a worse tear is made. Neither is new wine put into old wineskins; otherwise, the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins are destroyed; but new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved.

(Matthew 9:16–17)

No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak; otherwise, the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins.

(Mark 2:21–22)

He also told them a parable: "No one tears a piece from a new garment and sews it on an old garment; otherwise, the new will be torn, and the piece from the new will not match the old. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins and will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed. But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. And no one after drinking old wine desires new wine, but says, 'The old is good.'"

(Luke 5:36–39)

Jesus, in this parable, explains that new wine should be put into new wineskins to preserve both the wine and the wineskin; the same logic applies to the cloth too. This passage highlights the need for new structures to accommodate new life or truths. St. Chāvara recognizes that while the Gospel is eternal, the Church's methods needed to be adaptable and renewed to address the changing cultural context of the 19th century.

This passage emphasizes the need to be aware of and responsive to the changing times. Jesus criticizes those who can interpret everyday signs like weather but fail to understand the significant spiritual events happening in their time. St. Chāvara, in contrast, actively interpreted the 'signs of the times'

in Kerala, recognizing social shifts and the need for literacy and a local church leadership. His ability to discern God's work in the present led him to update the Church's response instead of adhering to outdated methods.

Theologically, the 'new wine' represents the overflowing, dynamic, and vital spirit of the Kingdom of God - the radical good news of Jesus Christ. The 'wineskins' represent the structures, methods, institutions, and traditions that contain and facilitate that message. Jesus' teaching here is a theological mandate for prudence and adaptation. The Spirit cannot be constrained indefinitely by rigid, brittle forms that resist new life. A heart open to God's movement recognizes when existing structures - such as reliance solely on foreign missionaries or ignoring local language/customs - are no longer capable of containing the vitality of faith in a new cultural context. True fidelity to tradition is not ossification, but ensuring the 'wine' is preserved, even if it requires the humility to create new organizational 'wineskins'.

Jesus' rebuke to the Pharisees and Sadducees who could read the sky but not the 'signs of the times', highlights discernment not just as a spiritual gift, but as an ethical obligation. Theological discernment demands engagement with contemporary reality. It is insufficient to be experts in historical theology while remaining blind to current injustices, social needs, or cultural shifts. St. Chāvara's 'genius' was his willingness to read the 'signs' of 19th century Kerala. The theological reflection here is that holiness is practical; it requires us to be acutely aware of how God is acting *now*, not just how He acted in the past. To ignore the present context is a failure of faith.

These Gospel passages subtly argue against discarding everything old *or* resisting everything new. The problem is not the old wine or the new cloth patch *in themselves*, but the unwise *mixing* that results in total loss. St. Chāvara's life reflects a prudent balance between preservation and innovation.

He preserved the essence of Syro-Malabar spirit while simultaneously innovating social practices (the school-attached-to-every-church model). The reflection is that the Christian life is an ongoing exercise in discerning which elements of tradition must be preserved intact and which novel forms are required to ensure the Kingdom of God flourishes effectively in a new age. This requires a discerning heart that understands the value of the past traditions while at home with the demands of the future.

St. Chāvara's profound impact and 'genius' did not stem from an ivory tower, but from a life balanced between deep interiority and active engagement with the world around him. His expertise was forged through a continuous interplay of prayer, meditation, study, and an openness to innovation, providing a timeless model for how one can remain relevant and effective ('updated') without becoming spiritually 'outdated.'

The foundation of St. Chāvara's discerning heart and genius was his relentless pursuit of knowledge, nourished by a profound life in communion with the Lord. His commitment to prayer and meditation, as evidenced in his *Dhyāna Sallāpangal*, was the crucible where information and experience were transformed into wisdom. This spiritual grounding allowed him to filter the knowledge he acquired - whether from ancient Syriac texts, local customs, or contemporary events - through a divine lens. He was not merely collecting facts; he was discerning truth. This synthesis of knowledge-seeking and contemplative prayer provided him with the clarity of vision required to lead the Church during a time of immense social and political change.

Crucially, St. Chāvara was remarkably 'open to the world,' actively absorbing what was good and necessary for his mission. While deeply traditional in his faith, his genius lay in his willingness to innovate within that tradition. He understood that effective pastoral leadership required understanding the

contemporary context. He embraced modernity by introducing printing press, founding schools attached to churches for universal education, and adapting his messages (such as writing his *Dirge* and *Anasthāsiāyude Rakthasākshyam* in popular local poetic styles) to be accessible to his people. He constantly evaluated what was vital to absorb for the community's progress and what was detrimental to their faith, demonstrating a selective and intentional engagement with the world.

St. Chāvara's life powerfully illustrates the principle that we must be updated in order not to be outdated. His example challenges the notion that deep spirituality necessitates withdrawal from worldly affairs or a rejection of new knowledge. Instead, he demonstrated that a true spiritual leader must remain current and relevant to address contemporary needs effectively. His willingness to utilize new means (like the printing press) for evangelization and education ensured his message and institutions remained relevant and sustainable. St. Chāvara's legacy is a testament to the integrated life: a genius cultivated by prayer and nourished by an engaged, discerning pursuit of knowledge that effectively transforms the world.

In one of his letters to the members of the Congregation, St. Chāvara exhorts 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 this world and the eternity where God dwells in. As those who have no eyes are called 'blind', so too those who have no learning are to be called 'intellectually blind'. Hence, it is the responsibility of the priest to teach the faithful and of parents to teach their children."

St. Chāvara's intellectual depth did not come from a single source, but from a rich blend of traditional, ecclesiastical, and cultural influences. His letters and writings reveal where he drew knowledge from. He began learning in a *kalari* (local tuition house) under an āsān (teacher), where he absorbed

foundational literacy and cultural knowledge. Later when he joined the seminary mentored by *Malpān* Thomas Pālackal, he studied theology, scripture, and pastoral training. There he was introduced to Latin, despite initial resistance from the Latin seminary, and mastered it through private tuition. He knew Malayalam, Syriac, as well as Tamil quite well, and had a working knowledge of Latin, Portuguese, Italian, and Sanskrit. His letters often requested replies in Syriac, showing his commitment to preserving the East Syriac tradition.

St. Chāvara's extensive use of quotes from diverse saints such as St. Teresa of Avila, St. Rosa of Lima, St. Augustine, St. Bernard, St. Agnes, St. Francis Xavier, St. Ephrem, St. John of the Cross, St. Louis Gonzaga, St. Francis of Assisi, alongside scriptures and other theological resources, reveals a remarkable breadth of knowledge and a rigorous reading habit. His ability to weave together Eastern and Western spiritual traditions, ranging from early Church Fathers to Carmelite mystics, showcases a versatile intellect deeply immersed in a wide array of sacred and theological texts. This extensive quoting demonstrates that he possessed a vast, well-read background that he leveraged to provide inspiring and globally informed spiritual guidance to his community.

He studied and translated liturgical texts like the Syriac Missal (*Tukāsā*), canonical prayers, funeral rites, and Latin liturgies. His letters to Rome and Propaganda Fide show his engagement with global Catholic scholarship.

St. Chāvara composed Malayalam poetry (*Āthmānuthāpam*, *Maranaveetil Pāduvānulla Parvam*) and short plays (*Eclogues*), drawing from both biblical themes and classical Latin/Italian traditions. His writings reveal familiarity with Virgil's *Eclogues* and European Christian drama. His letters reflect practical wisdom gained from leading monasteries, founding schools, and guiding sisters. He integrated local customs, social realities, and pastoral challenges into his intellectual framework.

St. Chāvara's knowledge came from a fusion of traditional Indian schooling, seminary training, multilingual study, liturgical texts, European Christian literature, and lived pastoral experience. That is the reason why his letters range so widely - from mystical theology to education policy, from liturgical reform to family life.

He was an erudite scholar. In his writings St. Chāvara quotes St Alphonse Liguori, St Teresa of Avila, St. Theresa of Lisieux, St. John of the Cross, St. Bridget, and St. Chrysostom. Recalling the words of St. Gregory the Great, he says, "a little scratch (venial sin) on the body of a priest is more fatal than a deep wound or a carbuncle on the body of a lay man."

An interesting Post Script (PS) given in one of his letters, "On 18 August, 9 am there will be complete solar eclipse. It is happening after so many years." This letter was dated 21 July 1868. Yes! It was true. There was a total solar eclipse on 18 August 1868. St. Chāvara was up-to-date with the knowledge of what was happening around the world and was eager to share it with others.

First Temptation: Seduction of Substance

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

(Matthew 4:1-4)

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"

(Luke 4:1-4)

While all three Synoptics record the event, Matthew and Luke provide a detailed dialogue of the three specific temptations, whereas Mark's account is much briefer, simply stating that Jesus was tempted by Satan while with the wild animals and ministered to by angels: "*And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him*" (Mark 1:11-13).

The Gospel accounts of Matthew and Luke detail the period of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, presenting narratives with significant shared elements and a few distinct details. Both accounts agree on the immediate timing of the event: it occurred directly after Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River, when he was subsequently led by the Spirit into the wilderness. The duration of the fast is also consistently described as forty days and nights, during which Jesus was physically weakened by hunger.

The core of the shared narrative focuses on three specific temptations presented by the devil; each time Jesus resisted them by quoting scripture from the Book of Deuteronomy. These temptations were:

1. **Stones to Bread:** A challenge for Jesus to use His divine power for personal sustenance ("If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread").
2. **At the Pinnacle of the Temple:** A test of God's protection by jumping from the highest point of the temple ("throw yourself down... For it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you'").
3. **Worship of Satan:** An offer for Jesus to bow down and worship Satan in exchange for authority over all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.

The sequence of temptations varies between Matthew and Luke, altering each narrative's climax; Matthew concludes with the offer of worldly power to emphasize that God alone is worthy of worship, while Luke ends at the Pinnacle of the Temple to stress God's sovereignty and challenges the idea of putting Him to the test. Despite these structural differences, both accounts share the common theological goal of demonstrating Jesus' perfect obedience and victory over the temptations that had previously led the Israelites astray in the wilderness.

The conclusion of the temptation narratives is also similar across both Gospels. After Jesus rebuffed the final temptation with the command, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only," the devil departed. Both accounts mention that angels subsequently came and ministered to Jesus. Luke uniquely adds a detail that the devil left 'until an opportune time', hinting that further temptations would follow later in Jesus' ministry.

Panem et circenses is a Latin phrase that literally translates to *'bread and circuses'*. It is a metonymic phrase used to describe

a strategy of superficial appeasement. The phrase was coined by the Roman satirical poet Juvenal (Decimus Junius Juvenalis) in the late first or early second century CE, appearing in his *Satires* (specifically, Satire X). Juvenal used the phrase to decry the decline of the civic sense of the Roman citizens and the manipulative tactics of the ruling elite in the Roman Empire. The full original quote from Juvenal laments:

> *...iam pridem, ex quo suffragia nulli*
> *vendimus, effudit curas; nam qui dabat olim*
> *imperium, fasces, legiones, omnia, nunc se*
> *continet atque duas tantum res anxius optat, panem et circenses.*

This translates to: "Already long ago, from when we sold our vote to no man, the People have abdicated our duties; for the People who once upon a time handed out military command, high civil office, legions - everything, now restrains itself and anxiously hopes for just two things: bread and circuses."

In ancient Rome, the government provided free or heavily subsidized grain (bread, or *panem*) and extensive public entertainment (*circenses*), such as gladiatorial fights, chariot races, and theatrical performances in venues like the Colosseum. This served as an effective instrument for the emperors to keep the populace content and distracted from significant political and social issues. By satisfying the most immediate requirements of the populace (food) and providing captivating diversions (entertainment), the rulers generated public approval and maintained social control, preventing public discontent or revolt. There is substantial historical evidence that the Roman government systematically provided "bread and circuses" (free grain and public entertainment) as an intentional policy to maintain social stability and political control. The policy existed as a well-documented element of Roman administration, particularly from the late Republic through the Imperial Era.

The Grain Dole ***(Annona or Cura Annonae)***: The Roman state implemented a system to ensure the capital's population was fed. Subsidized grain distribution to poorer citizens started as a political move in 123 BCE under the politician Gaius Sempronius Gracchus to secure votes. This system was later taken under the direct control of the autocratic Roman emperors, who managed the immense logistics of importing hundreds of thousands of tons of grain annually from provinces like Egypt and North Africa. The regular supply of free or subsidized grain to hundreds of thousands of adult male citizens was vital for preventing famine and urban unrest. Emperors like Augustus proudly referenced their actions related to the grain supply in public records, showcasing their provision as a sign of good governance and generosity, which in turn bolstered their public image and power.

Public Entertainment ***(Circenses)***: Lavish public games were a central feature of Roman life and a key part of the political strategy. These events included chariot races in the Circus Maximus (which seated over 150,000 people) and gladiatorial combats and wild animal hunts in the Colosseum. Aspiring politicians and emperors sponsored these costly games to gain popularity and public approval. Julius Caesar, for instance, famously organized magnificent games early in his career to build his reputation. The games served to distract the masses from political and social issues, generating a shared Roman identity and providing an opportunity for imperial ideology to be displayed.

In contemporary political and cultural contexts, "bread and circuses" is used as a criticism of governments or systems that distract the populace from substantive policy debates and governance failures by offering shallow entertainment, sensationalism, or basic material comforts. The term implies that the general public is willing to trade their civic freedoms

and responsibilities for short-term gratification and distraction, leading to the erosion of meaningful democratic engagement.

Emperors historically controlled and funded the systems that provided free grain and public games - the "bread and circuses" - effectively positioning themselves as the ultimate benefactors of the populace. This practice was a potent political indicator that the emperors were the providers. Within this historical context, the temptations of Jesus can be interpreted as a challenge by the tempter to overtly rival the emperor's authority. The suggestion to turn stones into bread could be seen as an incitement for Jesus to outdo the imperial provision of food, while jumping from the pinnacle of the Temple mirrored the dramatic spectacles of the circuses. Jesus, however, resisted these seductions during the temptations.

During the temptations of Jesus, the tempter presented challenges that can be interpreted within the context of imperial power dynamics. The suggestions to turn stones into bread and to perform a spectacle by jumping from the pinnacle of the Temple were incitements for Jesus to supersede the emperor's role as the perceived provider of "bread and circuses." Jesus, however, firmly resisted these calculated seditions during the wilderness encounters.

Instead of seeking worldly power through such displays, Jesus later performed miracles, such as the multiplication of bread and fish to feed the hungry multitudes. These acts were not political stunts but demonstrations of divine compassion and power. By providing sustenance through God's grace rather than an assertion of imperial-style authority, Jesus clearly indicated that God is the true provider, asserting His inherent superiority over the transient powers of any earthly emperor.

The "multiplication of loaves" (or feeding of the multitude) miracles are described in six separate accounts across the four Gospels (Matthew 14:13–21, Mark 6:31–44, Luke 9:12–17, John 6:1–14, Matthew 15:32–39 and Mark 8:1–9). There were two

distinct events: Jesus feeding the 5,000 and Jesus feeding the 4,000.

The Feeding of the 5,000: This miracle is the only one, apart from the Resurrection, recorded in all four Gospels (Matthew 14:13–21, Mark 6:31–44, Luke 9:12–17, John 6:1–14). Jesus started with five loaves and two fish, and 12 basketfuls of leftovers were collected afterward.

The Feeding of the 4,000: This second, separate miracle is recorded only in Matthew and Mark's Gospels (Matthew 15:32–39 and Mark 8:1–9). Jesus used seven loaves and a few small fish, and seven basketfuls of leftovers were gathered.

These two events are confirmed as distinct by Jesus himself in Mark 8:19-20 (*When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?" They said to him, "Twelve." "And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?" And they said to him, "Seven."*), where He refers to the specific numbers of loaves and baskets of leftovers from each miracle.

The core significance of Jesus' miracles of multiplying loaves and fish, recorded across all four Gospels, is a powerful demonstration of divine compassion and an affirmation of his identity as the Messiah. In each instance, Jesus is moved by the physical hunger of the large crowds and acts not merely to perform a spectacle, but to meet their genuine human need. By providing abundant food from meagre resources, he reveals God's boundless provision and care for His people, echoing the Manna provided in the wilderness and positioning Himself as the ultimate provider of sustenance.

Furthermore, these miracles are rich in symbolic and theological depth. They serve as a powerful metaphor and a foreshadowing of the Eucharist, where Jesus offers himself as the true "Bread of Life" who provides eternal spiritual nourishment. The acts of taking, giving thanks, breaking, and distributing the bread explicitly mirror the actions of the Last

Supper. The miracles also contain a vital lesson for discipleship, demonstrating that when human beings offer their limited resources and collaborate in faith and charity, God can take their small gifts and multiply them abundantly to meet the needs of the entire community.

St. Chavara initiated the "*pidiyari (a handful of rice)*" and "*kettuthengu (*set aside the income from a specific coconut palm, *thengu*)" systems as social reform and resource mobilization efforts to promote education and charity in 19th-century Kerala.

Pidiyari System: The *Pidiyari* system was a unique public distribution and resource mobilization method designed to feed the poor, especially students attending the schools he established. St. Chavara encouraged every Christian family to set aside a handful (*pidi*) of rice in a special vessel labelled "*to infant Jesus*" every time they cooked a meal. The rice collected in these pots was brought to the local church every weekend as a community contribution. This collected rice was then used to provide food, often as a mid-day meal, for poor families and students in the neighbourhood, ensuring no one in the community went hungry due to poverty.

Kettuthengu System: The *kettuthengu* system was another initiative for income generation, aimed at providing ongoing financial support for educational and charitable activities. Families were encouraged to set aside the income from a specific coconut palm (*thengu*) they owned. The funds generated from the sale of coconuts from this designated tree were collected and used to support the parish schools and other social welfare programs, such as the home for the dying and destitute that St. Chavara established.

St. Chavara's intention in initiating the *Pidiyari* and *Kettuthengu* systems was to mobilize community resources for social welfare and universal education, driven by a vision of social justice and shared responsibility.

Ensuring Universal Education: St. Chavara firmly believed that education was a powerful tool for social transformation and wanted to make it accessible to everyone, regardless of caste, creed, or economic status. The funds and food collected through these systems were primarily used to support schools attached to every church (his "A School for every Church" movement), providing free midday meals and sometimes clothes and books to poor, particularly Dalit, students to prevent dropouts.

Alleviating Poverty and Hunger: The *Pidiyari* system directly addressed hunger by providing food for starving families and students, fostering a sense of shared wealth and collective responsibility within the community for the well-being of its most vulnerable members.

Fostering Communal Responsibility: These systems were designed to raise awareness within society about its collective duty to the poor and to provide for educational needs. By encouraging small, daily contributions, St. Chavara instilled a spirit of charity, self-help, and community engagement in the populace.

Empowering the Marginalized: The initiatives aimed at uplifting the oppressed and marginalized sections of society, such as the poor and those from lower castes, by giving them access to education and basic necessities, thereby challenging the rigid social hierarchies of 19th-century Kerala.

Providing Sustainable Funding: The *Kettuthengu* system, in particular, created an ongoing, sustainable source of income to fund these educational and charitable activities, ensuring the longevity of his social reform programs.

St. Chavara's spiritual motive behind the *Pidiyari* and *Kettuthengu* systems was deeply rooted in the Christian virtues of charity, compassion, justice, and faith in divine providence.

The systems embodied a practical application of the Gospel message.

Imitation of Christ: St. Chavara sought to emulate Jesus Christ's compassion for the poor and the marginalized. His work was a living testament to the biblical mandate to love one's neighbour as oneself, making tangible the commitment to social justice.

Faith in Divine Providence: The act of setting aside a small, consistent amount daily was an exercise in faith. It required trust that God would multiply these small offerings through community effort to meet significant needs, a spiritual reflection of the Gospel message that God provides for those who act in faith and charity.

Dignity of the Human Person: By ensuring food and education for all, he affirmed the inherent dignity of every human being as a child of God, regardless of their social standing or economic status.

The *Pidiyari* and *Kettuthengu* systems can certainly be connected to the Gospel accounts of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes (e.g., Matthew 14:13-21; John 6:1-14).

The Principle of Small Offerings: In the Gospel story, Jesus takes a small offering—five loaves and two fish provided by a boy—and multiplies it to feed thousands. Similarly, the *Pidiyari* system relied on the small, consistent offering of "a handful of rice" from individuals. St. Chavara demonstrated how these seemingly insignificant contributions, when offered with faith and pooled for a common purpose, could miraculously meet the needs of an entire community.

Divine and Human Collaboration: The miracle wasn't just magic; it required human participation (the boy offering his lunch, the disciples organizing the crowd). St. Chavara's systems required active participation from every family, embodying the idea that divine grace works through human generosity and organized communal effort.

God as the True Provider: The miracles established Jesus as the divine provider, redirecting focus away from earthly

providers (like the Roman Emperor's grain dole). The success of St. Chavara's systems reinforced the spiritual understanding that while human effort is necessary, it is God who ultimately ensures abundance when resources are shared in charity and justice.

In conclusion, St. Chavara's *Pidiyari* and *Kettuthengu* systems were far more than mere logistical or social initiatives; they were practical expressions of a profound spiritual vision rooted in the Gospel. By asking families to contribute a "handful of rice" or the income from a single coconut tree, he operationalized the core Christian virtues of charity, communal responsibility, and faith in divine providence. This system beautifully mirrored the spiritual lesson from the Gospel miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes: just as Jesus transformed a humble offering into an abundant feast, St. Chavara demonstrated that small, consistent acts of human generosity, when pooled with faith and directed toward the common good of education and feeding the hungry, could be divinely multiplied to meet the extensive needs of an entire community.

Second Temptation: The Divine Circus

"Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

(Mathew 4:5-7)

"Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time."

(Luke 4: 9-13)

(To fully appreciate the nuances of this reflection, readers should refer to the introductory framework provided in the article "First Temptation: Seduction of Substance". That foundation on the 'bread and circuses' motif serves as the essential lens through which we explore this second temptation.)

The 'Sea of the Emperor': The Roman Empire referred to the much larger Mediterranean Sea as *Mare Nostrum* (Our Sea). While the Sea of Galilee was a significant body of water within the Roman province, it was a freshwater lake and river system that fed into the Jordan River, not the *Mare Nostrum* itself. However, the Roman Emperor was the ultimate sovereign ruler over all Roman territories, including Galilee. In this administrative sense, all bodies of water within the Empire were ultimately under the purview of the Emperor›s domain. The people of that time, when referring to the Sea of Galilee, would have called it by its local names (e.g., Lake of Gennesaret or Sea

of Tiberias) rather than the 'sea of the emperor'. The connection to the 'emperor' is purely based on modern interpretation of Roman administrative control.

The events of Jesus walking on water and that of Jesus calming the sea are recounted in the Gospels, demonstrating his authority over nature. During the period of Jesus' ministry, the body of water on which he walked was the Sea of Galilee. This sea was under the administrative control of the Roman Empire at the time. So, technically, Jesus walked on a sea that fell within the territory of the Roman Empire, which controlled the region of Galilee via client rulers (like Herod Antipas) who were acting under the Roman authority.

Jesus consistently demonstrated his divine power and superiority over the forces of nature throughout His public ministry, effectively proving that He is the Lord of creation, not a mere performer of parlour tricks. This assertion of authority stands in stark contrast to His earlier refusal to engage in the kind of 'circuses' demanded by the tempter during the temptation in the wilderness. When challenged to jump from the pinnacle of the Temple to perform a dramatic spectacle, Jesus rejected this path, refusing to use divine power for self-serving sensationalism designed to manipulate or control the masses in the style of the Roman Emperor. During the temptation in the wilderness, the devil's suggestion to perform dramatic feats was a direct challenge to adopt this imperial strategy.

Jesus Walking on the Water (Matthew 14:22–33, Mark 6:45–52 and John 6:16–21): This miracle appears in three of the four Gospels. The event occurred after the feeding of the 5,000, where the disciples were in a boat on the Sea of Galilee, struggling against a strong wind. Matthew's account (14:22–33) is unique because it also includes the detail of Peter getting out of the boat and walking on the water toward Jesus before becoming afraid and beginning to sink. In the version of Mark (6:45–52), Jesus intended to pass by the disciples, but they saw him and

were terrified, thinking he was a ghost, until he reassured them. John (6:16–21) notes that the disciples had rowed about three or four miles when they saw Jesus. After he got into the boat with them, the boat immediately reached its destination.

Jesus Calming the Sea: This separate miracle, where Jesus rebuked a furious storm, is recorded in the three synoptic Gospels (Matthew 8:23–27, Mark 4:35–41 and Luke 8:22–25). Jesus was asleep in the boat when a violent squall arose, terrifying the disciples. In all three accounts, when the disciples woke Jesus, he rebuked the wind and the waves, and a great calm ensued, leading the disciples to ask, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the sea obey him!"

Widow of Nain (Luke 7:11–17): The story of the widow of Nain is found exclusively in the Gospel of Luke. This narrative is a powerful demonstration of Jesus' compassion and divine authority over life and death. This story serves as a profound demonstration of Jesus' spontaneous compassion and divine authority over life and death. Jesus encountered a funeral procession for the only son of a widow, whose situation portended not only grief but also destitution. Moved by compassion, Jesus touched the coffin despite purity laws, commanded the young man to rise, and restored him to his mother, prompting the awe-filled crowd to praise God and declare that a great prophet had arrived. This miracle is one of only three instances in the canonical Gospels where Jesus raises someone from the dead, the others being Lazarus and the daughter of Jairus.

Turning Water into Wine (John 2:1–11): The miracle of turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana holds significant theological weight as the first of Jesus' signs, primarily serving to manifest his glory and demonstrate his divine power over the elements of nature. While subtly performed in a social setting rather than a public spectacle, the transformation of a substantial quantity of water into high-quality wine was a

clear indication that Jesus was not merely working within the confines of natural laws, but superseding them. He commanded the basic constituents of nature to instantly obey His creative will, effectively fast-forwarding and perfecting the natural process of grape cultivation and fermentation in an instant. This demonstration positioned Jesus as the Lord over creation, capable of altering the very essence of matter and proving His inherent superiority over the natural forces He commanded into submission.

Jesus decisively rejected the identity of a ruler who governs through spectacle and material appeasement—the 'bread and circuses' model employed by Roman Emperors to manage the populace. During the wilderness temptations, he refused the devil's incitement to turn stones into bread or perform a public display by leaping from the Temple pinnacle. These refusals were a summary rejection of the seduction aimed at acquiring earthly political power through manipulation and crowd-pleasing stunts. Instead of becoming a mere rival to Caesar, Jesus chose a path of spiritual authority that transcended earthly politics, refusing to use his divine power for self-serving sensationalism or the acquisition of a temporal throne.

Throughout the public ministry, Jesus performed meaningful miracles that served as clear indications of His profound command over the natural order and life itself, demonstrating powers far surpassing any emperor's reach. By turning water into wine, Jesus displayed creative power over the fundamental elements. His ability to calm a raging sea with a mere command and physically tread upon its surface - forces deemed chaotic and untameable in the ancient world - demonstrated absolute dominion that proved all elements of nature were under His command. Furthermore, miracles such as restoring life to the dead son of the widow of Nain showcased ultimate authority even over death, clearly positioning His divine, spiritual power as superior to all the temporary, physical powers of earthly rulers.

Now, coming to the life of St. Chāvara, we see him overcoming the temptation to do things for his own earthly glory. The press with all the accessories, printing material and workers were ready for use. The ecclesiastical permission also had been acquired. The royal sanction too was easily obtained through the good office of the Vicar Apostolic Ludovic Martini. It was in 1846 that he obtained it through the British Resident Mr. Kallan. There occurred also a sign of God's blessing. With all the expenses being duly met and the debts paid, the Fathers had run out of money. There was no penny left even for the urgent needs and paying the wages of the workmen. What happened then has been narrated by Father Chāvara:

> We started praying earnestly to the guardian angels and St. Joseph. Then something like a sign of God's special favor happened. One day in great distress I was praying in the church. Suddenly a man by name Itty Nellipuzha from the parish of Cherpunkal arrived, and said that he had brought with him 500 *chakram*. He added that if someone went with him, he would send 500 *chakram* more. Hearing it I heaved a sigh of relief. Earlier also he had given us 1000 *chakram*... I received the money and met the urgent needs.

By March 1845, permission from Rome to print books was duly received. Making further enquiries about ink and paper St. Chāvara and some others then went to Ālapuzha. There with the help of Cheriānkunju Elanjickal and Kochupaulose from Vaikom they arranged with a merchant called Kameesa to import for them paper, ink and lead, all together worth ₹ 100, and paid an advance of ₹ 10. Then, in September (1845?), they were informed that the articles had arrived. St. Chāvara along with Father Kanjirapally went and found 10 bundles of paper and a barrel of ink, worth a total of more than ₹ 400. But they did not have that much money. They requested the merchant to let them have only a small portion of the ink. But he insisted that

they should take the whole lot as he felt he would not be able to find a buyer for the remaining part. Naturally the Fathers were in *mana-vishādam* (agony). Providentially, there came a good man called Thomman Chennakāt. He negotiated with the merchant and got him to agree to sell to the Fathers just half a barrel of ink and paper. But even they would cost ₹ 300 which they did not have! They had with them only ₹ 100. Where would they find ₹ 200? The zealous Thomman immediately collected ₹ 100 from different people in the form of a *chitty* (chit fund) that he instituted on the spot in the name of St Joseph. For the remaining ₹ 100 he gave a promissory note to the merchant and sent the Fathers home with the goods.

Just as Jesus dismissed the tempter's suggestion to leap from the temple pinnacle, the rejection of the 'bread and circus' motif – a refusal to turn faith into a hollow spectacle for the masses, St. Chāvara understood that true divine power is not found in theatrical displays meant to dazzle the eye. While Jesus later demonstrated His true dominion over nature by calming the storm etc., He did so to reveal His identity and care, not to entertain a crowd. Similarly, St. Chāvara chose the path of quiet, steadfast trust in God's providence. He did not seek to prove his sanctity through sensational miracles or public wonders; instead, he allowed the authenticity of his work and the depth of his devotion to speak for themselves.

The "Divine Circus" of St. Chāvara was, therefore, an extraordinary display of faith in the ordinary. By shunning the need for a spectacle, he invited the community into a partnership of the spirit, where support flowed not as a reaction to a miracle, but as a voluntary response to his integrity. The resources he received were the fruits of a collective belief in his mission, proving that when one trusts entirely in the providence of God, the hearts of the people open naturally. In the end, the greatest miracle of St. Chāvara was not a suspension of the laws of nature, but the transformation of society through a faith so profound that it commanded support without ever needing to demand a sign.

Third Temptation: Cost of the Crown

"Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour; and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him."

(Matthew 4: 8-11)

"Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"

(Luke 4:5-8)

(To fully appreciate the nuances of this reflection, readers should refer to the introductory framework provided in the article "First Temptation: Seduction of Substance". That foundation on the 'bread and circuses' motif serves as the essential lens through which we explore this third temptation.)

The third temptation in Matthew's Gospel serves as the climactic confrontation between absolute allegiance to God and the pull of worldly power and idolatry. This encounter is rich in theological significance, illustrating the supreme test of Jesus' humanity and divine commitment.

The Scope of the Offer – "All the Kingdoms of the World":
The devil's offer was incredibly grand: he showed Jesus "all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour" (Matthew 4:8). This represents the ultimate temptation for power, dominion, and earthly glory - everything the human heart often craves. The offer implies that all worldly power structures operate, in some capacity, under the devil's influence ("to me all this authority has been given," as mentioned in the parallel account

in Luke 4:6), and he was willing to transfer control to Jesus instantly. The 'splendour' (Greek *doxa*, meaning glory or majesty) highlights the alluring façade of earthly success that often distracts humanity from eternal truths.

The Condition – A Single Act of Idolatry:

The core demand was deceptively simple but fundamentally blasphemous: "If you will fall down and worship me" (Matthew 4:9). This demand exposes the devil's true ambition: he sought to receive the adoration due only to the Creator. In the context of Jewish monotheism and the First Commandment ("You shall have no other gods before me"), this condition was the ultimate transgression. It was not just about gaining power; it was about redirecting the locus of worship, transforming Jesus from the obedient Son of God into a servant of evil through a single, symbolic act of submission.

Jesus' Response – Absolute Devotion to God:

Jesus' response was immediate, forceful, and rooted in the authority of Scripture: "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only'" (Matthew 4:10, quoting Deuteronomy 6:13).

- Scriptural Authority: Jesus did not debate the devil's ownership of the kingdoms or the legitimacy of the offer; he simply cited the ultimate moral law. This models for believers that the Word of God is the definitive defence against spiritual deception and temptation.
- Exclusive Allegiance: The response reinforces the principle of exclusive worship and service (*latreia* in Greek). There is no negotiation on this point. Allegiance to God is all or nothing. The temptation was to compromise this singular focus, a compromise that Jesus utterly refused.

The Outcome and Significance:

Upon Jesus' definitive command, 'the devil left him, and angels came and attended him' (Matthew 4:11). This victory affirms

that choosing God over worldly power and idolatry leads to divine vindication and strength. The third temptation highlights that the greatest spiritual battle is over who or what holds the primary place in our lives. Jesus established a precedence that any form of worship or service directed away from God, even for the promise of the world's glory, is unacceptable and must be resisted completely.

The denial of Jesus during the third temptation is profoundly proven and validated by subsequent events and declarations in the New Testament, which collectively reveal His true divine nature and ultimate authority as the one, true Lord and God.

Divine Attestation at Baptism and Transfiguration:
At both the baptism and transfiguration of Jesus, God the Father explicitly identifies Jesus, affirming His unique status as His 'beloved Son'. The voice from heaven at His baptism declared, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). This divine proclamation directly counters the devil's subtle questioning of Jesus' identity ("*If* you are the Son of God») during the temptation. The Father›s declaration confirms Jesus is the rightful heir to the promised kingdom, which He was destined to receive through obedience and sacrifice, not through the devil›s shortcut of idolatry.

Similarly, at the Transfiguration, the Father repeats this affirmation and adds, "Listen to him!". This command positions Jesus as the ultimate authority, superseding the Law and the Prophets (represented by Moses and Elijah). This shows that Jesus' authority is inherent and divine, not derived from Satan's false offer of worldly power.

Post-Resurrection Proclamations and Miraculous Authority:
The reality of Jesus' divine nature is further solidified by human witnesses following His resurrection and during His ministry:

- Proclamation of St. Thomas: The confession of 'doubting' Thomas after seeing the risen Christ, "My Lord and my

God!" (John 20:28), is a clear acknowledgment of Jesus' full divinity. This explicit declaration of Jesus as 'God' validates His earlier refusal to worship anyone but the Lord God.

- The Centurion's Declaration: At the crucifixion, even the Roman centurion, a representative of the very earthly power Jesus rejected in the temptation, declared, "Truly this was the Son of God!" (Matthew 27:54). This acknowledgment from an unexpected source underscores the undeniable evidence of Jesus' divine identity displayed through His sacrificial death, the opposite path of worldly glory offered by Satan.
- Authority to Forgive Sins and Lord of the Sabbath: Jesus demonstrated authority that belongs to God alone. When He forgave sins (e.g., Matthew 9:6), religious leaders accused Him of blasphemy because only God can forgive sins. His claim to be 'Lord of the Sabbath' (Matthew 12:8) also asserted authority over divine law. These actions proved that Jesus possessed an intrinsic, divine authority that Satan could never offer or grant.

Jesus' Own Divine Claims:

Jesus' own statements further solidify His unique relationship with the Father:

- 'I am' Statements: In John's Gospel, Jesus uses powerful 'I am' statements (e.g., "I am the bread of life," "I am the light of the world," "I am the way, the truth, and the life") that echo God's self-revelation to Moses ("I am who I am") in the Old Testament. These statements affirm His divine nature and function as the sole source of true life and salvation, not the material 'bread' or worldly 'glory' offered by the tempter.
- 'Oneness with the Father': Jesus explicitly stated, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). This profound claim of shared essence and purpose means that any worship given to Jesus is worship given to God. His rejection of bowing to Satan was an assertion of His singular, divine identity and His refusal to compromise that oneness.

In essence, Jesus' denial of the third temptation was a commitment to the path of obedience and sacrifice as the true Son of God, a path that ultimately led to His vindication and the full revelation of His divinity, authority, and rightful claim over all creation.

The contrast between Jesus' third temptation and the subsequent divine revelations centres on the source and nature of authority. In the wilderness, the devil presented a conditional offer of immediate, worldly power, attempting to make Jesus subservient and requiring an act of idolatry in return. Jesus rejected this illicit offer entirely, affirming that true authority is not derived from compromise with evil, but is inherent and divinely appointed. This inherent authority was explicitly confirmed by God the Father Himself at Jesus' baptism and transfiguration, where the divine voice proclaimed His status as the 'beloved Son,' establishing His unique identity as an unchangeable, unconditional fact independent of any worldly negotiation.

Furthermore, these events highlight the distinction between the counterfeit glory offered by Satan and the true *doxa* (divine glory) that Jesus possessed. By refusing the shortcut to earthly dominion, Jesus affirmed the path of humility, obedience, and sacrifice that led to the Cross and the subsequent resurrection. Later declarations—such as Thomas confessing "My Lord and my God!" and Jesus' own actions like forgiving sins and claiming Lordship over the Sabbath—served as powerful validations of His true divinity. The entire narrative cycle demonstrates that true dominion comes from fulfilling God's will and serving Him alone, entirely superseding the grasping for power through illicit means offered by the tempter.

Jesus proved the exclusive sovereignty of God, demonstrating that only the Creator is worthy of worship. His steadfast refusal to bow to the devil in exchange for worldly kingdoms established an uncompromising standard of allegiance, reinforcing the first Commandment that there are no 'other gods.' The subsequent

events of God the Father's declaration of divine Sonship of Jesus at His baptism and transfiguration, collectively affirmed that all legitimate authority and worship belong to God alone, rejecting any notion of shared sovereignty or compromise with evil.

Furthermore, Jesus proved His inherent divinity and unique nature as the incarnate Son of God. The 'I am' statements, claims of 'Oneness with the Father,' and actions like forgiving sins and declaring Himself 'Lord of the Sabbath' all assert an authority that is intrinsic, not derived or granted by external forces like Satan. This confirmed that Jesus did not need to receive kingdoms from the tempter; as God, they were *ipso facto* His. His life and teachings consistently validated this divine identity, standing in stark contrast to the devil's attempt to position himself as the one to grant power.

Ultimately, Jesus proved the superiority of divine authority over temporary earthly power and provided a clear model for human resistance to temptation. He demonstrated that true dominion is spiritual and eternal, achieved through obedience, humility, and sacrifice, not through the corrupting shortcuts offered by the worldly systems. The centurion's declaration at the crucifixion highlighted that this true power was fully realized in His sacrificial act, offering a powerful example for humanity to overcome temptation by grounding their lives in God's Word and maintaining unwavering fidelity to fulfilling His Will.

When the Roccosian supporters attempted to sway St. Chāvara to their schismatic side, they offered him the high ecclesiastical position of episcopacy. This offer mirrored the third temptation of Jesus, where worldly power and status were presented in exchange for compromise. St. Chāvara's response was a definitive rejection of this allure, prioritizing his spiritual integrity and obedience to the legitimate Church hierarchy. His spontaneous reply was: "I would rather save my soul than be made a bishop!" This statement underscored his profound humility and unwavering commitment to God's

will over personal ambition or illicit gain, directly contrasting with the temptation to seek status outside of the Church's true authority.

Vicar Apostolic Baccinelli, in his official correspondence dated 15 June 1861 with the Propaganda Congregation, recognized the genuine virtues and capabilities of St. Chāvara that were entirely lacking in the movement attempting to win him over. Baccinelli saw in him a man of exceptional character who embodied the qualities necessary for true spiritual leadership. He describes Father Chāvara as: "A truly Christian, virtuous, most prudent and well versed in Sacred Scriptures, most learned in Syriac language, and who has shown himself in these circumstances by deed to be most attached to the Catholic religion and to the Holy See..." Baccinelli recognized that Father Chāvara's influence was rooted in his piety, not power, noting that those attempting to win him over tried 'every art and cunning'. Recommending him for Episcopal ordination as a coadjutor bishop, Baccinelli attested, "He will certainly bring forth fruits much better than those from the Chaldean Patriarch, because he is good, prudent and obedient, and in preaching he enchants."

Vicar Apostolic Baccinelli writes in the appointment letter of St. Chāvara as Vicar General:

> "On account of the difficulties which we experience in the administration of churches, under our jurisdiction for a long time, because of our advanced age and the consequent exhaustion and indisposition, and moreover, since through our administration we do not see spiritual fruits both among the priests and among the laity, in the present circumstances of things… it is necessary to constitute a vicar general. Hence, we appoint you as vicar general, so that you govern, as regards spiritual affairs, priests and lay people in the Syro-Malabar churches under our jurisdiction. In fact,

> I am persuaded that you have the fortitude, skill, wisdom and the virtues which are necessary to fulfil this responsibility."

Despite possessing the necessary fortitude, skill, and wisdom, St. Chāvara maintained a radical humility that resisted any form of self-promotion, much like Jesus' rejection of worldly glory. When Vicar Apostolic Baccinelli appointed him as Vicar General - the highest post a Syrian of that time could achieve - St. Chāvara only accepted the position under a formal command of obedience. Baccinelli noted this extreme humility in his letter to the Prefect of the Congregation of the *Propaganda Fide*: "But I must warn you that the said person (St. Chāvara) 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." Furthermore, St. Chāvara consistently demonstrated his indifference to status by never signing official documents using his title, reinforcing his dedication to serving God rather than seeking personal glory.

The third temptation of Jesus, a rejection of immediate worldly power in favor of absolute fidelity to God, established an enduring principle of Christian life: true authority and glory are found only in divine obedience, not in the compromise of idolatry or illicit ambition. St. Chāvara perfectly exemplified this principle, centuries later when he decisively refused the schismatic offer of episcopacy, stating, "I would rather save my soul than be made a bishop!" His life starkly exemplifies the value Jesus taught when He rejected the grasping for power in the wilderness. St. Chāvara demonstrated his radical humility by only accepting the highest Church office under the command of obedience and consistently signing documents without using his title. Both Jesus' scriptural denial and St. Chāvara's clear example prove that authentic spiritual leadership bypasses worldly shortcuts and adheres strictly to God's sovereign will, affirming that God alone is worthy of ultimate allegiance.

Beyond the Bench

"Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if one blind person guides another, both will fall into a pit."

(Matthew 15:14)

The above verse from the Matthean Gospel serves as a stark theological warning regarding the profound responsibility held by those who impart knowledge. By analysing the spiritual and intellectual dynamics between the 'guide,' the 'learner,' and the educational process itself, we can derive the following insights:

The Integrity of the Source: Experts in the field of education shows that the teachers' authority is not just in their title, but in their vision. If a guide's own understanding is clouded by prejudice, ego, or falsehood, their 'instruction' becomes a source of danger rather than enlightenment. Education is only as effective as the clarity of the one leading.

The Peril of Passive Learning: The 'pit' is the inevitable destination for those who follow blindly without exercising their own God-given discernment. Education, from a Gospel perspective, should be a process of awakening the learner's own 'sight' (critical thinking and spiritual intuition) so they are no longer dependent on fallible human guides.

The 'Invisible' Pit of Ignorance: The 'pit' represents more than just a mistake; it symbolizes the systemic failure - poverty, moral decay, and social stagnation - that occurs when education is absent or corrupt. True education acts as a map that identifies these 'pits' before the community falls into them.

The Responsibility of 'Sight': In this passage, sight is a metaphor for truth. To educate is to provide 'sight.' This means that those who have been blessed with knowledge have a sacred obligation to lead accurately. Misleading a learner is not just a pedagogical failure; it is a spiritual betrayal of the vulnerable.

Disrupting the Cycle of Error: If the blind lead the blind, the cycle of error perpetuates itself across generations. The Gospel passage above suggests that education must be a 'disruptive' force - it must introduce a new way of seeing that breaks the chain of inherited ignorance, ensuring that the 'blindness' of the past does not dictate the future of the student.

St. Chāvara started his circular letter seeking financial help from the parishes with these words: "St. Ephrem, a Father of the Church, teaches us that the second means for vision is education. Just as we cannot see things without vision in the eyes, without knowledge, we will not be able to see heaven and God who dwells in it. Those who cannot see are blind. Similarly, those who are not educated are spiritually blind. It is because of this blindness that the Christians of Malabar, although they are followers of Jesus of Nazareth from the very beginning, are without the seed and sprout of holiness. Jesus has taught us that if the blind were led by the blind, both would fall in the pit."

St. Chāvara's educational initiative is perhaps the most widely discussed aspect of his legacy. The seed he planted has blossomed into a colossal tree, offering shelter and knowledge to thousands globally. We look back at St. Chāvara, the educationist, as a visionary who articulated *four enduring principles* - exemplified by his revolutionary decision to start Sanskrit schools - that remain powerfully relevant today.

1. ***Audacity in Innovation:*** St. Chāvara demonstrated extraordinary boldness establishing Sanskrit schools instead of the English-medium institutions, increasingly popular among the elite of the society. Thus, he effectively challenged the prevailing educational paradigms of the mid-19th century. At that time, most children were limited to *Ezhuthu Kalari* (village schools) for basic literacy. Meanwhile, Sanskrit—the prestigious language of sacred texts and higher learning—remained a restricted domain, strictly guarded by the upper castes and unattainable to the Dalits and other marginalized communities.

The rise of English education, spearheaded largely by Protestant missionaries such as the Church Missionary Society (CMS), presented a complex dilemma. While these schools offered modern subjects and paths to government employment, Catholic leaders feared that such an environment might compromise the religious identity and theological foundations of Catholic youth. St. Chāvara recognized the urgent need to safeguard his community's faith without allowing them to be left behind in the race for intellectual advancement and financial uplift.

By founding a Sanskrit school, St. Chāvara provided a prestigious and culturally authoritative alternative. In the social hierarchy of the time, Sanskrit was the ultimate gateway to higher learning, often viewed as equal or even superior to English in terms of intellectual status. Opening this 'sacred' language to everyone, including Dalits, was a radical act of social engineering. It not only made Catholic institutions attractive but also positioned them as progressive forces of social justice that did not rely on Protestant frameworks.

This was just a strategic first step. St. Chāvara did not reject English education outright—he later supported both vernacular and English schools under Catholic management—but his initial focus on Sanskrit served a dual purpose. It protected Catholic children from external theological influence while proving that Catholic institutions could match, and even surpass, the prestige of the most elite educational systems of the day.

His genius lay in his ability to transform education into both a shield for Catholic identity and a powerful catalyst for social reform. While he eventually expanded into vernacular and English schooling, his initial focus on Sanskrit was a strategic masterstroke designed to capture public attention. It proved that Catholic education could stand on par with - or even surpass - the prestigious English model of the time.

He viewed Sanskrit as the bedrock of Indian intellectual and spiritual traditions. By mastering it, students could

engage directly with classical texts, thereby strengthening their cultural identity. This move was profoundly radical; it directly challenged rigid caste hierarchies by inviting those considered 'untouchable' to study a language previously reserved exclusively for Brahmins. While English offered practical pathways to employment, Chāvara's priority remained rooted in justice and dignity. He ensured that the marginalized could finally share in a cultural and spiritual heritage from which they had been systematically excluded.

This decision was never about ignoring the demand for English, but about prioritizing social equity. He recognized that while English schools primarily benefited the privileged, a Sanskrit school could uplift the oppressed by granting them access to elite intellectual traditions. Despite fierce opposition, he established two schools at Mānnānam and Ārppookkara. These were humble structures - simple sheds built with public support, featuring bamboo walls and thatched palm-leaf roofs - yet they represented the dawn of a new social order.

His vision for these institutions was holistic. He directed that students first be grounded in languages such as Malayalam, Tamil, Latin, and Syriac. From this diverse student body, those who demonstrated the necessary maturity and discernment were invited to pursue priesthood, receiving the theological training required for ordination.

To ensure the success of this mission, St. Chāvara mandated that every parish sends two students to the Sanskrit school, a directive preserved in his collected letters. He viewed education as a collective ecclesial responsibility, essential for both spiritual growth and the strengthening of the Christian community. By requiring this contribution from every parish, he ensured that education was not left to chance or restricted to wealthy families, but was instead a shared burden and blessing for the entire community.

Furthermore, the establishment of the Sanskrit school testified to his deep respect for Indian heritage. By opening the study of the Vedas, Upanishads, and epics to Christians and lower-caste Hindus alike, he dismantled the barriers of the caste system and promoted a vision of universal harmony. He believed that mastering Sanskrit would empower people to internalize the very soul of India, fostering a religion of peace that transcended social division.

The gravity of this educational mission was reinforced by ecclesiastical authority. In a letter to the Superior of the Carmel Monastery, Bishop Bernardine referenced St. Chāvara's 'A School for Every Church' concept with a stern warning: Any Vicar who failed to fulfil their responsibility toward the schools faced the suspension of their priestly faculties, while uncooperative lay leaders were legally obliged to comply. This ensured that St. Chāvara's vision was not merely a suggestion, but a foundational mandate for the community.

2. Radical Inclusivity: Driven by an unwavering belief in human dignity, St. Chāvara pioneered efforts that ushered in a revolutionary era of social equity by opening the schools to students of every caste. He rejected the notion that education was a privilege reserved for the elite, recognizing that true social progress required the dismantling of intellectual monopolies. By establishing a Sanskrit school in 1846, he provided the marginalized groups access to 'forbidden' knowledge, prioritizing radical inclusivity over the prevailing elite demand for English-medium instruction.

In 19th century Kerala, the school 'bench' was a symbol of caste-based exclusion. St. Chāvara moved 'Beyond the Bench' by transforming the classroom into a site of social disruption. To him, education was more than just a seat in a room; it was the restoration of sight. He understood that to prevent the 'blind' from falling into the pits of exploitation, every child - regardless of gender or caste - needed to visualize and realize their own inherent potential.

This strategic vision was enacted at the Sanskrit school in Mānnānam, where St. Chāvara facilitated classical learning for both priestly candidates and lay students. By mandating that each parish send two students for training, he ensured the Catholic community would possess scholars well-versed in the classical literary and philosophical traditions of India. This was not merely an academic exercise; it was a profound step toward cultural integration.

In the long term, this initiative opened the gates of Indian and Hindu thought to the Christian community, fostering a deep appreciation for the nation's diverse worldviews. The eventual integration of Indian philosophy into seminary curricula — often cited as a post-Vatican II innovation— actually finds its roots in St. Chāvara's vision as early as in the 19th century. Through his Sanskrit school, he empowered the marginalized and bridged the gap between faiths, laying the foundation for a more harmonious and intellectually vibrant society.

St. Chāvara did not merely construct classrooms; he engineered a social revolution. By mandating that a school be attached to every parish (*Pallikkudam*) and pioneering the midday meal scheme, he dismantled the structural barriers to enlightenment. He ensured that the pursuit of knowledge was never obstructed by the gate of a closed door or the pangs of an empty stomach.

3. Uncompromising Vision: St. Chāvara maintained an uncompromising commitment to educational excellence, refusing to lower his standards despite mounting external pressures. To ensure the highest quality of instruction at the first Sanskrit school, he personally recruited an expert from the Warrier caste in Thrissur - a scholar renowned for his mastery of both Sanskrit and Malayalam - to lead the curriculum. This move proved that, for St. Chāvara, the pursuit of knowledge demanded the very best expertise, regardless of traditional social boundaries.

This single incident of the recruitment of a teacher from the Warrier community in Thrissur is a powerful testament to St. Chāvara's uncompromising stance on educational quality. It reveals that, for him, the excellence of the mind always took precedence over the convenience of the mission. One must understand this decision in the background of financial constraints and the smaller number of students enrolled in the Sanskrit schools at the beginning of those institutions.

- ***Distance as a Measure of Dedication:*** In the mid-19th century, Thrissur was significantly far from Mānnānam, especially given the difficult terrain and limited transportation facilities of the era. By seeking a scholar from such a distance, St. Chāvara proved that he would not settle for 'locally available' talent if it did not meet his rigorous standards. He was willing to go to any lengths – literally – to secure the best possible intellectual foundation for his students.

- ***Financial Sacrifice for Academic Excellence:*** Expertise rarely comes without a cost. It is highly probable that a renowned scholar brought from a cultural hub like Thrissur commanded a significantly higher salary than local instructors. St. Chāvara's willingness to allocate scarce resources to pay for a premium educator shows that he viewed education as an investment, not an expense. He refused to let a 'budget-first' mentality result in a second-rate education for the poor.

- ***Merit Over Identity:*** Perhaps the most striking aspect was his decision to hire a non-Catholic member of the Warrier caste. In an era of strict religious and social compartmentalization, St. Chāvara broke the mould. He prioritized pedagogical mastery over

religious affiliation. He recognized that to master Sanskrit - the soul of India - one needed an expert who lived and breathed the language, regardless of their creed. This demonstrated a sophisticated, modern understanding that secular expertise is essential to a holistic education.

- ***Professionalism as a Form of Worship:*** By bringing in a true 'expert,' St. Chāvara signalled that Catholic institutions would not be 'amateur' or 'charity-grade' schools. He wanted his students to receive an education that was objectively superior to what was available elsewhere. By hiring an elite scholar to teach, he sent a clear message: Every student, poor or rich, deserve the best, not just the 'good enough.'

- ***Setting a Standard for the Future:*** This move established a culture of excellence within the educational tradition followed by his sons and daughters (CMI-CMC). It proved that St. Chāvara's vision was not just about building walls and roofs, but about the intellectual fire of the highest calibre that burned within them. He set a precedence that quality must never be sacrificed at the altar of mediocrity or parochialism.

4. Resourceful Resilience: St. Chāvara fundamentally viewed a scarcity of facilities or funding not as a barrier, but as an opportunity for creative problem-solving and mobilizing community support. For him, every challenge possessed an inherent solution rooted in collective charity. He famously initiated the first free midday meals in schools, an innovation that dramatically reduced dropout rates by addressing immediate physical needs. Parishes funded these essential services - meals and free clothing - from their own meagre resources, sustained entirely through local acts of charity.

His strategic approach to funding is explicitly detailed in a circular to parish priests dated 25 March 1850. Recognizing the substantial expenses required for the operation of the school, student maintenance, and teacher salaries, as the Vicar General of the Church, he appealed to the faithful's stewardship: "Remember, if God has given riches, it is to be used to serve God and to spend it for common good. Hence, without burdening any one too much, funds shall be collected thus: In parishes... a tenth of each one's income, must be given for the running of the study centre... If the monthly contribution and this amount together are entrusted to designated collectors regularly, this proposal can easily be implemented. This must be done joyfully with good will. Reverend Father Vicars are requested to sign on this letter endorsing your cooperation and agreement with this decision in good will." This directive ensured that the educational mission was financed sustainably and joyfully through communal responsibility.

He realized that a child could not learn on an empty stomach. Moving *Beyond the Bench* required addressing the fundamental human needs. St. Chāvara pioneered the *midday meal scheme* for impoverished children, often creatively funding it through *Pidiyari*. This vital initiative ensured that children from the financially struggling families did not have to drop out to find work, directly linking education with social survival and human dignity.

In conclusion, the legacy of St. Chāvara proves that true education has always been about more than what happens within the four walls of a classroom; it is about the transformation of a society. The four pillars of his charism - *audacity in innovation, radical inclusivity, uncompromising vision,* and *resourceful resilience* - are not merely historical milestones but remain vital blueprints for navigating the complexities even today.

In an era still grappling with systemic inequality, St. Chāvara's *radical inclusivity* challenges us to ensure that

technology and knowledge do not become the 'new Sanskrit,' reserved only for the privileged. His *audacity in innovation* serves as a reminder that meaningful change often requires the courage to prioritize social justice over popular demand. Furthermore, his *uncompromising vision* for quality - exemplified by his search for expertise regardless of distance or cost - sets a gold standard for a world often tempted by mediocrity. Finally, his *resourceful resilience* teaches us that a lack of funding is never an excuse for a lack of action; rather, it is a call to mobilize the 'handfuls of rice' from a committed community to solve global challenges.

Ultimately, to move 'Beyond the Bench' is to realize that education is a sacred work of 'restoring sight.' By applying these enduring principles today, we ensure that the light of knowledge continues to reach the furthest margins, fulfilling St. Chāvara's dream of a world where no one is left stumbling in the shadows of ignorance. He was aware that a society without inclusive education was a group of people walking toward a cliff-edge in the dark. While some helplessly complained and some with much anguish watched the 'blind leading the blind,' St. Chāvara broke the cycle. He did not just build a classroom; he gave a nation its sight!

Entrepreneur Sage

For it will be as when a man going on a journey called his servants and entrusted to them his property; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them; and he made five talents more. So also, he who had the two talents made two talents more. But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money.

Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, "Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more." His master said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master." And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, "Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more." His master said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master."

He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, "Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not winnow; so, I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours." But his master answered him, "You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sowed, and gather where I have not winnowed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. So, take the talent from him, and give it to him who has the ten talents."

For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth.

(Matthew 25:14-30)

Entrepreneurship consists of the ability to lead effectively. Entrepreneurs give clear form to vague ideas. They attend to history, apply critical and imaginative thinking, and identify opportunities to shape new epochs—by doing the right things and by doing things right. In this sense they perform the role of *spiritual CEOs*. This applies to Jesus in an abundant measure, as seen in the transformative parables of Jesus in the Bible. In the nineteenth-century Kerala, St. Chāvara displayed entrepreneurial qualities that can vie with the calibre of a modern CEO. He was, in every sense, an entrepreneur with a saintly vision.

Several examples and parables in the Gospels illustrate principles of modern entrepreneurship such as stewardship, resourcefulness, risk-taking, integrity, purpose-driven action and other modern entrepreneurial principles. The Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30), The Parable of the Shrewd Manager (Luke 16:1-13), The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price/Treasure in the Field (Matthew 13:44-46), The 'Second Mile' Principle (Matthew 5:41) are best examples.

The Parable of Talents offers several entrepreneurial principles, primarily emphasizing risk-taking, resource management, and accountability. The core message is that one must actively use and multiply their resources and opportunities rather than hoard them out of fear of failure.

1. ***Stewardship and Resource Management:*** The 'talents' represent resources, skills, time, and opportunities entrusted to individuals. An entrepreneur is a steward, not an owner, and is expected to manage these resources wisely toward growth. He has to have a factual assessment and understanding of the resources available around him for the benefit of the success of the initiative he is planning to begin.

2. ***Calculated Risk-taking:*** In this parable, the master rewards the two servants who immediately invested their talents

and multiplied them. The third servant, who buried his talent out of a fear of loss, was severely reprimanded. This highlights that taking calculated risks is an essential ingredient for growth; also, failure to take effective action is shirking of responsibility.

3. ***Action over Idleness:*** The successful servants took immediate, diligent action ('went at once') to make their capital productive. The third servant was labelled 'wicked and lazy' for his passivity. The parable encourages a proactive and creative approach to opportunities, as opposed to a stagnant one.

4. ***Accountability for Results:*** Upon the master's return, each servant was required to give an account of their resource management. This underscores the principle of accountability for performance and results, not just intentions.

5. ***Different Abilities, Equal Expectation of Effort:*** The master distributed talents 'each according to his ability,' recognizing that people have different capacities. However, he expected each servant to make the most of what they had been given. Success was measured by the *effort* to multiply what was entrusted, not by achieving an equal absolute return.

6. ***Faithfulness Leads to Promotion:*** The two faithful servants were rewarded with greater responsibility and invited to share in the master's joy ("I will put you in charge of many things"). This demonstrates a principle of promotion based on proven diligence and success in managing current responsibilities – small or big.

7. ***Consequences of Wasted Potential:*** The servant who wasted his opportunity not only lost what he was given, but was also cast out. This serves as a cautionary tale that unused potential and missed opportunities lead to not only loss but also lead to negative consequences.

In every initiative of St. Chāvara, - be it in establishing St. Joseph's Printing Press at Mānnānam in1846, establishing monasteries and convents, distributing mid-day meal, starting Sanskrit school or handling the schisms - we could identify that it was an act of visionary leadership and an early expression of social entrepreneurship, the kind of forward-thinking initiative that today's innovators strive to emulate.

1. ***Vision Beyond His Time:*** At a time when literacy was limited and printed resources were scarce, he recognized that 'knowledge is power' and that access to knowledge can help transform the society. Modern entrepreneurs call this 'identifying an unmet need'. St. Chāvara recognized this instinctively - seeing printing not as a business venture but as a means to uplift the community.

1. ***Risk-taking for a Mission:*** Establishing a printing press in 1846 was a bold step, laden with financial, technical, and operational risks. There were no trained technicians, technology was limited, and funds were scarce. Yet he advanced courageously because the mission demanded it. This mirrors today's purpose-driven entrepreneurs who take risks not merely for profit but to serve a higher cause.

2. ***Innovation Rooted in Service:*** St. Chāvara used the press not only for church publications but also for educational materials, prayer books, cultural literature, and devotional texts. In doing so, he democratized information. In modern terms, this is innovation with social impact—creating scalable solutions that benefit society at large.

3. ***Building Institutions, Not Just Projects:*** Sustainability and scalability are hallmarks of successful entrepreneurship. St. Chāvara's press was not a one-time initiative; it evolved into an institution that trained people, produced literature for decades, and contributed immensely to Kerala's literacy movement. He built an ecosystem rather than a standalone project and 'the rest is history'.

4. ***Empowerment Through Education:*** By producing reading materials in the local language, St. Chāvara empowered children, families, and parish communities. The principles of modern entrepreneurship emphasize the knowledge economy, capacity building, and skill development - values he embraced long before they became global principles.

5. ***Ethical Leadership:*** St. Chāvara managed the press with values such as fairness, transparency, simplicity, and deep responsibility. In a world where ethical leadership is urgently needed, his life stands as a compelling model of integrity-driven entrepreneurship.

6. ***Venturing with Available Resources:*** St. Chāvara did not wait for ideal conditions or abundance of resources. He started with what he had - limited funds, basic equipment, and a small team. This reflects the entrepreneurial principle of 'bootstrapping', *i.e.*, beginning with available resources and allowing growth to emerge organically. St. Chāvara teaches us that resource limitations are not barriers but catalysts for creativity and determination.

7. ***Creativity Beyond Measure:*** St. Chāvara's approach to problem-solving was marked by extraordinary creativity. Whether it was finding ways to train local people in printing techniques, producing literature in vernacular languages, or using the press to support educational reforms, he constantly thought beyond conventions. His creativity was not just technical but visionary - he imagined possibilities that others failed to see. This is the hallmark of innovative entrepreneurs who anticipate future needs and design solutions that outlive their time.

St. Chāvara's entrepreneurial spirit teaches us that the greatest enterprises are those that create opportunities, uplift communities, and transform society - precisely what he accomplished around 200 years ago.

Human Resource Engineering

After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest."

(Luke 10:1-2)

The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

(Ephesians 4:11-16)

These two New Testament passages, when read together, provide a powerful biblical framework for understanding the necessity of teamwork, division of labour, and full participation within the Christian mission.

Urgency to Delegate Authority: 'After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of Him in pairs to every town and place where He Himself was about to go. He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field."'

This passage demonstrates practical wisdom in organizing our works. Jesus clearly states, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few." The sheer scale of our services requires

a mobilization of *all* available workers. It emphasizes that every believer is called to participate; being a 'saint by halves' is insufficient for the task ahead. By sending them in pairs, Jesus mandates teamwork. This arrangement provides mutual support, accountability, and safety. The mission is inherently communal, not an individualistic pursuit. Jesus delegates authority and tasks to 72 people beyond the core 12 apostles, effectively dividing the work to cover more towns and places. He models that a leader's role involves equipping others to share the load and multiply the effort.

The Spiritual Body and Specialized Roles: 'And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ'. Paul's letter to the Ephesians shifts the focus from a temporary mission assignment to the ongoing, organic structure of the Church as a unified body, highlighting how specialized roles contribute to the whole. God has given specific, differing gifts and roles (apostles, prophets, teachers, etc). This is not a hierarchical structure of *worth*, but a functional division of labour based on God-given abilities. Not everyone is an evangelist; not everyone is a teacher. The primary role of a leader is to "equip the saints for the work of ministry." It emphasizes full participation from every member.

Unity and Interdependence (Teamwork): The ultimate goal is the 'building up of the body of Christ.' Paul stresses interdependence in verses 15-16, describing how 'the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love.' Together, these passages teach that the Christian services require highly organized teamwork. Luke 10 provides the urgent call for mobilization and working in supportive pairs, while Ephesians 4 explains the structure and purpose of diverse giftings, ensuring that every individual contribution is essential for the healthy, unified growth of the entire team (the Church).

St. Chāvara governed the CMI Congregation for 16 years as its Prior General, under the name 'Common Prior'. The people at large took note of the transformation that was taking place in the Church and in the Malabar society through the apostolic activities of the members under the able guidance of St. Chāvara. Priests and people from various parts of Malabar began requesting Chāvara to open houses in their midst. As a result, monasteries were started at Koonammāvu-1857, Elthuruth and Plasanal-1858, Vāzhakkulam-1859, Pulincunnu-1861, Ambazhakad-1868, and Mutholy-1870. For all those works – finding the suitable place to establish a monastery, to arrange the workers, to raise funds etc., - St. Chāvara appointed different priests from Mānnānam Monastery.

- To oversee construction and the purchase of plots of land, St. Chāvara relied on the collaborative efforts of his co-founders and key members of the community, rather than appointing a single individual.
- For the construction of the first monastery at Mānnānam in 1831, St. Chāvara, with co-founders *Malpān* Thomas Porukkara and *Malpān* Thomas Pālackal, supervised the work.
- Since *Malpān* Thomas Porukkara was often traveling for fund collection and dealing with government affairs, young Father Chāvara took a lead role in supervising the construction. He was assisted in this responsibility by Brother Jacob Kaniyanthara.
- When St. Chāvara became the Prior General of the CMI Congregation in 1856, he managed the establishment of several new monasteries. While the day-to-day work was delegated to priests and members of the respective local communities, St. Chāvara, as the ultimate authority, guided and sanctioned these construction efforts.
- In general, major decisions regarding land acquisition and construction were handled by the collective leadership of

the Congregation. This included the co-founders in the initial stages and later, the Prior General (St. Chāvara) and the priests appointed to lead the new religious houses. This collaborative, collective model of management was fundamental to St. Chāvara's leadership style.

- St. Chāvara implemented a unique and highly effective system for fund collection based on charity, community participation, and specific written instructions, primarily known as the *Pidiyari* system that democratized charity and ensured a sustainable flow of resources for his social initiatives, especially the mid-day meal programs in schools.
    - *Individual Duty*: He encouraged every Christian family to set aside a handful (*pidi*) of rice every time they were to cook a meal. This small daily saving was a simple, consistent contribution that did not place an undue burden on any single household, regardless of their economic status.
    - *Centralized Collection*: The rice collected in a special pot at home was brought to the local church every weekend as a family contribution.
    - *Centralized Distribution*: The collected rice was then used by the parishes to feed the poor, the sick, and especially the children attending the parish schools, thus directly funding the mid-day meal scheme.
    - The duty of fund collection was distributed through a combination of community involvement, institutional directives, and the establishment of dedicated organizations: Parishes were made the central hubs for collecting the *Pidiyari* and managing the distribution of aid.
    - St. Chāvara, as the Vicar General, mandated that schools be started attached to every church and that funds for feeding the children be managed locally. This placed a clear institutional responsibility on the parish priests and their communities.

- *Families* (Individual): The daily act of setting aside rice was an individual and family duty, fostering a widespread culture of compassion and shared responsibility.
- *Well-wishers* (Charity): St. Chāvara also had written instructions on how funds should be collected and managed for his 'Home of Charity' for the destitute, beggars, and the sick. This involved appealing to general Christian charity and well-wishers for support, which sometimes included donations of money or even land, to provide long-term financial support for these institutions.
- *Pious Organization*: A pious organization called *Unnimishihāyude Dharma Sabha* was formed specifically to oversee the collection and management of the *Pidiyari* scheme, ensuring its effective and efficient operation.

- In response to an urgent need, St. Chāvara dispatched Father Geevarghese Thoppil to local parishes to appeal to the faithful for assistance. Father Geevarghese returned having successfully collected ₹ 400 in donations from various individuals. Remarkably, the immediate need was met using only half of that amount. The community members inquired of the Prior, "What could we do with the remaining ₹ 200?" Without a moment's hesitation, St. Chāvara replied with characteristic integrity: "Return it immediately to the donors!"
- For the proper running of the first Sanskrit school, St. Chāvara brought from Thrissur a teacher belonging to the Warrier caste, an expert in Sanskrit and Malayalam.
- St. Chāvara took Father Paulose Parampil, a seminary mate, who possessed good taste for and expertise in handicrafts and skilled work to Thiruvananthapuram to visit the government press. They were able to see and learn

everything about the working of the press as much as they wanted. Returning to Mānnānam Father Paulose made the model of a press in plantain stem. According to this model, St. Chāvara got a press constructed in wood by a skillful carpenter.

- In their efforts to find workers, for printing they managed to get the service of a certain Kuriyan, an employee of the government press in Thiruvananthapuram.
- With the influence of Pazhukkāchan of Kottayam, St. Chāvara secured the services of Shivarāman, a goldsmith from the CMS press, to cut the crucial square-shaped metal letters (types).
- For book binding they brought a black Jew from Kochi, who had training in this profession at Mumbai. These two men trained a few local people of Mānnānam in their respective trades.
- To bring ink and paper St. Chāvara and some others then went to Alapuzha. With the help of Cheriankunjhu Elanjickal and Kochupaulose from Vaikom, they arranged with a merchant called Kameesa to import for them paper, ink and lead, all together worth Rs 100, and paid an advance of Rs 10.
    - In September (1845?), when they were informed that the ink and paper have arrived, St. Chāvara along with Father Kanjirapally went to collect it.
    - There were 10 bundles of paper and a barrel of ink, worth a total of more than Rs 400. But they did not have that much money. Providentially there came a good man called Thomman Chennakat who negotiated with the merchant and got him to agree to sell to the Fathers just half a barrel of ink and paper.

Through this decentralized yet coordinated system, St. Chāvara ensured that his humanitarian projects were sustainably funded and managed with the active participation

of the entire community. St. Chāvara's life and administrative style exemplify a profound understanding of the strategic mobilization of human resources to achieve visionary goals. He systematically integrated the principles of teamwork and the division of labour into the very fabric of his institutions, demonstrating a leadership philosophy that valued collaboration over individual heroism. By empowering co-founders, delegating responsibilities within communities and parishes, and establishing highly organized systems, he ensured that every contribution, no matter how small, was essential to the overall mission.

He actively sought out specialized expertise for various endeavours, whether in construction, education, or establishing a printing press, recognizing the value of diverse skills united by a common purpose. Ultimately, St. Chāvara demonstrated that the most effective way to bring about a lasting social and spiritual transformation was through the unified, focused efforts of a well-organized and diverse team working toward shared objectives.

Andrew's School

After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so, they sat down, about five thousand in all. Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also, the fish, as much as they wanted. When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." So, they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets.

(John 6:1-13)

Three active characters are visible in this narration: Philip, Andrew and Jesus.

Philip represents human calculation and despair, while Andrew represents limited faith and action. Jesus specifically asked Philip the question "Where shall we buy bread, that these people may eat?" to test him. Philip's response is immediate, practical, and entirely focused on human limitations and logistics. Philip instantly performed a financial calculation. He determined that even 200 denarii (about eight months' wages for a working man) would not be enough money to buy sufficient bread for each person to have even a small bite. Philip's mind is trapped by the 'facts' and financial impossibilities of the situation. He did not consider Jesus' divine power, despite

having witnessed previous miracles. His perspective was purely 'horizontal', viewing the problem solely in terms of available market resources and money. Philip defaulted to self-reliance, looking at what 'we' could do with 'our' money, rather than considering what God is able to bring about. He essentially concluded that the task was impossible and so unreasonable.

Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, offered a different, albeit still doubting, response. He took initiative to find a resource, but his faith did not extend to believing it would be enough. Andrew displayed initiative by actively seeking out available resources within the crowd and found a boy with five barley loaves and two small fish. He acted as a bridge, bringing a potential, though absolutely inadequate, solution to Jesus. His attitude was one of limited faith, quickly undermined by realism. He brought the boy forward but immediately verbalized his doubt with the rhetorical question: "But what are they among so many?" He acknowledged a potential avenue but had no vision of a miraculous outcome. Although Andrew's faith was not fully formed, his action of bringing the little that was available to Jesus was a crucial step that Philip did not take. He placed the meagre resources before Jesus, even while doubting their value, allowing the divine power to take over.

Jesus' attitude toward Philip and Andrew is a poignant blend of patience, pedagogical testing, and divine provision. He responded to their human limitations - Philip's despairing calculation and Andrew's doubting initiative - with grace and a clear demonstration of His power.

Jesus knew exactly what He was going to do before He even asked the question; the inquiry was solely to test their faith and understanding. Jesus did not rebuke Philip for his purely logistical and pessimistic answer. He patiently allowed Philip to exercise his human logic to its limit, thereby proving that conventional human solutions were insufficient for the scale of the need. Jesus acknowledged Andrew's effort to find the boy and his small lunch. Rather than criticizing Andrew's

accompanying doubt ("But what are they among so many?"), Jesus took the small offering Andrew presented and used it as the foundational element of the miracle. This validates the act of bringing what little we have to God, even if we lack complete faith in the final outcome.

The attitude of Jesus was one of calm confidence in divine power. He did not engage in the disciples' frantic calculations. When the meagre resources were brought to him, Jesus did not lament upon their insufficiency. He simply 'took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he asked the disciples to distribute them'. His attitude shifted the focus from scarcity to gratitude and abundance, demonstrating that a thankful spirit is key to divine intervention. Instead of offering a lengthy lecture on faith, Jesus simply performed the miracle. His action served as the ultimate teaching tool, showing the disciples that their human limitations were irrelevant in the face of the limitless power of God when they put the little, they had in His hands.

Jesus exemplified mature interdependence. He could have created bread out of thin air, but He chose to involve the disciples and the little offering from the young boy. Jesus honoured the boy's simple gift and the disciples' roles in distribution and cleaning up. He showed that God often chooses to partner with humanity, using even our meagre efforts to achieve great things. After everyone was fed, Jesus instructed them to gather the leftovers. This attitude of careful stewardship of resources, even after a miracle of abundance, further underscores His practical wisdom and respect for what was provided.

Philip's attitude was one of complete cessation of effort based on mundane calculation, while Andrew's attitude showed a spark of hope or willingness to explore all options by presenting the small offering to Jesus, which made the miracle possible. Jesus' attitude was one of grace, patience, and a calm, deliberate demonstration of how human effort, when surrendered to divine power, results in abundant synergy.

Significance of the Loaves and the Fish:

The Loaves: The text specifies they were barley loaves. In the first century, barley bread was considered a staple food for the poor and was generally seen as an inferior or coarse grain compared to wheat, which was eaten by the wealthier segments of society. There were only five of these loaves, and they were likely small, flat, round cakes—about the size of small pancakes—rather than the large loaves we find today.

The Fish: There were two small fish. They were likely salted or dried fish, perhaps about the size of sardines, which were a common, inexpensive source of protein for people living near the Sea of Galilee. Fish was a common accompaniment to bread (a relish), making up a typical simple meal of the time.

The Context: The offering belonged to an unnamed young boy who was part of a crowd of about 5,000 men (not counting women and children) who had followed Jesus to a remote, grassy area. Andrew, who found the boy, highlighted the complete insufficiency of this small meal among so many people, asking, "But what are they among so many?" The significance of the items on offer lies in their initial insignificance. Jesus took this small, humble offering, gave thanks to God, and miraculously multiplied it to feed the entire multitude until they were satisfied, with twelve baskets of leftovers gathered afterward. This demonstrated God's abundant provision and the power of giving whatever little one has to God.

The significance of the five loaves and two fish in the given context extends beyond their physical description, offering powerful symbolic and theological meaning.

Limited Human Resources vs. Divine Power: The small quantity of food—meagre barley loaves and small fish for an estimated 5,000 men plus women and children—starkly contrasts human limitations with God's boundless power. Andrew's question, "But what are they among so many?" highlights the

hopelessness of the situation from a human perspective, setting the stage for a divine miracle.

The Bread of Life: The miracle is a 'sign' in John's Gospel, pointing to Jesus as the true 'Bread of Life' (John 6:35) who provides spiritual nourishment and eternal sustenance, not just physical food.

Old Testament Connection: The five loaves can be seen as symbolizing the five books of Moses (the Torah), while the two fish might represent the two books of the Prophets (Nevi'im) and Wisdom (Ketuvim). Jesus 'breaking open' the loaves and fishes symbolizes His fulfilment and expansion of the Old Testament scriptures, revealing their deeper meaning in the light of His presence.

Completeness and Abundance: The number of leftovers gathered filled exactly twelve baskets. This number is often seen as symbolic of the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles, signifying the completeness and perfection of God's provision for all His people, with an overflow of abundance beyond immediate needs.

Trust and Surrender: The central lesson is the power of surrendering what little one has to God. The young boy's willingness to give his entire lunch, (eliciting a reference to 'the widow's mite' given in Luke 21:1-4) despite its apparent insignificance, teaches a lesson in faith and radical generosity.

God Multiplies Our Offerings: The story reassures believers that when they place their resources, time, talents, or efforts in Jesus' hands, He can multiply their impact in ways they could never imagine. Little becomes much when given in faith.

God Uses Ordinary People: The miracle highlights that God chooses to work through the ordinary things and people offered to Him, rather than needing grand resources to accomplish His purposes.

Despite his doubt, Andrew's actions embody a key thought that of bringing what little is available to Jesus. He acts as a connector, a 'people person' who brings an overlooked boy and his simple meal to the Master's attention. This highlights that our role is often to simply offer what we have to Christ, trusting Him with the outcome.

The significance of the five loaves and two fish is ultimately that our insufficiency, when combined with Christ's power and blessing, is more than enough for any situation.

The Andrew's School of thought where the Apostle Andrew sees potential in a seemingly insignificant offering and brings it to Jesus, who then multiplies it to feed thousands resonates strongly with St. Chāvara's activities and attitudes of utilizing humble resources and fostering community action to achieve monumental social change.

Here is how St. Chāvara studied in this school. Like Andrew who did not dismiss the small lunch, St. Chāvara had an unwavering belief that even the smallest contributions and the most marginalized members of society as well held immense potential when directed toward the common good. So, he introduced the *Pidiyari* system (*pidiyari* was originally started to find money for Koonammāvu convent construction, later it was extended to generate money for all projects), which means 'a handful of rice'. He encouraged every family to set aside a small daily portion of rice in a pot. These small, daily contributions were collected and used to provide free midday meals for poor and marginalized children in the schools that he pioneered. Individually, a handful of rice is negligible, but collectively, through this systematic approach, it provided sustenance for thousands and drastically reduced school dropout rates. This perfectly mirrors the multiplication of the loaves and fishes.

Andrew consistently acted as a 'bridge,' bringing people (his brother Peter, the Greeks, the boy with the food) to Jesus. St. Chāvara similarly served as a bridge, connecting the

marginalized with opportunities for education and dignity. He challenged the severe caste restrictions of his time by not only admitting children from all communities to his schools but also providing Sanskrit education, which was forbidden to the lower castes. He brought those who were considered 'untouchable' into the mainstream educational system, effectively bringing them to the source of empowerment and enlightenment. He founded the first indigenous religious congregation for women (CMC) and started schools for girls, empowering women through education and giving them a formal role in societal development. He bridged the gap of inequality by providing opportunities for those traditionally excluded from public life.

The Andrew School of thought highlights interdependence. The boy provided the resource, Andrew made the connection, Jesus performed the miracle, and the disciples distributed the food and collected the leftovers. St. Chāvara's projects were inherently interdependent and synergistic. St. Chāvara strategically involved ordinary people in transformative projects, ensuring collective ownership and responsibility. His initiatives, like the printing press at Mānnānam, were community efforts involving Hindus, Muslims, and Christians working together, illustrating profound social synergy and communal harmony. By founding the CMI (for men) and CMC (for women) congregations, he established dedicated groups of individuals working interdependently with a shared vision for social reform and spiritual renewal. This multiplied his personal vision across generations and geographical areas, a greater outcome than what he could have achieved alone.

In essence, St. Chāvara embodied the 'Andrew School' of thought by seeing great potential in small offerings as well as the marginalized people, acting as a catalyst to bring those resources into a communal context where their impact could be divinely and synergistically multiplied for the well-being of the entire society.

Woman Caught in Adultery

The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, they said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, sir." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again."

(John 8: 3-11)

The account of the woman caught in adultery serves as a masterclass in divine wisdom, exposing the mechanics of a trap while offering a path toward true justice.

The Hypocrisy of Selective Legalism: The opponents presented a question that was technically grounded in the Law of Moses, yet their application was fundamentally dishonest. By bringing only the woman and remaining silent about the men involved, they revealed that their interest was not in the sanctity of the law, but in its use as a weapon to add insult to injury of the marginalized of the society. This highlights a universal truth: when the law is used to target individuals while ignoring the broader context of the offense, it ceases to be justice and becomes a tool of oppression.

The Strategy of Subtle Sedition: The question was a carefully constructed 'subtle sedition' designed to undermine Jesus' authority regardless of his choice. A 'yes' would destroy his

reputation for mercy; a 'no' would provide grounds to arrest him as a lawbreaker. This reflects the reality that challenges to moral authority are often framed as binary traps. Jesus' refusal to be pinned to either extreme demonstrates that wisdom lies in recognizing the hidden motives behind a 'true' question.

The Power of Prudent Ambiguity: Jesus' response – *"Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone"* - is a model of pastoral and divine prudence. By offering an 'ambiguous' reply rather than a direct legal ruling, he redirected the focus from the woman's external act to the accusers' internal state. He did not explicitly deny the law, but he set a condition for its execution that no human being could meet, thereby neutralizing the trap without compromising his status as a Rabbi.

The Confrontation with the Self: The genius of Jesus' reply forced the audience to move from being 'objective' judges to 'subjective' penitents. When the focus shifted to their own sins, the mob's collective energy dissipated. This suggests that true justice requires a level of self-examination. By forcing the questioners to examine their own conscience, Jesus revealed their hypocrisy; they could not throw the stone because they were suddenly made aware of their own need for the very mercy, they were trying to deny the woman.

The Differentiation between Sin and the Sinner: The Lord's final interaction with the woman provides the 'right answer' that the audience eventually understood. He exercised a mercy that was 'technically' outside the immediate letter of the law but was perfectly aligned with the heart of the Lawgiver. By saying, *"Neither do I condemn you,"* he affirmed the dignity of the person. He proved that mercy is not a dismissal of the law, but its highest fulfilment, offering a space for the individual to exist beyond their worst mistake.

The Call to Transformation: The narrative concludes not with a license to continue in error, but with a firm caution: *"Go, and from*

now on sin no more." This underscores that divine compassion is always transformative. While Jesus set her free from the physical stones of the Pharisees, he also called her to free herself from the spiritual chains of her lifestyle. True mercy does not simply 'leave one free' in the sense of abandonment; it provides the grace necessary for a complete and virtuous change of life. In *Nalla Appante Chāvarul*, St. Chāvara reminds:

> "Forgive the mistakes and shortcomings of each other. If you do so, you will experience peace on earth and eternal reward in heaven. How lamentable it is to find a home where there are discord and acrimony between brothers and sisters… If you are not ready to forgive the mistakes and wrong-doings of your family members, how will they forgive you? If they should forgive you for mistakes you may make in future, shouldn't you forgive them today for theirs? If you love only those who have not harmed you, then you are doing what people of other faiths and total strangers, who do not know each other, do. Should you voluntarily create more woes and difficulties than what our great father Adam has bequeathed already? Woe unto those who cause quarrels in families!... There is an instance of an old woman who incited several quarrels in her home. The devil appeared before her and offered her a bag full of gold and took her to the hell as his counsel, saying that she had successfully accomplished in three days what he had been unable to achieve in three years! The honour and blessing of a family lie in coexisting without any quarrels and to be on good terms with everyone. Even animals retaliate against those who resent them. The ability to overlook faults in others and

to forgive them is possible only for those who are really strong, prudent, and honourable."

Through this writing, St. Chāvara translates the high theology of the Gospel into a lived, domestic reality. His counsel to the people of Kainakary serves as a bridge between the divine mercy shown to the woman caught in adultery and the practical preservation of the 'Holy Family' within every home.

The Prudence of Self-Examination: Just as Jesus forced the accusers of the woman to look inward before casting a stone, St. Chāvara challenges family members to recognize their own fallibility. He asks, *"If you are not ready to forgive... how will they forgive you?"* mirroring the logic of John 8:7. St. Chāvara suggests that a 'prudent and honourable' person is one who acknowledges that they, too, will eventually need the very mercy they are currently being asked to provide. He moves the believer from being a judge of others to a steward of mutual reconciliation.

Protecting Others from Humiliation: The woman in the Gospel was brought to Jesus to be publicly shamed and executed. Jesus' silence and subsequent redirection saved her from total destruction. Similarly, St. Chāvara warns against the 'acrimony' and 'woes' caused by those who 'voluntarily create more difficulties' for others. He views family quarrels as a form of social and spiritual 'stoning' that only serves the devil's purpose. To St. Chāvara, the strength of a family lies in the ability to 'overlook faults,' thereby protecting the dignity of the family member rather than exposing them to the 'stones' of gossip and discord.

The Diabolical Nature of Judgment: St. Chāvara's vivid story of the old woman whose quarrels achieved more in three days than the devil could in three years provides a stark warning against the 'subtle sedition' found in the Gospel. The Pharisees

used the law to cause 'turmoil'; St. Chāvara notes that those who incite quarrels are effectively acting as 'counsels for hell.' By contrasting the 'animal' instinct to retaliate with the 'honourable' ability to forgive, he aligns the peaceful family with the divine mercy of Jesus, who refused to participate in the cycle of condemnation.

A Call to Transformed Living: Jesus' final words, "Go, and from now on sin no more" are echoed in St. Chāvara's vision for the families in Kainakary. He does not suggest that the 'shortcomings' of others are non-existent, but rather that 'peace on earth' is found in the active choice to transcend them. He challenges his people to love more than 'total strangers' or 'people of other faiths' do - urging a higher standard of Christian integrity where forgiveness is not just a polite gesture, but the foundational law of the home.

Filial Love as the Pastoral Foundation: Ultimately, the correlation between the Gospel and *Chāvarul* lies in the heart of the teacher. Just as Jesus acted out of a desire for the woman's salvation, St. Chāvara wrote out of a 'filial love' for his people. He did not provide these instructions as a cold legalist, but as a 'Loving Father' (the very title of his work). He understood that to preserve the Syro-Malabar Church and its families from 'acrimony,' he had to instil a spirituality where the interiority of God's love was the only force capable of maintaining the integrity of the family unit.

The profound parallel between the Gospel passage on the woman caught in adultery and St. Chāvara's *Chāvarul* lies in the radical shift from external judgment to internal transformation. Just as Jesus silenced the accusers by forcing them to confront their own sinfulness, St. Chāvara challenges family members to drop the 'stones' of discord and acrimony, reminding them that the need for forgiveness is a shared human reality. St. Chāvara's counsel remains a vital spiritual compass: he identifies the ability to overlook faults not as a sign of weakness, but as the

hallmark of the 'strong, prudent, and honorable.' By warning that domestic quarrels serve a diabolical purpose, he echoes Christ's desire to save the individual from humiliation and the family from ruin. Ultimately, both the Gospel passage and the *Chāvarul* teach that true peace is found when we mirror the divine mercy of the Lord within the sacred sanctuary of our homes, transforming the 'woes' of human nature into the 'eternal reward' of a life lived in love.

"Go and Do Likewise"

And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? How do you read?" And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself." And he said to him, "You have answered right; do this, and you will live."

But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion, and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbour to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed mercy on him." And Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

(Luke 10:25-37)

A neighbour is anyone. We normally limit our definition of a 'neighbour' to just the people who live next door or look like us. A good neighbour is exemplified by the Good Samaritan. Any person that we encounter has the potential to be someone we interact with, help, or who might help us, regardless of their background or proximity. The biblical parable of the Good Samaritan provides the perfect example of what it means to be a truly good neighbour - someone who shows unexpected kindness to a stranger in need, even when others pass by.

The Good Samaritan is not merely a person: it is a ***style*** of functioning; it is an ***attitude*** for engaging with others in distress; it is an ***initiative*** taken to rescue and restore an individual. The parable of the Good Samaritan is not just about one historical person. On the other hand, it is a universal model of behaviour, an exemplar, to be emulated. It is about adopting a proactive mindset focused on actively involving and helping those who are suffering, rather than just observing their pain.

If those in power and authority assume the mantle of neighbour in the narrow sense, justice and fairness will cease; mercy and kindness will disappear; authority figures will abandon their formal, impartial roles and start acting with personal bias (being a 'neighbour' only to their friends or family). Then the objective application of law and equal treatment for all citizens would break down. Conversely, if the authorities act as good Samaritans, they will become reflections of the divine intent. Their sense of justice will exceed the 'righteousness' of the scribes and Pharisees. If they incorporate the *attitude* of the Good Samaritan - acting with selfless compassion and going above and beyond the strict letter of the law - their leadership would reach a higher moral standard, surpassing mere rigid adherence to rules.

Good Samaritan is not the one who merely catalogues the wounds, but the one who pours healing oil and wine. True compassion is not just about documenting problems or observing suffering from a distance; it is about actively intervening and providing immediate, practical aid and comfort (the oil and wine were considered medicines in those times). He is not the one who observes the wounded man, but the one who carries him safely on his own animal. Help is more than just watching; it entails personal sacrifice and physical effort to lift someone out of harm's way and move them to safety, using one's own resources.

Good Samaritan is not the one who abandons the victim on the roadside, but the one who brings him to the inn for care.

The commitment to help does not end with a temporary fix. It means ensuring the person reaches a stable environment where they can receive ongoing professional care and recovery. He is not the one who continues his journey unburdened, but the one who covers the expenses for recovery.

Being a Good Samaritan means accepting the financial and personnel cost of helping another; it requires committing resources until the victim is fully restored, not just until the immediate crisis is over. In short, a good Samaritan is the one who 'finds' the needy, 'feels with' the needy and 'fills' the needy.

'Find the needy' implies identifying those in distress. 'Feel with the needy' implies empathy and compassion. 'Fill the needy' is the call to action that completes the process. The word 'fill' is used in a broad sense, suggesting action that addresses various forms of needs:

1. Physical Need: Providing food to *fill* an empty stomach or resources to *fill* a void in their life (food, housing, clothing)
2. Emotional and Spiritual Need: *Filling* their lives with hope, comfort, or a sense of belonging.

In this sense, St. Chāvara can indeed be called a Good Samaritan, as his life's work exemplified finding, feeling with, and filling the needy in a deeply impactful manner. His actions were rooted in a Christian vision that sought to uphold human dignity and respond practically to the social injustices of 19th century Kerala.

His life and work substantiate this description through the following initiatives:

Finding the Needy (Initial action): St. Chāvara actively sought out the marginalized in a caste-ridden society, including the poor, the sick, orphans, and those considered untouchable. He did not wait for them to come to him; instead, he initiated programs to reach out to them where they were.

Feeling with the Needy (Emotional Connect): He was known for his social sensitivity and compassion, choosing to live a life with minimal facilities and expressing solidarity with the neglected. His actions were driven by a genuine empathy for the semi-starved millions and a commitment to their welfare and freedom, as highlighted by his instruction: "Do not insult the poor; neither should you vex them because if God sees them weeping, he will surely wreak vengeance on you".

Filling the Needy (Practical Action): He translated his compassion into concrete action, addressing both immediate needs of the people and their long-term empowerment. To address the issue of poverty in the families, he provided midday meals and clothing for poor students, a concept far ahead of its time. To find a long-lasting solution to the social maladies, he mandated that every church establish a school, open to children of all castes and religions. He founded a 'Home of Charity' in 1869 to care for the destitute, the sick, the elderly, and the dying who had no one to look after them. He insisted on fair wages and respect for domestic workers, challenging prevailing social norms and advocating for human dignity.

St. Chāvara's life was a testament to Christian humanism and a practical application of the evangelical call to love and serve one's neighbour, making the analogy of the Good Samaritan highly appropriate in his case.

Sheep, Wolves and Shepherds

"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber; but he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens; the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." This figure Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

So, Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers; but the sheep did not heed them. I am the door; if any one enters by me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hireling and not a shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hireling and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So, there shall be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason, the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again; this charge I have received from my Father."

(John 10:1-18)

In this parable of the Good Shepherd, the characters symbolize essential spiritual roles and human nature. The sheep represent people, the followers of God, who are often portrayed

as vulnerable and in need of guidance and protection. The wolves symbolize dangerous forces that threaten the flock. In the biblical context, these often refer to false teachers, the devil, and evil individuals or influences that seek to destroy and scatter the believers. The Good Shepherd is Jesus Christ, who is contrasted with 'hirelings' because He is willing to lay down His life for the safety and salvation of His sheep in contrast with others.

The Good Shepherd: The parable emphasizes Jesus' role as the ultimate, self-sacrificing protector and guide, while warning against false leaders and destructive forces that prey on the vulnerable. Jesus identifies Himself as the Good Shepherd with the key attributes of

1. Sacrificial Love - He lays down His life for the sheep, demonstrating a level of care beyond that of a mere hireling;
2. Intimate Knowledge - He knows His sheep by name, and they know His voice, signifying a personal and intimate relationship with His followers; and
3. Protection and Guidance - He leads the sheep to good pastures and protects them from harm, ensuring their well-being.

The Hireling: The 'hireling' is mentioned in contrast to the Good Shepherd. A hireling works for pay and does not own the sheep. When a wolf comes, the hireling runs away because he does not genuinely care for the flock, leaving the sheep frightened, and so scattered and finally, destroyed. This figure can represent leaders who are in their positions for selfish gain and abandon their responsibility when true danger arises.

The Thief and Robber: Jesus also refers to 'thieves and robbers' who try to enter the sheepfold by climbing in some other way, and not through the gate. They come only to steal, kill, and destroy. These figures symbolize those who try to lead people astray through deception and even coercion.

A meditative reflection on the themes of sheep, wolves, and shepherds provides rich insights into the nature of humanity, the reality of evil, the necessity of good leadership, and the character of God as a protector.

1. The Vulnerability of the 'Sheep' and the Nature of Humanity:

The image of sheep for human beings reflects a profound theological reality, i.e., human beings are inherently vulnerable, often directionless on their own, and prone to wandering into danger. This points to a fundamental need for external guidance and protection, a theme consistent with the Christian understanding of salvation and reliance on God.

Sheep thrive only when they trust their shepherd. Theologically, this highlights that spiritual well-being is not achieved through rugged individualism but through a trusting, relational dependence on the guidance of God. The sheep's knowledge of the voice of their shepherd symbolizes an intimate, discerning relationship with the divine.

Sheep are communal animals. This understanding underscores the importance of the Church (the 'flock') as a supportive community where individuals find safety, identity, and shared purpose under the care of one shepherd.

2. The Reality of Evil and the 'Wolves':

Wolves represent the real and present danger of evil in the world—forces, ideologies, and individuals that seek to 'steal, kill, and destroy' (John 10:10). Theological reflection affirms that evil is not merely an absence of good but an active, real and malicious force that must be confronted.

The presence of wolves necessitates spiritual vigilance. It requires the community of faith to develop discernment, recognizing that threats can be external and also internal for, the false teachers who may look like sheep but are inwardly ravenous wolves (Matthew 7:15). The interaction between the

sheep and the wolves symbolizes the ongoing spiritual warfare between the Kingdom of God and the forces of darkness.

3. The Role of the 'Shepherd' and the Character of Leadership: The defining theological characteristic of the Good Shepherd is sacrificial love. True spiritual leadership is not about power or status, but about self-giving service, protection, and a willingness to lay down one's life for others. The hireling provides a negative theological example of leadership driven by selfish interests. Theological reflection on the hireling emphasizes the moral failure of leaders who abandon their responsibilities when facing adversity, highlighting that integrity is crucial in providing care for the vulnerable.

Ultimately, Jesus as the Good Shepherd is the ultimate theological archetype. The reflection leads to an assurance of God's providence and active care for His creation. The promise that no one can snatch His sheep out of His hand (John 10:28) offers profound comfort and security, affirming God's sovereignty over all threats.

St. Chāvara acted as a true 'shepherd' by actively safeguarding his 'sheep' (the people of the Church and society in 19th century Kerala) from the 'wolves' of his time, which manifested as social injustice, ignorance, caste discrimination, poverty, and spiritual division (schism). His protective actions focused on holistic development - spiritual, educational, and social.

Protecting from the 'Wolves' of Ignorance and Social Injustice: St. Chāvara saw ignorance as the source of many evils and used education as a primary tool for empowerment.

1. *The Pallikkoodam Movement*: As the Vicar General of the Syro-Malabar Church, he mandated that a school be established attached to every parish church, famously threatening to close the parishes that did not comply. This *Pallikkoodam*

movement made education universally accessible, a radical idea when education was a privilege of the elite.

2. *Challenging Caste Discrimination*: He actively fought against the social 'wolf' of the rigid caste system by being the first Indian to admit children from 'untouchable' (Dalit) communities to his schools and even offering them Sanskrit education, which was forbidden to lower castes at the time.
3. *Mid-day Meals and Aid*: To ensure that the poor and Dalit children stayed in school, he initiated the *Pidiyari* (a handful of rice) scheme, where families contributed rice and other materials daily to provide free mid-day meals, clothes, and books, thereby combating poverty and encouraging attendance.

Protecting from the 'Wolves' of Spiritual and Ecclesiastical Division:

St. Chāvara provided strong spiritual leadership and stability during a tumultuous period for the Church in Kerala.

1. *Thwarting Schism*: In 1861, when the serious schism - the 'Roccos Schism' - threatened to divide the Christian community, St. Chāvara's strong stance, effective leadership as Vicar General, and strenuous and principled fight were instrumental in preserving the unity of the Syro-Malabar Church, saving his 'sheep' from being scattered by false leadership.
2. *Spiritual Renewal*: He initiated programs for the spiritual renewal of both priests and laity, including introduction of annual retreats, encouraging popular devotions, and codifying liturgical practices to strengthen the faith and identity of the community.
3. *Formation of Clergy and Religious*: Recognizing the need for well-formed shepherds, he established seminaries for the systematic education and formation of local clergy and founded two indigenous religious Congregations, one for

men (CMI) and another for women (CMC), ensuring the long-term spiritual care and development of the people.

Protecting from the 'Wolves' of Destitution and Neglect:

He addressed immediate physical needs, showing compassion for the most vulnerable.

1. *Home of Charity*: He founded *Upavisāla* (Home of Charity) to care for the destitute, the sick, the aged, and the dying, providing them with refuge and a dignified end, a revolutionary act of organized compassion at the time.
2. *Counsels to Families*: His *Oru Nalla Appante Chāvarul* (Testament of a Loving Father) provided practical, timeless instructions for Christian families on raising children with strong moral foundations, protecting the integrity of the basic unit of society.

In these ways, St. Chāvara was an exemplary shepherd, using innovative and compassionate action rooted in deep prayer and a clear vision to protect and uplift his community against the diverse challenges of his era. The example of St. Chāvara provides a powerful and challenging message for modern pastors and shepherds: True pastoral care involves holistic engagement - addressing not just spiritual needs, but actively combating social injustices and leveraging education to empower and protect the vulnerable.

1. The Shepherd Must Be a Social Reformer: St. Chāvara demonstrated that a pastor cannot be confined to the four walls of a church building while society around them suffers from 'wolves' of systemic injustice. Modern shepherds are called to be prophetic voices against contemporary structures of injustice like poverty, inequality, discrimination, human trafficking, environmental degradation. Faith must translate into tangible action that transforms society and uplifts the marginalized, not just offering spiritual comfort.

2. Education is a Primary Tool for Protection: St. Chāvara saw that ignorance made his 'sheep' vulnerable to exploitation and poverty. His establishment of the '*Pallikkoodam*' movement changed the trajectory of a generation. Shepherds must champion education and empowerment in their communities. They should advocate for accessible quality education, job training, and financial literacy programs to equip their congregations to navigate and overcome modern challenges.

3. Unity of the Flock is Paramount: He fought tirelessly to prevent schism and preserve the unity of the Church. He understood that a divided flock is easy prey for wolves. Shepherds must prioritize unity within their congregations and across different denominations. They should actively work against divisions caused by politics, race, or secondary theological differences, fostering a strong, cohesive community that can stand together against threats from external forces.

4. Innovation in Ministry is Essential: St. Chāvara did not just maintain the status quo; he initiated the first indigenous Congregation for men and women, universal education, and charity homes. He was a pioneer. Modern shepherds need to be innovative in their approach to ministry. They must adapt biblical truths to the current culture, leveraging technology and new methodologies to reach out to the people effectively and address the complex needs of a rapidly changing world.

5. Compassion Must Be Organized: His 'Home of Charity' showed that love must be expressed through practical, organized systems of care, not just spontaneous acts of kindness. Churches should develop sustainable, structured systems of care for the poor, the sick, and the grieving. Compassion must be intentional and effective in meeting the real, material needs of people within and outside the church community.

6. Leadership Requires Integrity and Firmness: He was a firm leader who enforced high standards and protected the Church

from false leadership and internal threats. Shepherds need to lead with integrity, moral clarity, and courage. They must be willing to make difficult decisions, discipline when necessary, and safeguard the theological and moral integrity of the church, even when it is unpopular.

In essence, St. Chāvara's life is a blueprint for holistic shepherding that integrates deep spirituality with radical compassion and proactive social engagement.

Spiritual Vacuum: Return of the Evil Spirits

"When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it wanders through waterless regions looking for a resting place, but it finds none. Then it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' When it comes, it finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then it goes and brings along seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and live there; and the last state of that person is worse than the first. So will it be also with this evil generation."

(Matthew 12:43–45)

"When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it wanders through waterless regions looking for a resting place, but not finding any, it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' When it comes, it finds it swept and put in order. Then it goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and live there; and the last state of that person is worse than the first."

(Luke 11:24–26)

'Deliverance without discipleship is dangerous.' The above parable is a call to active, ongoing faith and submission to God; a half-hearted commitment or temporary clean-up will ultimately lead to spiritual ruin. It takes us beyond a simple warning about demons to a deeper message about salvation, spiritual transformation versus mere reformation, and the necessity of indwelling by the Holy Spirit.

Reformation vs Transformation: The central spiritual insight is the difference between outward 'cleaning' (reformation) and true inner occupation by God (transformation). The 'house' that is 'swept clean and put in order' is a place where sins or evil influences have been removed, perhaps through a moral resolution, or religious observance. However, the crucial flaw is that the house is left 'empty'. This implies that while the negative has been expelled, the positive has not been invited in. Morality or self-improvement alone, without a genuine

relationship with Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, leaves a spiritual vacuum.

The Danger of a Spiritual Vacuum: Nature abhors a vacuum, and so does the spiritual realm. The *emptiness* is an invitation for evil to return: The spirit wanders through 'waterless places,' restless and seeking a place to inhabit, indicating that its nature is to indwell a host. Its return with 'seven other spirits more evil than itself' indicates that spiritual negligence leads to a condition far worse than the original state. This highlights the progressive nature of sin and demonic influence if not actively countered by God's presence.

The Necessity of Divine Occupation: The parable forcefully teaches that merely avoiding evil is insufficient for lasting spiritual well-being. The only lasting solution is to invite Jesus Christ to live within one's 'house' or soul, allowing the Holy Spirit to fill the void left by sin. A true believer is not an empty house waiting for reoccupation; s/he is a temple occupied by the Holy Spirit, which acts as a powerful shield against evil influences (1Corinthians 6:19-20). The Christian life requires constant, active effort to 'fill oneself with the Word of God' and live in obedience to His teachings.

The Broader Context – The 'Wicked Generation': In its immediate context, Jesus directed this warning to the 'evil generation' of his time, particularly the unrepentant Jewish religious leaders. They had seen Jesus' miracles (the 'exorcism' of the nation's spiritual blindness/ bondage) but still they refused to accept Him as the Messiah. Their moral and religious efforts were ultimately 'empty' of true faith in Christ, leaving them vulnerable to a worse judgment than previous generations.

The statement, 'Deliverance without discipleship is dangerous,' highlights that liberation from evil, sin, or spiritual bondage (deliverance) is only the foundational step, not the final goal. The danger arises from the resulting spiritual

vacuum if that newfound freedom is not immediately filled by a commitment to following Christ (discipleship).

The Danger of the 'Empty House': 'Deliverance without discipleship' creates the precise condition described in Jesus' parable: the 'house' that is 'empty, swept, and put in order.' ***Deliverance*** is the 'sweeping out': It successfully removes the immediate problem (the unclean spirit/sin). ***Discipleship*** is the 'filling': It involves inviting Christ's presence in and actively cultivating virtues, prayer, community, and obedience to God's Word. If the space is left empty, the former occupant - or worse influences - will return, as the parable warns, making the final state worse than the first. The danger is a relapse that leaves the individual more cynical, hardened, and in bondage more than before.

Discipleship Provides Structure and Nourishment: Deliverance removes chaos; discipleship builds order. Discipleship involves teaching, training, accountability, and spiritual nourishment (the Word of God, Sacraments, community). Without this structure, the newly delivered person is like a new born baby placed on the street without food or shelter. They are free, but vulnerable and likely to perish or fall back into harmful habits.

Salvation is More Than Just 'Not Sinning': This reflection emphasizes that the Christian life is not merely the *absence* of evil, but the *presence* of God. Deliverance focuses on what we are free *from* (sin, Satan, death), while discipleship focuses on what we are free *for* (relationship with God, purpose, holiness, service). The danger is stopping at the negative ("I do not do that anymore") without pursuing the positive ("I am actively pursuing Christ-likeness").

The maxim 'Deliverance without discipleship is dangerous' serves as a vital caution for all ministry efforts. It demands follow-through. It teaches that the goal of spiritual work is not just freedom *from* bondage, but integration *into* the life of Christ and His community. True spiritual health requires both the

eviction of evil and the continuous occupation of the heart by God through dedicated, lifelong discipleship.

St. Chāvara's leadership following the Roccos schism perfectly exemplifies the need to 'occupy the house' with positive faith and discipline. The schism represented the entry of a disruptive spirit into the local Church, which, once expelled, left the community vulnerable and potentially directionless. St. Chāvara did not merely celebrate the departure of the schismatic influence; he actively implemented measures to fill the void with vibrant, disciplined Catholic life, ensuring the community was not left 'empty' for future spiritual attack.

Following the departure of the intruder Bishop Roccos in March 1862, St. Chāvara immediately turned his attention to mitigating the harm – the vacuum - the schism had inflicted upon the Church of Kerala. He dedicated significant effort to repairing the fractures within the broader Catholic community, restoring order, and rejuvenating the faith life of the people. Concurrently, he addressed matters related to the spiritual well-being and progress of his own nascent religious community (the CMI Congregation).

A significant shift occurred in 1864 when St. Chāvara was transferred to the Koonammāvu monastery. In this new location, his zeal extended beyond the male Congregation. He became actively involved in a pioneering new endeavour: the founding and establishment of the first indigenous Congregation for women, now known as the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel (CMC). His work at Koonammāvu thus marked a crucial expansion of his vision for consecrated life in India.

The founding fathers of the CMI Congregation made a remarkable contribution to the formation and ministry of priests in the Syro-Malabar Church. In those days, candidates for priesthood typically received their formation in informal *Malpānates*, under a priest designated as the *Malpān* (a

Syriac word meaning ‹professor› or ‹teacher›). While some exceptions existed, such as the excellent training provided by *Malpān* Thomas Pālackal at Pallippuram (where St. Chāvara himself studied), the general standard and systematization of teaching were often inconsistent. *Malpān* Pālackal, in particular, dedicated his life to this mission, recognizing the critical need for well-trained and knowledgeable priests within the local Church.

Driven by this awareness, the seminary apostolate became a core mission of the new religious Congregation. A significant initiative led by the founding fathers resulted in the opening of a seminary attached to the Mānnānam monastery, which began functioning as early as 1833. As the older seminary at Pallippuram eventually closed, Mānnānam continued to serve as the sole seminary for the entire Syrian Catholic community for decades. To meet growing needs, additional seminaries attached to other monasteries were subsequently established at Vāzhakkulam (1866), Elthuruth (1868), and Pulinkunnu (1872).

It is noteworthy that these seminaries were primarily intended for the formation of diocesan clergy, rather than exclusively for candidates joining the religious Congregation. However, the founding fathers maintained the hope that these institutions would also naturally foster vocations for their own religious order. This network of seminaries fundamentally changed the landscape of priestly formation in Kerala, moving toward a more systematic and rigorous standard of education and spiritual training. To help the priests sustain their spiritual fervour and pastoral zeal, St. Chāvara took pains to conduct annual retreats for them at Mānnānam, usually by the end of May.

One of St. Chāvara's most important contributions was the compilation and standardization of the Divine Office for his Church. This work was urgently needed, as the daily Divine Office then in use was excessively lengthy and existed only in scarce, poorly preserved manuscripts. Consequently,

many priests tended to neglect its daily recitation. Recognizing this significant pastoral and liturgical challenge, St. Chāvara committed himself to preparing a more practical and handier version of the Divine Office, a task for which he had been initially trained by his *Malpān*, Fr. Thomas Pālackal, during his seminary days at Pallippuram.

St. Chāvara undertook this project with extreme care. He diligently collected various old manuscripts from different locations and organized an assembly of several *Malpāns* at Koonammāvu to discuss necessary revisions. After reaching a consensus, he personally took great trouble to transcribe the entire revised breviary neatly and in an orderly fashion by his own handwriting. This manuscript was reportedly ready by 1862. While only the Book of Psalms was printed immediately during his lifetime, the remaining portions were eventually published in 1876, five years after his death. This standardized Divine Office sustained the practice of canonical prayers for the St. Thomas Christians for almost a century, remaining in use until the introduction of the Malayalam breviary in the late 1960s.

St. Chāvara played a pivotal role in ensuring the orderly and uniform celebration of the Holy Mass within the Syro-Malabar Church. Although the 1774 Missal, which had been reprinted, was available, there was a notable absence of a standardized book detailing correct rubrics or a properly organized liturgical calendar. This vacuum led to priests following diverse, localized customs and practices while celebrating Mass, resulting in a lack of uniformity that caused confusion and embarrassment among the faithful.

In order to remedy this liturgical inconsistency, acting under obedience to the Local Ordinary, he composed a book titled *Tūkāsa*, which contained the detailed rubrics for the Syrian Mass. The *Tūkāsa* codified existing traditional practices and was subsequently printed for mandatory use by all

priests, successfully introducing order and uniformity to the Eucharistic celebrations. This essential text was later reprinted in 1926 and remained the authoritative guide until a new Missal was promulgated by Rome in 1962. For nearly a century, Chāvara's *Tūkāsa* served as the sole means of ensuring an orderly and consistent manner of worship in the Church of St. Thomas Christians, a truly monumental contribution.

Following his liturgical reforms regarding the Mass rubrics, St. Chāvara turned his attention to the urgent need for restoring and updating the liturgical calendar of the Syro-Malabar community. Lacking a calendar of their own ancient tradition, it entirely bypassed distinct Syrian traditions, such as the unique division of the year into specific liturgical seasons. This cultural and spiritual displacement was a matter of serious concern for the Syrian faithful.

Addressing this void, St. Chāvara meticulously prepared a new calendar that incorporated all the essential features of the authentic Syrian Rite liturgy. He overcame significant difficulties to get this crucial work printed before the end of 1865, and it was implemented from the following year onward. This instrumental work preserved the St. Thomas Christians' ancient traditions of dividing the liturgical year into the seasons of Nativity, Epiphany (*Denha*), Lent (*Sauma Ramba*), and others. The success of this undertaking clearly showcases St. Chāvara's deep knowledge of the ancient traditions of his Church and his profound concern for their preservation.

The people of God were the ultimate beneficiaries of the renewal efforts targeting both the clergy and the liturgy. The faithful were delighted to participate in a more meaningful, orderly, and spiritually enriching liturgical service. This was complemented by the more committed and effective pastoral care provided by the priests. A crucial aspect of this care was the ministry of preaching, which formed an integral part of the charism of the nascent religious community.

The CMI fathers adopted the Dominican ideal of 'preaching what one contemplates.' While Father Thomas Pālackal was known as an able teacher of the Word of God, Father Porukkara and St. Chāvara were highly sought-after preachers. Their followers readily adopted the preaching of retreats and sermons as a primary apostolate. Father Porukkara, utilizing the analogy of the miraculous catch of fish in Luke 5:4ff, described how the brothers at the Mānnānam Monastery preached spiritual retreats and sermons, taught Catechism, and heard confessions in various parishes containing thousands of faithful. These efforts, he wrote, effectively rooted out the reign of the devil and guided people toward eternal life.

The success of their preaching ministry was formally recognized when, in 1849, Vicar Apostolic Ludovic Martini appointed them as official preachers of retreats for the entire Vicariate. This mandate required them to conduct eight-day retreats in various churches, with expenses covered by parish funds. Both early biographers, Fathers Leopold and Porukkara, praised the pastoral zeal with which St. Chāvara directly confronted the Roccosian schism. Porukkara highlighted Chāvara's effectiveness during those stormy days as Vicar General for the Syrian churches, using his eloquence, influence, and virtuous life to save many people from the abyss of schism and salvage churches from the Roccosian partisans. Porukkara dramatically concluded that without Father Prior – St. Chāvara – and the religious community acting as a kind of 'Noah's Ark' during that spiritual flood, it is reasonable to believe that all Syrian churches might have been lost to the schism.

Following the severe disturbances caused by the Roccosian affair, the preaching ministry was intensified and reorganized into a more coordinated teamwork approach rather than an individual undertaking. Each retreat was delivered by a group of four or five priests. Every year, between twenty and thirty retreats were conducted in different parishes, often followed by

canonical visitations by the vicar apostolic. It was through the persistent efforts of St. Chāvara and his priests that the regular practice of preaching sermons on Sundays and feast days became standard practice throughout Kerala. Indeed, it is often said that there was hardly a church in the region in which St. Chāvara himself had not preached.

In addition to their work with the priesthood and liturgy, the founding fathers introduced and actively promoted several new practices and devotions within the community. Mention has already been made of *Malpān* Pālackal's pastoral innovations in both Syrian and Latin Rite communities. St. Chāvara later initiated the practice of the Forty-Hours Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament within monastery chapels. He further enriched the liturgical practices by compiling the Office for the Dead and adapting the Holy Saturday Service for use in Syrian parishes. He and his community members actively encouraged popular devotions among the people, such as the Way of the Cross, the Marian Rosary and Scapular, and various Novena Prayers.

While many of these devotions were not strictly liturgical prayers or originally traditional Syrian practices, their introduction significantly enlivened Christian life among the Syrians. They made the faith more engaging and appealing, effectively responding to the legitimate emotional and spiritual needs of the common people. The efforts of the founding fathers demonstrate a balanced pastoral approach: they did their best to nourish and sustain the spiritual life of the faithful by prudently integrating useful universal Church practices with existing Syrian traditions, all while remaining highly attentive to the practical needs of their community in the given circumstances.

St. Chāvara implemented specific, tangible initiatives designed to systematically fill the spiritual vacuum and counteract lingering instability within the Syro-Malabar Church. Recognizing that simply removing the intruder bishop was insufficient, he proactively instituted practical tools

for spiritual regeneration. He authored functional, guiding documents such as *Oru Nalla Appante Chāvarul* (Testament of a Loving Father), which provided structured instruction for daily prayer and Christian family life, fortifying the domestic church against future confusion. He penned narrative poems like *Anasthasyayude Rakthasākshyam* (The Martyrdom of Anastasia) and numerous letters and circulars to motivate the faithful, rally them around orthodox faith, and reinforce unity. Institutionally, he founded robust confraternities, such as the Confraternity of Happy Death and the *upavisala* (home of charity), ensuring constant engagement, mutual support, education, and spiritual accountability, effectively providing a framework of discipleship that ensured the community was spiritually 'occupied' and made more resilient against any future spiritual attacks.

Fr. Thomas Pālackal was widely recognized as an able teacher of the Word of God, while Father Porukkara and St. Chāvara were particularly sought-after as captivating preachers. Their effectiveness was officially recognized by the Archbishop and Archbishop Baccinelli provided a strong endorsement of St. Chāvara, testified that "he is a good, prudent, and obedient person, besides being a captivating preacher." Similarly, Father Thomas Porukkara was noted as a zealous pastor and a highly sought-after preacher. Pleased with the success of their preaching ministry, Vicar Apostolic Ludovic Martini officially appointed the religious fathers as the formal preachers of retreats for the entire vicariate as early as 1849.

Following the crisis caused by Bishop Roccos's departure, the renewal work undertaken by St. Chāvara and his community of religious priests was instrumental in ecclesiastical restoration. They successfully brought most of the separated parishes back into communion with the Church, thus restoring almost complete unity. The faith of St. Chāvara was recognized and acknowledged by none other than the Pope himself after the

successful eviction of Bp Roccos. Regarding the letter of the Pope, Leopold Beccaro notes: "Holy Father Pope Pius IX, gloriously reigning, on hearing about the stability of St. Chāvara's faith and about his zeal for saving the Christians from schism wrote to him a letter of high praise and satisfaction."

St. Chāvara's liturgical reforms profoundly impacted the daily lives of the St. Thomas Christian community by bringing order, uniformity, and enhanced spiritual depth to their religious practices, making faith more accessible and structured for both clergy and the laity. St. Chāvara's efforts standardized the entire liturgical process, ensuring that the Mass was celebrated with decorum and uniformity across all parishes. Lay people knew what to expect during the Mass, fostering a sense of communal unity in their worship experience. The orderly celebrations, along with the introduction of new devotional practices like the Forty Hours Adoration and parish retreats, helped 'invigorate their sacramental life' and generate genuine devotion among the participants.

The re-establishment of the authentic Syrian liturgical calendar was highly significant. It allowed the St. Thomas Christians to reconnect with their unique ancient traditions and identity, moving away from imposed Latin practices. Their daily and yearly lives became structured around meaningful Syrian liturgical seasons like Nativity, Epiphany (*Denha*), and Lent (*Sauma Ramba*), rather than the Latin calendar, grounding their spiritual journey in their own heritage.

Beyond the direct liturgical changes, the reforms were part of a broader spiritual renewal that permeated daily life: The compilation of a more manageable Divine Office for the clergy meant priests were more likely to recite it regularly, setting a better example and ensuring the rhythm of canonical prayer was sustained in the Church. Writings like the *Oru Nalla Appante Chāvarul* (Testament of a Loving Father) provided practical guidance on how to integrate Christian values into everyday

family life, covering everything from raising children to settling disputes and managing household affairs. This helped form strong, well-knit family units. These integrated changes fundamentally shaped the daily existence of the St. Thomas Christians, moving them from a state of potential confusion and disunity to a vibrant, structured, and deeply rooted faith life.

In the context of the parable, the Roccos schism was the 'unclean spirit.' St. Chāvara acted as the responsible householder who not only swept the spirit out but immediately implemented practices (education, discipline, strong family faith, and stable clergy) to ensure the house was actively *occupied* by Christ and the practices of the Church. He prevented a spiritual vacuum, thereby ensuring that the 'last state of that person' (the Kerala Church community) was not worse than the first, but rather stronger and more resilient in its faith.

Fair-weather Friends

Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?"

(Matthew 16: 24-26)

And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who from now on die in the Lord." "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labours, for their deeds follow them."

(Revelation 14:13)

This is a powerful Gospel statement on eternal priorities, the ultimate worth of a single human soul, and the nature of true discipleship. This verse is situated immediately after Jesus instructs his disciples that following him requires self-denial, taking up one's cross, and losing one's life for his sake to find true life. The theological reflection is that the path of discipleship, though it may involve hardship or suffering in this world, leads to eternal gain, while the 'easy' path of worldly embrace leads to eternal loss.

Jesus explicitly states that the human soul has a value that is incommensurable with any earthly possession, including the entirety of the world's wealth, fame, pleasure, or power. The rhetorical question implies the answer: nothing on earth is a sufficient exchange for one's eternal self. It serves as a stark warning against prioritizing temporary material gains over eternal spiritual well-being. A person who dedicates her/his life to accumulating worldly success but neglects relationship with God has, in the ultimate sense, made a profoundly foolish and poor decision, resulting in a net loss. 'Forfeiting one's soul' is often interpreted as facing eternal separation from God, a loss that is permanent and irreversible.

The value of the soul is further emphasized by the price paid for its salvation. Theologians note that no human can pay a ransom for their own soul; only the shed blood of Jesus Christ is a sufficient price for its redemption. This highlights that salvation is a gift of grace through faith, not something that can be earned or purchased with worldly currency or treasures.

St. Chāvara reflects on this Gospel passage, "For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit the life? Or what will they give in return for their life?" in his *Marana-vīttil Pāduvānulla Pāna* and reminds the living, of the need for distinguishing between true and fake friends.

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

He illustrates this lesson with a beautiful narration of a person who was condemned by an emperor to be beheaded.

"While thus I spend my days,
The great Emperor, my king
For some reason unknown
Caused me to be beheaded
When the news spread abroad
I mourned deep o'er my fate
If before the judge I pleaded
My cause without a fear"

St. Chāvara compares four friends to the world, relatives, one's own body and the virtues. These friends had promised to each other that each will be alert to come to the other's rescue in the wake of any tragedy. The condemned man approaches his friends whom he had considered to be very dear to him for help. However, no one could help him escape the wrath of the king's judgment.

The first companion is 'the world'. All the powers of the world – medicine, money and magic – cannot help the one who is dying. All human means are powerless in the face of death.

"Please, I pray let no one know
That I was once your friend
And to save you from this fate
Impossible it is, I swear"

The second friend represents 'the kith and kin'. Their love and good will are not enough. They are helpless like anyone else at this critical moment.

"Sad indeed, the news made me
I sought the means to save you
Helpless I am, the punishment
To ward off, I cannot, my friend!"

The third is one's 'own body', with a beautiful expression to comfort him, embraced him and enquired about his sadness. At last, the third friend reveals that he has no prospect of survival.

"Like a friend he ran up to me
Seeing sorrow writ on my face
In sympathy, me he did embrace
'How come, my friend, your fortunes have sunk
Your countenance so sad?'
Whatever be your sorrow, behold
To remove the cause, I am bent
Remember, I am your loving friend
Little you know of my strength.

When all friends failed and were helpless, the real friend enters the scene namely, 'virtue'. The only friend who could help at this critical moment was the virtue he had earned in life. The fourth friend was invisible and had refrained from making any promises. This last friend was the only helpful friend in the journey to heaven.

"This fourth, my true friend
He reminded me of my end

His voice sounded welcome to my ear
And I listened to it with care
He told me words of wisdom sweet
And day after day to me it was meat
And if those I would often repeat
Great good fortune will be my mead."

The chant is powerful enough to evoke a sober mood in the sad and disheartened people mourning around the deceased. The personal emotions are raised to a universal and supernatural sphere.

By means of this illustration of four friends, St. Chāvara imparts the message of recognizing the real friend in one's life, and this is nothing but the virtues one practices in life. This echoes Revelation 14:13, "And I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Write this: Blessed are the dead who from now on die in the Lord.' 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'they will rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them." which reminds us that we have only our virtuous deeds to follow us after we die.

In the Catholic perspective, the reality of death is not an end but a profound reminder of essential spiritual truths that shape the Christian life. Contemplating death serves as a vital call to reflection and a reaffirmation of core tenets of faith:

Firstly, death serves as an inescapable reminder of human mortality and the transient nature of our earthly existence. The Catholic faith teaches that death is a consequence of original sin and an inherent part of the human condition. This universal reality - that 'all will die one day' - underscores the need for spiritual vigilance and highlights that the life lived on earth is a preparation for eternal life (Hebrews 9:27, James 4:14). This perspective encourages believers to prioritize their relationship with God and to make use of their limited time on earth to pursue holiness, rather than becoming attached to fleeting worldly pursuits.

Secondly, death in the Catholic view is inextricably linked to the core belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and consequently, of all humanity at the end of time (Philippians 3:20-21, 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). The contemplation of physical death reaffirms the Christian hope that death is not the final chapter. The Risen Christ conquered death, and believers who die in grace share in this victory. This eschatological hope transforms the fear of death into an anticipation of the resurrection and the promise of a renewed body and eternal life in communion with God. This reaffirmation of faith provides comfort and perspective amidst the sorrow of physical separation.

Finally, the Catholic perspective emphasizes the profound reality that only the virtues and good works performed during one's earthly life will follow the soul after death (2 Corinthians 5:10, Ephesians 2:10). Worldly possessions, social status, and physical accomplishments are left behind. What matters eternally are acts of charity, faith, hope, and love. This truth serves as a strong impetus for living a virtuous life committed to fulfilling God's will alone. The virtues cultivated and the good deeds done act as spiritual treasures stored up in heaven, which will determine one's standing before the divine judge and their place in the afterlife. The contemplation of death thus motivates a life of active love and service.

Good works and a virtuous life are often theologically presented as a person's only true companion at the moment of death. Death is a universally recognized as a moment of profound fear and uncertainty for most people. However, for an individual who has lived a morally upright and faithful life, this fear is diminished. The conviction that one's meritorious works—seen as real friends or spiritual currency—will accompany them through this transition provides a sense of security and peace that worldly friendships or possessions cannot offer.

This concept is perfectly exemplified in the life and peaceful passing of St. Chāvara. He remained fearless on his deathbed, having understood the folly of depending solely on the temporary friendships and material security of the world. This profound confidence in his spiritual standing is reflected in his powerful confession: "By God's grace I feel confident to say that with their [Holy Family] help I never had an occasion of losing the grace that I received in baptism."

The life and death of St. Chāvara serve as a model of deep spiritual preparation. His confidence was rooted not in the absence of human frailty, but in a lifelong commitment to preserving the grace of God through constant good works and devotion to the Holy Family. His peaceful end affirms the theological truth that true security lies in a virtuous life that provides the unwavering companionship needed to face death without fear.

Tests of Fire

I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.

(Matthew 3:11-12)

As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

(Luke 3:15-17)

According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw - the work of each builder will become visible, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done. If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire.

(1 Corinthians 3:10-15)

In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith - being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire - may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

(1 Peter 1: 6-7)

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you.

(1 Peter 4: 12-14)

The phrase 'tests of fire' in the Bible is a metaphor with two primary interpretations, symbolizing divine judgment and purification through trials.

In the Gospels, fire is used as a powerful symbol with multiple meanings, primarily representing divine judgment, purification, and the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. The most prominent mentions of fire in the Gospels come from John the Baptist, who foretells Jesus' coming ministry. Matthew 3:11–12 and Luke 3:16–17 state that Jesus "will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire". The immediate context clarifies this duality. Jesus "will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire". In this context, the 'baptism with fire' is widely interpreted as a reference to God›s final, unquenchable judgment upon the unrepentant ('chaff') and the purifying work of the Holy Spirit on believers ('wheat').

The symbolism of fire in the Gospels reminds believers of God's presence, the need for purification, and the gravity of judgment based on their response to Jesus.

In the context of the biblical metaphors discussed - particularly the refining of faith in 1Peter and the testing of works in 1Corinthians 3 - one can analytically suggest that, *according to biblical principles*, the 'test of fire' is a necessary process for anything intended to have true permanence or enduring value.

The most direct reference to a 'test of fire' appears in St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, where it describes the evaluation of a Christian's work at the day of judgment (often

referred to as the 'Judgment Seat of Christ'). St. Paul uses an architectural metaphor: Jesus Christ is the only true foundation upon which a life is built. Believers build upon this foundation using different 'materials' which represent their works, service, and motives. Gold, silver, costly stones represent actions done with pure motives, faithfulness, and alignment with God's will; works of lasting, eternal value. Wood, hay, straw represent superficial deeds, selfish motives, or works lacking eternal significance that focus on worldly recognition. The 'fire' is the divine judgment that will test the quality of each person's work.

The outcome is that the works of 'gold, silver, costly stones' will survive the fire, and the builder will receive a reward. Works of 'wood, hay, straw' will be burnt up, and the builders will suffer loss of reward, though the persons themselves will still be saved, 'as one escaping through the flames'. This passage emphasizes that while salvation is a gift by grace through faith in Christ and secure for believers, the rewards received in heaven are dependent on the quality of one's service and obedience.

Another significant biblical usage of the imagery of fire is found in the first letter of St. Peter, where 'fiery trials' are described as a means of testing and purifying faith, much like fire refines gold. The trials, sufferings, and persecutions that believers face is compared to a refiner's fire. This process is not meant to destroy but to prove the genuineness and quality of one's faith, making it more precious than perishable gold. A proven faith results in 'praise and honour and glory when Jesus Christ returns'.

In summary, the 'test of fire' serves as a powerful biblical metaphor for evaluation: of a believer's *works* at judgment (1Corinthians) and of a believer›s *faith* through earthly trials (1Peter). The tests of fire serve a dual purpose: ***Purification*:** The fire burns away impurities (dross in metal; hay, wood, and straw in architecture) leaving only the valuable and lasting material (pure gold; costly stones). For faith or character to be truly

permanent, it must be refined through trials and difficulties. ***Validation*:** The test validates the integrity and substance of the material. Only what can withstand intense heat is proven to be genuine and worthy of preservation.

The 'test of fire' does not *create* permanence, but rather *reveals* or *proves* it. The suffering and trials mentioned in 1Peter are designed to produce a faith that is "found to result in praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ," indicating an outcome that is divinely recognized and enduring

There were numerous 'tests of fire' in the life of St. Chāvara. His life featured numerous severe challenges. Following the death of the Congregation's senior founders, he assumed significant leadership responsibilities. The new religious community faced continuous setbacks from its inception. While some could be considered initial difficulties, others could have been avoided if St. Chāvara had been granted proper support from the ecclesiastical authorities.

Indeed, while at the helm of the community, St. Chāvara was often subject to the dictates of the missionaries. In hindsight, and certainly in his profoundly scrupulous trust in Divine Providence, he would have perceived the hand of God guiding their destiny, even in the most challenging decisions concerning the community's fundamental tenets. He passed the 'tests of fire' victoriously.

The members of the new religious Congregation were forced to accept a name, rule, tradition, and religious ideal that were fundamentally at odds with their own beliefs and was against their will. Furthermore, half of the community left after a new, excessively strict rule - more suitable for veteran European monks than for novices - was implemented. The progress of their first monastery was hampered by what were considered unnecessary transfers of founding members. When some local parishes and their clerical leaders opposed the new monastery's foundation, influenced by them, the Archbishop

promptly issued orders to block its progress. A demand for a native bishop also resulted in the dismissal of several prominent members.

The religious community frequently faced financial hardship, preventing them from gathering the necessary funds to build the Convent at Koonammāvu. They also lacked the resources to create a wooden press, the required ink, and the *achukal* (printing blocks) for it. Navigating these profound 'tests of fire,' St. Chāvara provides us with a deeply inspiring example, demonstrating that enduring such trials is the only path to achieving lasting accomplishments in our lives, whether in spiritual development, missionary endeavors, or monastic pursuits.

Fishers of Men

As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea - for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

(Matthew 4:18–22)

As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea - for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

(Mark 1:16–20)

The Vocation to be Fishers of Men – A Call to Discipleship and Leadership:

From these passages, we can generate several profound reflections centred on transformation, commitment, and purpose, which shape the nature of Christian vocation and leadership.

Firstly, the call highlights the shift from a physical occupationm to a spiritual vocation. Fishing for fish is a job focused on sustenance and commercial activity, while "fishing for people" implies an endeavour focused on the spiritual well-being, growth, and salvation of humanity. Leadership in religious life, particularly within a community context, involves moving beyond practical, commercial, or temporary gains to pursuing an enduring, life-altering purpose. A leader's focus shifts from managing material resources to nurturing human potential.

Secondly, the immediate and radical commitment demonstrated by the disciples in leaving their nets challenges our modern tendency toward caution and incremental change. Both accounts stress their instantaneous response: 'immediately they left their nets and followed him'. True leadership demands a radical, often immediate, commitment that prioritizes a new, enduring vision over previous comforts, security, or established ways of life (the 'nets' and 'boats'). Discipleship requires leaving behind the temporary or the familiar.

Thirdly, the success of 'fishing for people' requires collaboration and community building. Leaders must shift their mindset from individual achievement or small-scale projects to building a sustainable community and an integrated ecosystem. The strength of this communal effort lies not in one person's ability to catch a single person but in the collective endeavour to gather many people into a functional, value-based community.

Fourthly, Jesus also modelled the repurposing of existing skills. He did not ask the fishermen to become carpenters; he re-tasked their existing skill set (patience, hard work, use of nets, knowledge of the 'waters') for a new spiritual purpose. Effective leaders do not need to discard all previous knowledge. A spiritual redirection using existing skills and applying them to the higher calling of building an enduring culture in society is what is expected of them. The mission is new, but the discipline is repurposed.

Finally, the analogy implies that ministry and leadership are not passive endeavours. Fishing is an active, intentional pursuit. One must go to the water, cast nets, and actively seek the catch. Building a faith culture in society is an active mission of outreach, engagement, and intentional pursuit of people. It requires leaving the comfort of one's existing boat and actively seeking out the community in its 'sea', bringing them into the safety and structure of the faith.

St. Chāvara – A Model of Active Discipleship:

St. Chāvara became a 'fisher of men' by employing practical and compassionate methods that addressed the holistic

needs of society in 19th century Kerala. He 'fished' by creating environments where people of all backgrounds were drawn in by the promise of dignity, empowerment, and community support.

His approach was rooted in locating the 'sea' of societal needs among the marginalized, the illiterate, and the sick - those largely ignored by the rigid caste system of his time. He understood that true outreach meant going where the need was greatest, rather than staying within established religious comforts.

He used empowerment and dignity as his primary 'offer,' which was revolutionary at the time. He provided the platform for universal education with inclusive learning through the *Pallikkudam* (schools attached to churches) and a Sanskrit school in 1846, challenging social injustice by allowing lower castes to access education, which was previously reserved for the elite classes alone. The schemes he initiated, like mid-day meals (funded by the *pidiyari* system of collecting a handful of rice daily), reduced dropout rates and ensured that the most vulnerable could remain in the 'boat' of education and faith.

St. Chāvara focused on holistic welfare first, embodying the 'come as you are' principle. He founded a house of hospitality (*upavisāla*) for the destitute, the pauper, the sick, and the aged, offering refuge without preconditions of conversion or social status. This powerful testament to Christian love in action drew people in through genuine care rather than conversion demands. By co-founding the first indigenous Congregation for women (CMC), he provided avenues for women to be educated and involved in social action, which was unheard of in 19th century Kerala.

He consistently concentrated on faithful action and building permanent community structures, trusting that societal and spiritual transformation would follow. He established the first indigenous printing press, which published the first

Malayalam daily newspaper, providing continuous channels for information and faith formation. Through the two thriving religious Congregations he initiated, he ensured that the values and mission would endure for generations, rather than relying solely on his temporary presence as an individual leader.

Cultivating the Virtues of a Fisher of Men:

Becoming a fisher of men today requires personal growth and an approach centred on genuine relationships, thoughtful engagement, and reliance on the Holy Spirit. These qualities ensure the mission is carried out as a compassionate, deeply relational, and intentional endeavour.

1. *Active Listening Culture*: Being an 'active listener' transforms the mission from a mere recruitment drive into empathetic engagement. A good fisherman understands the habits and location of the fish; similarly, an active listener understands the struggles, hopes, and questions of the people they are trying to reach. You cannot effectively 'cast the net' if you do not know the 'waters' you are fishing in. This quality helps build trusting relationships and tailors the Gospel message to actual life experience, making outreach authentic.
2. *Opening the 'Heart's Eye'*: St. Paul speaks on the 'opening of the heart's eye' (Ephesians 1:18), which is a metaphorical way of describing empathy, spiritual intuition, and seeing people through the lens of compassion, as Christ did. This allows leaders to look past a person's current brokenness or scepticism and see their inherent dignity and potential within the Kingdom of God. A 'heart's eye' view facilitates a 'do not clean them first' approach, allowing leaders to suspend judgment and embrace people with unconditional love, fostering compassionate action rooted in genuine care rather than performance metrics.
3. *Authentic Presence*: Instead of just focusing on the activity of fishing, focus on the *way* you fish. This means being

fully present and genuine with people, rather than just performing a role or executing a program. An authentic presence builds the trust necessary for someone to leave their old life ('nets') and join the faith community; your own authenticity invites theirs.

4. *Spiritual Discernment*: Discernment involves a wisdom that goes beyond surface-level observation to understand the spiritual currents, fears, and hopes that drive people's lives. It helps leaders locate the 'sea' more effectively and know how to cast the net in a specific situation, understanding when to push, when to wait, and what kind of message is needed for different individuals.
5. *Relational Patience*: This virtue is about mastering the long game of discipleship. Fishing involves long waits; you cannot force a fish to bite. This connects perfectly with trusting the harvest to God. Leaders must be patient, consistently casting the net (evangelizing) without demanding immediate, measurable results. It is about being faithful to the process, not the outcome.

In conclusion, the biblical mandate to become 'fishers of men' is fundamentally a call to a transformative, lifelong vocation rather than the execution of a temporary project. It requires a mindset shift that prioritizes enduring purpose and genuine human connection over quick, superficial results. As demonstrated by the life of St. Chāvara, effective spiritual leadership is achieved through compassionate action, empathy, and a commitment to building stable, value-based communities that address holistic needs. By cultivating virtues such as active listening, authenticity, and relational patience, leaders can effectively cast the net of the Gospel message into the 'sea' of society. Ultimately, this approach ensures that the mission is a resilient, deeply relational endeavor that transforms individuals and builds a lasting culture of faith, trusting always in God's work and the eventual harvest.

A Cup of Cold Water

"And whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple – truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward."

(Matthew 10:42)

"For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward."

(Mark 9:41)

In the economy of God's Kingdom, the significance of an act is measured not by its scale, but by the love and intentionality behind it. The Gospel passages of Matthew 10:42 and Mark 9:41 present us with a startlingly simple promise: that even a cup of cold water given in the name of a disciple will never lose its reward. This divine validation of the "small" challenges our human tendency to pursue only the grand and the visible. Even the smallest acts of kindness and hospitality, when motivated by genuine love for Jesus and extended to His followers, are noticed by God and will be divinely and eternally rewarded. Before we explore how these seemingly minor gestures ripple into eternal significance, we must first understand the spiritual weight of the ordinary, recognizing that in the hands of the Creator, the smallest seed of charity contains the full DNA of the Gospel.

1. Value of Small Acts: Jesus highlights the 'cup of cold water' as a powerful metaphor for the smallest, most basic act of hospitality or care that anyone, regardless of their status or resources, can perform. Jesus highlights that the value is not in the cost or skill of the action, but the heart and intention behind it. This teaches that no act of kindness is too insignificant in God's eyes when done with the right heart.
2. Motivation Matters: The act must be done specifically 'in the name of a disciple' or 'because you belong to Christ'. This means the motivation is a recognition of and love for the

recipient's connection to Jesus, not a desire for personal gain or recognition. This transforms a common act of hospitality into an act of allegiance and love for Jesus Himself.

3. Identification with Christ: By receiving Jesus' disciples ('these little ones', referring to humble followers), a person is effectively receiving Jesus and, consequently, the One who sent Him (Matthew 10:40). Acts of service to believers are acts of service to Christ Himself (Matthew 25:40). Jesus teaches that acts of kindness (or persecution) shown to His followers are considered by Him as acts done directly to Him (Acts 9:5). The way people treat His 'little ones' (disciples who may be humble or vulnerable in the eyes of the world) reflects their relationship with Christ.
4. Guaranteed Reward: The promise that 'he will never lose his reward' (using a double negative for emphasis in the original Greek) guarantees irreversible divine recompense. Jesus solemnly assures that such acts 'will certainly not lose their reward'. This promise encourages believers to serve unselfishly, trusting in God's faithfulness to remember and recompense their love and work, even if the world overlooks it.

In his letter to the nuns at Koonammāvu on 04 April 1870, written just before his death, St. Chāvara offered this reminder: "Any action, no matter how small, when carried out with an awareness of God's presence, contributes to spiritual development and helps cleanse the soul of sin." This is something similar to the 'little way' of St. Theresa of Lisieux. You and I suffer from the same ailment at present, and so both of us need the same treatment. In order to make amends for the sins of our past lives, and the faults we continue to commit, we need virtues. However, we are unable to cultivate them. For such people, there is an easy method, which I will explain below:

> *Offer up to God every pulse beat of our veins, every blink of our eyes, every breath we take and even the little chirping of birds – yes, everything – as our prayers. Offer all these in union with the works of our Lord, which are of infinite merit. In this way, we will wash away all our sins while also acquiring an abundance of merit. These merits can be further multiplied. For example, when I move my left leg, I say: 'Lord with the Precious Blood that flowed from the sacred wound on Your left leg, wash away all the sins and misdeeds I am guilty of'. Secondly, 'by this movement, I desire to perform all the good works ever done by Your saints'. Thirdly, 'I give this movement the same meaning and significance that You assigned to it when You moved Your leg'.*

St. Chāvara was reminding the nuns to continuously live in the presence of God, a practice he believed would foster spiritual growth. It was an enduring invitation to sanctify every moment. While these practices might seem simple or insignificant, wholeheartedly adopting them prepares individuals for a spirit-centered life in Jesus Christ and cultivates a broad-minded spirituality. Essentially, St. Chāvara was advocating for a life lived fully 'in this moment, here and now'.

We can meaningfully practice these tips in manifold ways. Look for everyday opportunities to refresh and support fellow brethren and those in need, as simple acts like a kind word, a listening ear, an encouraging text, or practical aid can assist those who are weary or in distress. This practice opens our inner eyes to the truth that all people are part of the same body, and all faithful service - whether in a prominent ministry role or a supporting position - is valued equally by God. Focus on embodying unselfish love by serving those who cannot repay the favour, particularly the 'little ones' who are new in faith, marginalized, overlooked, or vulnerable within the community or the world at large.

The message of Matthew 10:42 and Mark 9:41 is relevant even today. The message is very clear that even the smallest acts of genuine kindness and service, motivated by love for Christ and offered to His followers, are noticed, valued, and will be rewarded by God now and in the eternity. These verses emphasize humble, selfless service and the profound truth that serving others is equivalent to serving Jesus Himself. The teaching offers a practical insight to every believer, regardless of their status or resources, that they can demonstrate Christ-centred compassion in daily life. It challenges us to constantly check the motivation, ensuring that acts of generosity and service stem from a genuine love for Jesus and a desire to advance His kingdom, not for personal status or worldly applause.

'Bruised Reed' and 'Smoldering Wick'

When Jesus became aware of this, he departed. Many crowds followed him, and he cured all of them, and he ordered them not to make him known. This was to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah: "Here is my servant, whom I have chosen, my beloved, with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. He will not wrangle or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets. He will not break a bruised reed or quench a smouldering wick until he brings justice to victory. And in his name the Gentiles will hope."

(Matthew 12: 15-21)

In the above Gospel passage, the symbols of the 'bruised reed' and 'smouldering wick' are powerful metaphors for the weak, vulnerable, and struggling individuals whom Jesus, as the compassionate Messiah, came to gently heal and restore, rather than discard or condemn. In the cultural context of the Old Testament times, the objects used by Jesus in this parable were instantly recognizable symbols of everyday weakness, fragility, and a sense of worthlessness. Understanding this background helps deepen comprehending the profound compassion of Jesus' actions.

Reeds were common, simple plants found along the Jordan river and the local marshes. They were used for making basic purposes like housetops, baskets, simple flutes, or measuring rods. It is an inherently fragile, weak plant that grows along waterways and can be easily bent or broken by wind or pressure. Once damaged or cracked, it was considered useless, for instance, as a measuring rod or a musical pipe. The 'bruised reed' symbolizes people who are emotionally, physically, or spiritually broken by the hardships of life like ill-health, loss, sin, pain, or injustice. They are on the verge of total collapse and may feel devalued or beyond repair by the world's standards.

A reed was cheap and highly fragile. If it became 'bruised' or snapped - even partially - it lost all utility. It could no longer hold a straight line as a measuring stick nor produce a clear sound as a pipe. A damaged reed was simply discarded, trampled underfoot, or used for kindling fire. It was a throwaway item, symbolic of a person marginalized by society due to weakness, failure, or misfortune.

Jesus' refusal to 'break' the bruised reed signifies His extraordinary gentleness, patience, and commitment to restoring what others deem worthless. He does not deal harshly with the weak but offers support and mending, demonstrating that God's mercy triumphs over judgment.

Oil lamps were essential for life after sundown, providing the only source of domestic light. They required careful maintenance to produce a bright, steady flame. A lamp's wick was typically made of flax. A 'smouldering' wick indicates a lamp that is low on oil and nearly extinguished, producing smoke rather than useful light.

A 'smouldering' or smoking wick was inefficient and irritating. It signalled a lack of oil and produced acrid smoke that stung the eyes and blackened the walls. A conscientious homeowner would immediately 'snuff out' the smoking wick using small metal tongs or pliers, trim it, add oil, and relight it properly. A smouldering wick was a nuisance to be dealt with quickly and decisively - symbolic of a person whose spiritual life or hope was failing, becoming a burden or annoyance to the community.

The smouldering wick represents individuals whose faith, hope, or spiritual fire has grown dim due to discouragement, neglect, or the 'storms' of life. They are close to giving up entirely, with only a faint spark of belief remaining.

Jesus' refusal to 'snuff out' the smouldering wick highlights His commitment to nurturing even the smallest glimmer of faith or potential. Instead of extinguishing the struggling soul,

He tenderly provides the 'oil of grace' (the Holy Spirit) to fan the flame back into a bright light, demonstrating God's patience and restorative power.

Jesus will not break the bruised reed: His mission is fundamentally restorative. He does not treat the broken human being as disposable. Instead, He sees inherent value. The 'bruised reed' finds in Jesus a gentle Mender who reaches down to those whom the society has crushed, offering strength and support when they are at their nadir or the weakest point. He provides the grace necessary to stand upright once more, transforming an object of worthlessness into an instrument of His kingdom.

Jesus will not snuff out the smouldering wick: He responds to the failing light not with impatience or abandonment, but with nurturing. When hope is nearly extinguished and a person is producing smoke rather than light, Jesus does not discard them. He gently adds the 'oil' of the Holy Spirit and His presence. He fans the faintest spark of faith back to life, strengthening the struggling individual so they can shine brightly again, fulfilling the mandate to be 'the light of the world' (Matthew 5:14). Ultimately, the significance is that while the world abandons the weak and extinguishes the failing, Jesus saves and restores, demonstrating that God's strength is made perfect in human weakness (2Corinthians 12:9).

Jesus is the gentle Servant who does not use His immense power for aggression or condemnation, but for healing, tenderness, and quiet support of the vulnerable. This contrasts sharply with the legalistic and harsh approach of the Pharisees in the preceding verses. The passage assures the broken-hearted, the weak, and the outcasts that they are not discarded by God. Jesus sees value where others see failure and offers hope and dignity to those who feel crushed. His gentle method is not a sign of weakness, but a path to ultimate victory. He will continue His restorative work until God's true justice –

which lifts up the downtrodden and heals the broken-hearted – triumphs over all evil.

Drawing the parallel between Jesus' gentle handling of the 'bruised reed' and 'smouldering wick' (Matthew 12:20) and St. Chāvara's life reveals how the Saint consistently mirrored Christ's compassionate approach to those who were weak, failing, or marginalized. St. Chāvara proactively sought to restore dignity and rekindle hope in situations where others might have simply abandoned the failing efforts.

Nurturing the 'Smouldering Wick' of Vocations:

In the early days of the CMI Congregation, there were instances of instability and members leaving the demanding life in the monastery. A more rigid leader might have harshly dismissed those who showed weakness or faltering commitment. However, he handled the situation with immense patience and understanding. Instead of extinguishing their dimming spiritual fire, he provided encouragement, structure, and ongoing formation. He acted as the nurturing hand that provided 'oil' to the wick, seeking to fan the small spark of vocation back into a flame by creating a supportive community environment that allowed members to recover from discouragement.

Healing the 'Bruised Reed' of the Schism Victims:

The Roccosian schism left many parishes and families broken, confused, and alienated from the Church - truly bruised reeds trampled by ecclesiastical conflict. The easy path would have been to condemn these 'lapsed' communities. As Vicar General, St. Chāvara approached the separated parishes not with judgment, but with a pastoral heart. He used his 'eloquent sermons and life of virtue' to gently persuade and restore them. He did not 'break' the already bruised people with harsh condemnation but provided a pathway back to unity through education (parish schools), clear liturgy (*Tūkāsa*), and structural support. He built an 'ark' (as his biographer Porukkara

described it) for those who were otherwise lost in the flood of schism, providing refuge and restoration.

Fanning the Flame of the Indigenous Church:
The local St. Thomas Christian Church itself was a kind of 'smouldering wick,' struggling to maintain its unique identity while relying heavily on foreign superiors and Latin practices. Its distinct traditions were close to being snuffed out. St. Chāvara's efforts to compile the Syrian Divine Office and the Liturgical Calendar were acts of nurturing this failing light. He did not abandon the struggling traditions; he meticulously restored it, providing the necessary 'oil' of authenticity so that the local Church's ancient spiritual flame could shine brightly again for almost another century.

Upholding the Dignity of the Marginalized (Women and Families):
St. Chāvara consistently uplifted those whose voices were often ignored in society like ordinary families and women. His *Oru Nalla Appante Chāvarul* affirmed the dignity and spiritual importance of the domestic sphere. His founding of the first indigenous women›s Congregation (CMC) provided a voice and a structured path for women seeking to take up consecrated life, treating them not as marginal figures but as essential co-workers in the Church's mission. He refused to dismiss the potential of those overlooked by the patriarchal culture of the time. In every instance, St. Chāvara lived out the Messianic prophecy, choosing always to nurture the dim spark and mend the broken stem, embodying Christ's tender mercy over harsh judgment.

In conclusion, the life and ministry of St. Chāvara offer a powerful and practical illustration of the Messianic ideal presented in Matthew 12:20: that the compassionate servant of God 'will not break a bruised reed or snuff out a smouldering wick.' His uniqueness lies in his consistent refusal to discard those who were weak, failing, or marginalized. Where others

might have applied rigid discipline or simply abandoned struggling individuals and institutions, St. Chāvara embodied Christ's restorative grace. He chose patience over impatience, restoration over condemnation, and gentle nurture over harsh judgment. Whether rekindling the dim flame of the indigenous Church's ancient traditions, mending the 'bruised reeds' bruised by schism, or providing structure for those whose vocations faltered, St. Chāvara's pastoral approach ensures that his legacy remains a testament to the enduring power of mercy and the transformative potential of strengthening, rather than crushing, the fragile human spirit.

Dependence, Independence and Interdependence

"Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go."

(John 21:18)

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - Jews or Greeks, slaves or free - and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honourable we clothe with greater honour, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.

(1Corinthians 12:12-26)

Dr. Varghese Panthalookaran CMI outlines three critical phases in individual development: Dependence, Independence, and Interdependence. The first phase, dependence, defines childhood, where an individual relies entirely on others for sustenance and guidance. Adolescence marks the transition to independence, characterized by asserting free thinking and decision-making, which facilitates the development of unique, distinguishing traits. Adulthood signifies the mature phase of interdependence, where individuals maintain their autonomy while actively supporting and nurturing the freedom of others.

In the above Gospel reading, the description of being 'younger' suggests an initial stage of natural dependence on caregivers, which has a spiritual parallel in early faith where individuals rely on guidance from others. The phrase 'you dressed yourself and went where you wanted' signifies personal autonomy and self-reliance, which is crucial for developing individual identity. However, the passage implies that remaining solely in this phase, focused only on self-interests, can limit growth and effectiveness. Peter's impulsive actions and self-confidence during this time led to some undesirable consequences. The shift to being 'old' and led by 'someone else' represents a move beyond self-reliance to spiritual maturity and surrender. This stage involves yielding personal desires to a higher purpose or the community, allowing God to work through circumstances or others. This is not a return to helplessness but a mature choice to integrate one's life with Christ's mission and the needs of others. The prophecy of Peter's death illustrates that true strength comes from vulnerable reliance on God's grace rather than independent ability.

Interdependence of Peter as in the Book of Acts: After Jesus' ascension and the descent of the Holy Spirit, Peter transitioned from the impulsive, independent disciple seen in the Gospels to an interdependent and mature leader in the early Church. His life, as recorded in the Book of Acts, exemplified the mature phase of interdependence.

1. Shared Leadership and Decision-Making:

Peter did not unilaterally run the nascent Church. In Acts, he is consistently shown working in partnership with the other apostles, particularly John (Acts 3:1; 4:13). When critical decisions needed to be made - such as selecting a replacement for Judas (Acts 1:15-26) or addressing doctrinal disputes at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) - Peter operated within a communal framework, respecting the wisdom of the community. The passage challenges the often-reckless individualism very much prized in modern society, especially in the world of business. Effective modern communities and organizations recognize that the 'one-man show' model is unsustainable. The most successful endeavours utilize synergy, where diverse talents interact to produce outcomes greater than the sum of individual efforts.

2. Reliance on the Community:

When Peter was imprisoned, the Church gathered to pray fervently for his release (Acts 12:5). His ministry was sustained by the collective faith and action of the community. He was no longer acting depending solely on his own strength but was organically interwoven into the life of the entire Body of Christ. The ultimate maturity in the modern context, just as in the passage, is a move towards mutual flourishing. The 'interdependence' phase means actively supporting and nurturing the freedom and success of others along with one's own, preventing the 'adolescent version of freedom' from creating isolated, unproductive systems.

3. Vulnerability and Mutual Support:

The prophecy of John 21:18 became a reality in his willingness to be led, metaphorically and literally as well. His later ministry was defined by a vulnerability that allowed the community structure to support him, demonstrating true interdependence where members rely wholly on one another. The 'mature' leader, by this interpretation, is not the all-knowing, fully

independent figure. Instead, mature leadership recognizes its own limits and embraces vulnerability. A leader who can say "I need you" or "We must decide this together" creates a more robust, interdependent system.

According to Panthalookaran, the natural progression of freedom follows this sequence from dependence to interdependence, via independence. If a person's understanding of freedom freezes at the level of mere independence, it becomes stunted. The quest for mature freedom must reach the level of interdependence, where the freedom of one individual cross-fertilizes with that of others, leading to mutual enhancement and enrichment.

This mature conceptualization of freedom operates on the principle of synergy - where the combined effect of interaction is greater than the sum of individual contributions (the 1+1>2 situation). Panthalookaran posits that freedom and synergy are the first and second laws of being creative. Creative minds, throughout history, have endured profound personal sacrifices—hunger, loneliness, rejection, and even death—to preserve this creative freedom. Their awareness of 'creating something totally new' within this synergistic framework engendered the necessary perseverance to overcome these hardships.

Practiced solely as independence, freedom creates disharmony and 'monsters.' If one person's freedom is incompatible with another's, it becomes a societal burden and remains unproductive because it fails to cross-fertilize. Independence represents only an adolescent, immature version of freedom. When personal freedom facilitates, reinforces, and multiplies the freedom of others, grounded in the principles of synergy and interdependence, individuals coalesce into a single, healthy, and functional body.

In 1Corinthians 12:12-26, the Apostle Paul uses the human body as a vivid metaphor for the Church in order to explain

the principle of synergy - the idea that the collective is greater than the sum of its individual parts. The passage demonstrates synergy through the relationship and functions of diverse body parts.

1. Unity in Diversity: Paul emphasizes that a body "though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body". This highlights that unity does not mean uniformity or sameness. The synergy comes not from identical components, but from diverse elements working in symphony.
2. Interdependence and Necessity: No single part, even the most prominent (the eye or the head), can function in isolation or claim self-sufficiency from the seemingly weaker parts (the hand or the feet). The 'weaker' or less visible members (like internal organs) are often the most indispensable for the whole body's survival.
3. Mutual Concern and Empathy: God designed the body 'that its parts should have equal concern for each other'. When one part suffers, all parts suffer with it; when one is honoured, all rejoice with it. This natural system of empathy ensures that the well-being of the whole supersedes individual status, creating a powerfully integrated system.

A core aspect of achieving synergy lies in valuing every contribution, regardless of visibility. The passage challenges us to look beyond hierarchical rankings or public recognition and instead assess worth based on necessity for the functioning of the whole system directly or indirectly. The efficiency and health of a community rely heavily on seemingly 'less honourable' or behind-the-scenes work. When every role is recognized as indispensable for overall survival and flourishing, a powerful, integrated system emerges, fulfilling the synergistic premise that the 'weaker' or unseen parts are often the most vital.

Furthermore, true synergy within a community requires combating both pride and inferiority. Envy stemming from comparing one's gifts with another's, or arrogance

regarding one's own prominence, acts as corrosive forces that disrupt cohesive functioning. Paul's message prompts reflection on fostering humility and mutual respect. Recognizing that diverse individual giftedness is an intentional design for the common good shifts the focus from individual status to collective efficacy, allowing energy to flow into collaboration rather than internal conflict.

Shared suffering and joy are essential indicators of functional synergy. A healthy synergistic community is evident in its empathetic responsiveness to the circumstances of its members. The passage emphasizes that when one part suffers, all parts suffer with it, and when one is honoured, all rejoice. Such deeper level of mutual empathy strengthens bonds and ensures that the well-being or success of the whole supersedes the state of the individuals. Indifference or envy in the face of another's situation creates division and schism, whereas collective celebration and burden-sharing maximize the community's emotional and operational resilience thus leading to a sincere collaborative effort from all quarters.

Finally, the power of connection is paramount to synergy. An isolated part is as useless as a severed limb. Synergy only manifests when parts are connected and in communication, working towards a common purpose. This principle encourages active relationship-building and connectivity across differences in talents, roles, and perspectives. By breaking down organizational silos and fostering an environment where every member understands the mutual reliance on one another, communities can achieve momentum, purpose, and an impact far exceeding what any isolated individual could ever accomplish alone.

As described by Dr. Panthalookaran, St. Chāvara exemplified the progression through the developmental phases of dependence, independence, and interdependence. In his early years, St. Chāvara experienced the phase of dependence typical

of childhood. He relied entirely on his family and community for guidance and foundational education. During this time, he absorbed the fundamental practices and values of his faith, diligently learning prayers and receiving instruction that would form the basis of his spiritual life.

The phase of independence became evident in his young adulthood through a significant assertion of personal will and conviction. When faced with the critical decision of his vocation, he took a bold stance in contravention to the vehement opposition of his family members. This decision demonstrated his capacity for free thinking and autonomous decision-making, distinguishing himself as an individual committed to his vocation despite the mounting external pressures from various quarters.

His life matured significantly into the phase of interdependence, which characterized the majority of his adult life and ministry. After entering the seminary, and particularly in his work as a priest, teacher, and social reformer, he moved beyond mere independence to foster mutual support and collaboration. His efforts in teaching and managing construction works required constant cooperation with and from others. This spirit of interdependence was central to his major initiatives, such as navigating the challenging period of the Roccos schism, establishing the printing press, founding religious orders, and initiating various social movements. Even during his last days, he remained deeply connected to his community, relying on them as well as nurturing them.

Ultimately, his life illustrates that true maturity lies in achieving interdependence. His capacity to preserve his individual mission while facilitating, reinforcing, and multiplying the efforts and freedom of those around him, based on the principles of synergy, allowed him to build enduring legacy of communal initiatives while fostering a healthy relationship with a unified religious community.

St. Chāvara demonstrated a systematic and mature growth in both his life and his thought patterns, moving logically through phases of dependence and independence to ultimately reside in a state of interdependence. This journey highlights a profound lesson: that true maturity involves a conscious decision to grow into the fullness of development, recognizing that interdependence is the highest and most effective stage of human existence.

This principle of interdependence holds particular relevance in a pluralistic nation like India, which is characterized by its rich tapestry of multiple faiths, cultures, and traditions. In such a diverse environment, the model of mere independence is insufficient. A harmonious society can only flourish when its various communities understand that they are complementary to one another. Interdependence becomes the essential social fabric, allowing different groups to mutually support and enrich each other's existence rather than conflict.

Interdependence is likely the purpose of God for humanity. It is through embracing this mutual reliance and cooperation that individuals and societies can fully achieve success and harmony in life. This concept aligns perfectly with the logic behind the principle of synergy, where the combined effort of cooperative interaction produces a result much greater than the sum of individual contributions.

Ultimately, the message is practical and universal: we can accomplish significantly more, achieve greater success, and foster a healthier life in a community if we embrace an attitude of interdependence. This approach transforms potential friction points due to diversity into a source of collective strength, embodying the mature freedom where every person's autonomy reinforces and multiplies the freedom of others.

'The Fifth Sparrow'

"Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So, do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows."

(Matthew 10:28–31)

"Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten in God's sight. But even the hairs of your head are all counted. Do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows."

(Luke 12:6–7)

There is an astute observation by experts regarding the slight difference in phrasing between the two Gospel accounts, which lends itself to a powerful spiritual interpretation. Matthew states that "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ... you are of more value than many sparrows." Luke states the same text in a slightly different way: "Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten in God's sight. ... You are of more value than many sparrows."

The interpretation of a 'fifth sparrow' often arises from comparing these two accounts and highlights the theme of God's overflowing generosity and care, even for the seemingly valueless. In Matthew's account, two sparrows are sold for a single copper coin. In Luke's account, if you spend two pennies, you get four sparrows—but the vendor throws in a fifth one for free because it is essentially considered worthless, a surplus item of no commercial value.

Jesus points out that even this 'throwaway' or 'fifth sparrow,' which the merchant considers a free bonus with no cost attached, is not 'forgotten by God' or falling outside the ambit of the Father's care. This nuanced difference emphasizes

that God's attention to detail is absolute and extends even to things we humans devalue or discard.

The core message that you note here is profoundly reinforced: You are counted in the heart of the Lord. We are infinitely more valuable than sparrows. No one is overlooked. Even if a person feels like a 'fifth sparrow'—unwanted, overlooked, or a surplus in the society—God sees and values them individually, and remembers them perfectly. God's care exceeds human logic. God's economy of love operates on a different realm than a human market-based thinking pattern. His care is both total as well as personal for every single creation.

Dr. Benny Sebastian Tharakkunnel cmi, in his article titled 'St. Chāvara: An Indian Saint Who was Ahead of His Time' published in the magazine *Indian Catholic Matters* on 17 February 2022, mentions that St. Chāvara's "father, mother and his only brother died in a small pox epidemic that devastated his village. Little Kuriakose, who was just 13 years of age at that time, came to know about the death of his near and dear ones only three weeks after the incident and because of this reason he was not even able to attend their funeral. He was heartbroken." This could be one of the reasons why St. Chāvara took utmost care to cater to the dying people.

The following incident proves that St. Chāvara was very lenient in sending Father Scaria Kalathil home to visit his ailing uncle priest. Father Scaria Kalathil's uncle priest, while on his deathbed, wanted to see him. Father Leopold's opinion was that Father Scaria should not make a visit to his dying uncle. Father Prior, however, felt the other way. It was the time when all the superiors were having a gathering at Koonammāvu. Father Leopold suggested that they might take a decision by secret vote. Accordingly, they met and were about to cast votes. Then Father Leopold held a black (negative) pellet between his fingers and raised it for all to see. Father Prior then held between his fingers a white (positive) pellet and showed it up.

The superiors were in a predicament! They pleaded that the two major superiors – Leopold and Chāvara – take an appropriate decision in the matter. But Father Leopold was insistent on voting. Reluctantly all obliged. Alas! When the ballet box was opened, all pellets except one were white! Father Leopold's displeasure reflected on his face.

St. Chāvara initiated the 'Confraternity of Blessed Death' in October 1843 at Mānnānam. Rendering all possible assistance to the poor while they were dying was his objective. Those who want to be the members of this confraternity, must follow these two points:

> "First: one must not forget that one will die and that it may happen at the most unexpected time. Remember always the words of our Lord, 'the end will come like a thief at the most unexpected time, therefore, be alert always.' Second: since mortal sins frighten us at the time of death, we must keep ourselves away from them always. Whenever we feel guilty of mortal sins by word, deed or thought, we must receive the sacrament of Confession. If it is not possible, we must make an act of contrition and pray for forgiveness of sins before we go to sleep."
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> "Those who became members of this organization must have the good will and courage to render this help to the dying. When the information is received that someone is on the death bed the members of the 'Confraternity of Blessed Death' alone or a few together should visit the dying patient and if it is found that the death is imminent do the needful for the patient to receive the Last Sacraments. Apart from that, plan so that someone, one after another, may be with the patient till death. Making such arrangements is the responsibility of the President and the Councilors. The members are bound to

follow the arrangements made by the leaders. The main responsibility of the members is fulfilling this act of charity."

"If by the advices, encouragement, motivation and good words of a member, someone embraces a blessed death, and his soul is saved and becomes worthy of heavenly joy, the one who caused this also will, surely, be saved. For, the saved soul with a grateful heart, always, will pray for the salvation of the one who caused its salvation."

In his letter, Father Chāvara shares his thoughts with the parishioners of Kainakary encouraging them to work for starting a home of charity in their village. "The greatest help a human being can render to others is the help for a blessed death; that is the greatest charity too. Hence this is definitely a great thing needed for all." "Therefore, the greatest good one can offer to a person is the help rendered to him at the time of his death." He exhorts the people of Kainakary to believe firmly in the words of Jesus; when the sick and the poor are lovingly served, the Lord himself has appeared to some in the form of the sick and has asked for their service.

"I intimate to you my intense desire that you should start a 'confraternity' for the purpose of serving and helping the dying. I may not be fortunate to see it established but, if you are interested, it will be realized. Take interest in keeping a collection box, 'Blessed Death Box'. Ask for donations without shame and make a small home of charity near your chapel at Kainakary and keep 2-4 forsaken patients and care for them. Thus, if you show at least a shadow of charity, it will become a reality in Malabar."

"Raise funds slowly and build a small building near the chapel. It may have a central verandah with

> rooms on both sides of the verandah. The walls could be weaved with bamboo blades; roof could be thatched with bamboo and coconut leaves. Then call it a poor home or a home of charity. It must be built in such a way that the poor, the wandering, the alms seeking, the sick, the catechumens, the neo-converts and others could be accommodated and cared for. Thus, by the grace of God, it will be the first home of charity in Malabar."
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> "Having heard of this 'Confraternity of Blessed Death' other parishes also may be planning to start the same. Before others start the collection box for blessed death, if you start, you will be able to raise funds for the purpose…. Moreover, we plan to construct a small home of charity for the poor, the homeless and the sick people, whom no one looks after, so that they can stay together and can be looked after and they may have a blessed death."

St. Chāvara embodied the Gospel teaching that every individual, even the 'fifth sparrow' often overlooked by the society, holds immense value in the eyes of God. This deep conviction was the driving force behind his earnest efforts to establish the 'Confraternity of Blessed Death,' a voluntary association dedicated to serving the poor and destitute, who were often neglected, especially in their final hours. His attitude was one of profound compassion, recognizing the inherent dignity of all people regardless of their social status or financial standing. He dedicated significant efforts to recruiting and inspiring volunteers for this ministry, demonstrating his unwavering desire to ensure that every member of the society received the much-required spiritual and material care they deserved, right until their final moments, thereby mirroring God's own meticulous and inclusive love.

On Good and Evil in the Same Person

He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So, when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?' He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

(Matthew 13:24-30)

If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of stumbling blocks! Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to the one by whom the stumbling block comes! If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to enter life maimed or lame than to have two hands or two feet and to be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into the hell of fire.

If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven,

and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.

(Matthew 18: 6-9, 15-20)

The parable of the weeds and the exhortation in the above passage provide several profound insights regarding the nature of the Church, the problem of evil, and the reality of divine judgment. It is an exhortation to be strengthened by the faith in Jesus in the face of adversities and make it a source of energy to depend on the providence and protection of Jesus Christ.

1. The Coexistence of Good and Evil:

The primary theological message is that the Kingdom of Heaven on earth - often identified as the Church in the world - will remain a 'mixed body' (*corpus permixtum*) until the end of time. The Church is understood as a hospital, rather than being a community of the already-perfected; the Church is a vessel of clay containing both 'children of the kingdom' and 'children of the evil one'. This parable warns against 'weeding frenzies' or overzealous attempts to prematurely purify the community, which historically led to injustices like the Inquisition. Pope Francis famously likened the Church to a 'field hospital'.

2. Divine Patience and Mercy:

The landowner's command to let both the weeds and the crop grow together reveals God's loving patience. God delays judgment to allow the 'weeds' more time for repentance and transformation. Prematurely uprooting evil risks harming the righteous, as the roots of the wheat and weeds are often intertwined.

Matthew 18 grants the community the authority to 'bind and loose,' meaning they have a divine mandate to decide who is in or out of fellowship based on their response to sin. In a paradoxical sense Matthew 13 warns against 'uprooting'

(suggesting a danger of being too aggressive) whereas Matthew 18 warns against indifference to sin. A church that never practices discipline fails to reflect God's holiness, just as a church that is too eager to 'weed' fails to reflect His mercy.

3. The Nature of Evil (*Privatio Boni*):
This parable highlights that evil is parasitic on the good. Evil (the weeds) does not have its own independent 'field' but insinuates itself into the good field. Evil is sown 'while everyone was asleep,' suggesting it often enters through spiritual neglect or sloth.

4. Final Judgment and Accountability:
The parable maintains a strong dualistic view of the final destiny of humanity. Separation is the work of angels, not humans, ensuring that only the 'Just Judge' makes the final determination. While evil may seem to thrive now, it is destined for destruction, while the righteous are promised to 'shine like the sun' in the eternal Kingdom.

The two chapters emphasize different stages of dealing with sin: The primary goal here is to 'gain your brother'. The multi-step process—private rebuke, then in the presence of witnesses, then in the church—is a sequence designed to prompt repentance and restoration of fellowship. In the parable of weeds, it focuses on the end of the age. It reminds humans of their limited perspective; because we cannot always distinguish wheat from weeds (which often look identical until they mature), we must wait for the perfect judgment by the angels.

5. Practical Discernment:
Humans lack the divine wisdom to perfectly distinguish between wheat and weeds (which, in the case of 'bearded darnel,' look identical until maturity). The text serves as a call for self-reflection - asking believers to ensure they are cultivating 'wheat' within their own hearts rather than judging others.

Theology often suggests that Matthew 18 is the how-to for the 'wheat' to live together without becoming 'weeds.' Just as the landowner in Matthew 13 waits for maturity to reveal the fruit, the process in Matthew 18 allows for a gradual uncovering of a person's heart through their response to repeated warnings. Matthew 18 begins with warnings about 'stumbling blocks' and 'little ones'. Church discipline is therefore a protective act to ensure the 'weeds' of unrepentant sin do not choke out the growth of 'wheat' in others.

St. Chāvara's life beautifully illustrates the theological tension between the patience enshrined in Matthew 13 and the discipline laid out in Matthew 18. He did not live in a sanitized ivory tower; he operated in a field thick with 'weeds' - social prejudice, ecclesiastical rebellion, and personal betrayal - yet he remained 'wheat' of the highest quality. His assessment as a missionary who accommodated the 'weeds' can be seen through these four lenses:

1. The Wisdom of 'Letting Both Grow Together':

St. Chāvara possessed the landowner's vision, understanding that a 'mixed body' is the reality of the Church on earth. During the Roccos Schism, which threatened to tear the Malabar Church apart, he did not immediately resort to aggressive excommunication or vitriol. Instead, he worked with 'enduring patience,' providing a stable base of truth while allowing time for the confused to realize their error. He understood that many 'weeds' were actually 'wheat' that had been momentarily choked by misinformation. His patience allowed many to repent and return to the fold.

2. Resistance to Corruption (Non-Contamination):

While St. Chāvara coexisted with the 'weeds' of the caste system and social injustice, he was never 'influenced or disturbed' by them in a way that altered his moral compass. This is the hallmark of 'Wise and Innocent Resilience.' He lived in a society where discrimination was the norm (the weeds),

yet he remained 'innocent as a dove' by opening schools to all, regardless of caste. He allowed the weeds to exist in the same field, but he ensured they did not stifle the growth of the life-giving wheat he was planting.

3. Restorative Discipline Over Destructive Uprooting:
In line with Matthew 18, St. Chāvara's approach to the 'weeds' within his religious communities was always restorative. He was known for his 'prudence in correction,' viewing delinquent behaviour as a 'cry for help' rather than a reason for immediate expulsion. He followed the steps of private and communal correction to 'gain his brother.' By refusing to 'uproot' prematurely, he protected the 'little ones' (the younger monks and students) from the scandal and trauma of unnecessary division.

4. Centeredness in the 'Conversation with the Beloved':
The reason St. Chāvara remained 'undisturbed' by the presence of evil or opposition was the strength he drew from his profound interior life. As described in an earlier passage, meditation for him was a 'non-stop conversation with a friend.' Because he sat 'very close to his Spouse, Jesus Christ,' the noise and growth of the 'weeds' around him could not break into his inner peace. His 'Attitude of Prayer' served as a spiritual hedge, ensuring that while he shared the field with the weeds, his roots were nourished by a different source entirely.

St. Chāvara assessed the 'weeds' in his field not as enemies to be destroyed by human hands, but as challenges to be outgrown by the fruitfulness of his own life. He proved that the best way to deal with weeds is to be such healthy wheat that the master's harvest is never in doubt. St. Chāvara followed a strategy for daily life to reduce the influence of the 'weeds' in his life which could be useful for us to live amidst the 'weeds'.

- ***Cultivating Personal Integrity:*** The foundation of navigating a complex world is a strong personal moral code.

By consistently choosing actions aligned with your values, you maintain your own 'good' in the face of external 'evil'.

- ***Focusing on Agency and Responsibility:*** Recognize that while evil exists, individuals possess agency to do good. The focus shifts from eradicating evil (which may be impossible) to actively promoting good in one's immediate sphere of influence.
- ***Building Community and Support Systems:*** Individuals can mitigate the effects of evil by creating strong, supportive communities focused on shared positive values. Collective action and mutual support act as a buffer and a positive force.
- ***Mindfulness and Resilience:*** Practices like mindfulness help individuals manage the stress and cognitive dissonance caused by the presence of evil, fostering psychological resilience and enabling clearer moral judgment.

The same attitude is found in his writing *Anasthāsiyāyude Rakthasākshyam*. In this writing we find the good is represented by Anasthasia, Sophia and Chirillose, whereas evil by Emperor Valerian and the Minister Proba. St. Chāvara advises people to distinguish between good and evil. The world of illusion ruled the minds of the emperor and his minister so that they strove after the happiness of the material world. On the face of death she proclaims:

My Saviour kind and Lord supreme
Christian is a term of joy
A term of glory and in my life
Virgin am I, bride of Christ,
Jesus is my Lord and groom.

Amidst the existence of the 'weeds' of trials and tribulations, Anāsthasia focused on the good things and thoughts and that enabled her to receive glory of martyrdom. This story is a practical lesson for all to handle the presence of evil in life.

St. Chāvara embodied the landowner's wisdom from the parable of the wheat and the weeds, maintaining a resolute focus on the 'good seed' even when surrounded by the 'weeds' of social prejudice, ecclesiastical discord, and systemic injustice. He was never contaminated by the presence of these negative forces; instead, his 'conversation with the beloved' provided him with an interior sanctuary of peace that kept his vision clear. With a remarkably broad outlook and an open mind, he sought out the 'worthy' in every corner of society, transcending the rigid barriers of his time to embrace all that was good, true, and life-giving. By refusing to let the weeds of his era dictate his actions, he became an agent of universal transformation, demonstrating that a heart truly rooted in Christ remains inclusive, resilient, and perpetually oriented toward the nurturing of every human soul.

St. Joseph: The Favorite Saint of St. Chāvara

Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth."

(John 1:45)

They were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?"

(John 6:42)

In the Gospel of John, the identification of Jesus as the 'son of Joseph' as given above provides a profound theological window into the hidden, yet essential, role St. Joseph played in the mystery of the Incarnation. In John 1:45, Philip's declaration to Nathanael, "We have found the one... Jesus, son of Joseph," highlights how St. Joseph served as the necessary bridge between prophecy and history. By providing Jesus with a legal pedigree in the line of David, St. Joseph integrated the Word made flesh into the human social order. His presence as the recognized father ensured that Mary was protected by the law and that Jesus grew up within the stable, structured environment of the Holy Family, allowing the Messiah to be 'found' by seekers as a man rooted in a specific, honourable lineage.

In John 6:42, the crowd's sceptical query - "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?" - paradoxically underscores the success of St. Joseph's mission. St. Joseph was so effective as a guardian and provider that, to the outside world, Jesus appeared entirely 'normal.' This 'ordinariness' was a vital shield for the Holy Family, concealing the divine mystery until the appointed time for the public ministry of Jesus. St. Joseph's 'conspicuous absence' in the Gospels, quite ironically, points to his profound presence as the 'shadow of the Father' (as Pope Francis described in *Patris Corde*), creating a space where Mary could fulfil her vocation and Jesus could grow in wisdom and favour.

Ultimately, these verses reflect a theology of stewardship and accompaniment. St. Joseph's importance lies in his 'just' character (Matthew 1:19), which provided a secure social and religious framework for the Mother of God and the Savior. Though John's Gospel primarily focuses on Jesus' divine origin, the repeated mention of St. Joseph's name serves as a reminder that the Divine chose to enter humanity through a family. St. Joseph's silent obedience allowed the Bread of Life to be nurtured in a humble home in Nazareth before being offered to the world, proving that the mundane reality of being 'Joseph's son' was the essential vessel for the manifestation of the Son of God.

In reflecting on St. Joseph, we first encounter a man defined by his mastery as a craftsman. As an expert carpenter, St. Joseph's professional excellence was so widely recognized that it became the primary identifier for Jesus, whom the community knew simply as the 'carpenter's son' (Matthew 13:55). This trade required more than physical labour; it demanded a man of precision, perseverance and creative ingenuity. A carpenter is, by nature, a problem-solver who listens to a need, designs a framework, and executes a solution with meticulous care. Spiritually, this suggests that Joseph was a man capable of finding practical and divine solutions to the complex questions of life, transforming raw challenges into structured reality.

Further, the Gospel honours St. Joseph as a 'righteous man' - one who was profoundly just and steadfastly faithful to the Law (Matthew 1:19). This righteousness was the internal foundation that complemented his external skill. While his hands worked with the precision of a craftsman, his heart moved with the precision of the Spirit. His commitment to justice was not merely about following rules, but about an intimate alignment with God's will. As a 'just man,' Joseph provides a model of how professional competence and moral integrity work in harmony, allowing him to serve as a reliable

guardian for the Holy Family and a silent architect of God's plan on earth.

Father Thomas Chathamparambil, the former Prior General of the CMI Congregation, frequently encourages the members of the Congregation to pursue the highest possible academic degrees and to engage deeply in all facets of our community's mission. His vision is clear: no ministry should be set aside for the 'unqualified.' Instead, we are called to be highly qualified - even over-qualified - yet remain humble enough to embrace the most modest of tasks. This approach ensures that we do not view certain ministries as beneath us, but rather look at each ministry as opportunities to bring our best selves to every level of service to the people of God.

This philosophy finds its ultimate archetype in St. Joseph, an expert craftsman who chose to become a 'fool' for the sake of the Kingdom of God. In the eyes of the world, St. Joseph's actions often appeared illogical or even nonsensical. From accepting a pregnant Mary as his wife and obeying the mysterious instructions of an angel in a dream, to leading his wife in advanced pregnancy on a difficult journey to Bethlehem only to find no room in the inn, his life was marked by several apparent failures. When shepherds found him nursing his newborn in a humble manger, or when he fled as a refugee to Egypt, others might have mocked him as an irresponsible or foolish father.

Yet, St. Joseph's 'foolishness' was actually a profound act of faith and obedience to God's Will. Whether he was frantically searching for the lost twelve-year-old Jesus for three days or working quietly in a carpenter's shop, he demonstrated that true greatness lies in the willingness to set aside worldly reputation and delving into the duties assigned by the divine. St. Joseph's life teaches us that professional mastery and high standing are meant to be placed at the realization of God's plan, even - and especially - when that plan demands humility and the courage to possibly be misunderstood by the society.

In the biblical tradition, the concept of a 'fool' carries a profound spiritual meaning that contrasts sharply with worldly wisdom. According to 1Corinthians 2:14, those without the Spirit of God cannot accept the things of the Spirit, viewing them as mere foolishness. St. Joseph, however, embraced a path that appeared nonsensical to his peers because he was filled with the Holy Spirit. By accepting the 'illogical' demands of his vocation, he became a 'fool' for the Kingdom, demonstrating that true spiritual insight often requires the surrender of human logic to divine wisdom.

St. Paul, a man of immense erudition, being a learned Hebrew, also embraced this divine 'foolishness.' He frequently spoke of his own 'little foolishness' (2Corinthians 11:1) and even admitted to making a 'fool' of himself for the sake of the Gospel (2Corinthians 12:11). Paul's life mirrored the supreme humility of Christ, who, as described in Philippians 2:6-10, emptied himself of His divine status to take the form of a servant. For Paul, boasting about his qualifications was only useful if it served the mission, illustrating that the most 'learned' must be willing to be misunderstood by the world to be, in the long run, exalted by God.

This theme is echoed in the Gospels, where Jesus praises the Father for hiding the mysteries of the Kingdom from the 'wise and learned' and revealing them to 'little children' (Matthew 11:25). It is not through intellectual pride, but through the humble 'foolishness' of the heart that God's ways are truly understood. St. Joseph exemplifies this paradox; by setting aside his reputation and social standing to serve the Holy Family, he became a central participant in the history of salvation. His life proves that being a 'fool' for God is the highest form of wisdom.

In following the example of St. Joseph, we are often called to embrace a holy 'foolishness' to fulfil our unique roles in God's divine plan.

In a world that prizes self-interest and reputation, it is a radical act to prioritize the establishment of the Kingdom and

the proclamation of the Gospel above all else. This spiritual path may lead us to accept social misunderstanding or humble ourselves in ways that seem illogical to others. Yet, it is through this very surrender that we become instruments of grace - saving others from humiliation, repairing fractured relationships, and protecting the vulnerable from the dangers of life. By choosing to be 'fools' for Christ, we enliven the spirits of our fellow human beings and cooperate in the grand mission of universal salvation. As we navigate these challenges, let us seek the powerful intercession of St. Joseph, the silent guardian of the Redeemer. We trust that he, who stood as the unwavering protector of the Holy Family, continues to guard us and plead our cause in the presence of God the Father.

This deep devotion to the 'just man' of Nazareth was famously shared by St. Chāvara, who remained a profound devotee of St. Joseph throughout his life. This profound spiritual connection undoubtedly inspired him – along with other founding fathers - to dedicate the first CMI monastery at Mānnānam to St. Joseph and to name the first Catholic printing house after St. Joseph. He consistently urged his confreres and the religious sisters in the convents to place their absolute trust in St. Joseph, encouraging them to invoke his powerful intercession during trials and difficult circumstances.

In his *Circular Letter on the Confraternity of Happy Death*, St. Chāvara emphasized a profound devotion to the Holy Family, stating: *"This is it: devotion to the holy name of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. Moreover, every year, while prayerfully preparing for the feast of St. Joseph, our protector, on March 19, one should offer food and clothing to a family – specifically a man, a woman, and a child – and thus renew their sacred pledge."* I vividly recall this beautiful tradition being practiced in my own family during my early school years. Sadly, now this practice seems not to be in vogue.

While he was a fervent devotee of the Holy Family, St. Chāvara also mirrored St. Joseph's virtues in his own life. He embraced a humble, industrious, and 'foolish' obedience to the

Divine Will, demonstrating that a life hidden in St. Joseph's quiet strength and integrity can truly transform the world.

The 'Denha episode' chronicles a critical moment when a schism threatened the Church of Kerala. Denha attempted to win over St. Chāvara, mounting pressure on him to sign petitions supporting the intruder's claim to authority from Babel. St. Chāvara, however, ignored the pressure. Denha then sent a note: "I hoped that you would come to see me before anyone else. But you have not yet come while several others have and I am surprised at it. So, I am now sending this loving note. As soon as you get it, I hope in the Lord that at least your superior, *Malpān* Kuriakose, will come and meet me." St. Chāvara and his confreres did not even deem a reply necessary, choosing instead a principled silence that mirrored the quiet decisiveness of St. Joseph.

When Denha proceeded toward the Mānnānam Monastery, St. Chāvara chronicled the bizarre scene with meticulous detail: "He was accompanied by a crowd which looked more like one of urchins following a rutting elephant or a raving lunatic than a set of people attending on any honourable person. We were surprised why this was so."

Upon hearing the news of Denha's arrival, the community took a collective stand: "We at once met together and took the decision not to let him say mass here as it was being done in every church without asking for his credentials or authorization." Despite the serious dilemma and the decision not to compromise ecclesiastical law, St. Chāvara exemplified profound hospitality: "So we got a rooster cooked, served him a good supper and gave him a room."

The next morning, Denha intended to celebrate Mass, but the fathers politely informed him of their inability to oblige him without proper authorization from the Vicar Apostolic. Denha's response was immediate and furious: "He rose in a rage and left at once shouting that he had said Mass in so many churches and none of the Vicars raised any objection and that he would say Mass within hours at Athirampuzha church."

Throughout this encounter, St. Chāvara demonstrated the shrewdness, patience, and unwavering adherence to principles, reminiscent of St. Joseph. He combined warm hospitality for the individual with firm protection of the Church's integrity, ensuring the community remained united with Rome and preserving the Kerala Church from schism.

Many misunderstood the community's decision, particularly the hospitality shown by allowing Denha to stay at Mānnānam. Even the Father Carlos - the future Vicar Apostolic of Quilon and then-Rector of the seminary at Verapoly - sent critical remarks, describing their actions as a 'fault prompted by charity.' In response to this constructive correction, St. Chāvara commented: "But we let him stay here not of our own accord, but because there was no alternative. In spite of this truth, people, when they hear that he stayed in the monastery, would think that we too were with him. This is why the Bishop corrected us. Hence let it be borne in mind by all and be more cautious in future." This episode highlights St. Chāvara's humility and his willingness to understand the diktats from ecclesiastical authority. Like St. Joseph, he balanced the demands of charity with the necessity of protecting the Church's reputation, ultimately using the experience to urge his confreres toward greater vigilance and prudence in their future ministry.

In the face of intense pressure and public misunderstanding, St. Chāvara displayed the defining virtues of silent obedience and serene strength, just like his favorite saint, St. Joseph. He kept his cool and remained quiet, neither replying to the Bishop on his criticism nor to Denha on his demands. This deliberate silence was not passive resignation, but an active, strategic choice that ensured the integrity of the Church was maintained. Through this crucial episode, St. Chāvara exemplified the wisdom of St. Joseph: knowing when to act decisively in accordance with divine will, and when to remain silently steadfast in the face of worldly turmoil.

On Family Life

Then one was brought to Him who was demon-possessed, blind and mute; and He healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw. And all the multitudes were amazed and said, "Could this be the Son of David?" Now when the Pharisees heard it, they said, "This *fellow* does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons." But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast *them* out? *Therefore, they shall be your judges. But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you."*

(Matthew 12:22-28)

"But he knew what they were thinking and said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself becomes a desert, and house falls on house. If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? —for you say that I cast out the demons by Beelzebul. Now if I cast out the demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your exorcists cast them out? Therefore, they will be your judges. But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you."

(Luke 11:17-20)

In the synoptic accounts of Matthew 12:22-28 and Luke 11:17-20, Jesus presents a foundational truth of the Kingdom through the logic of internal stability: "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand." Theologically, this teaching establishes that the strength of any collective—whether a kingdom, a city, or a family—is not found in its external defences, but in its internal cohesion. When Jesus argues that Satan cannot cast out Satan without destroying his own dominion, He reveals that division

is essentially a self-defeating force. For a family, this means that internal strife is not just a personal conflict, but a structural threat that undermines the very foundation of the home. These passages offer several profound theological reflections on the nature of good and evil, the Kingdom of God, and the identity and authority of Jesus.

Logical Refutation of Accusation:

Jesus first uses a logical argument to expose the irrationality of the Pharisees' accusation that he casts out demons by the power of Beelzebub (Satan, the ruler of the demons).

Internal Division is Self-Destructive: The central principle is that any entity—a kingdom, city, or household—experiencing internal civil war or division will inevitably collapse. This was a common, universal truth understood by his audience.

Satan's Kingdom is United in Purpose: Satan's kingdom seeks to oppose God and spread evil. For Satan to empower Jesus to undo his own work (casting out demons) would be a form of self-sabotage, an act contrary to the very nature and goal of his intent. Such action would lead to the ruin of Satan's dominion, which clearly had not happened.

A Call for Consistency: Jesus further challenges the Pharisees by asking, "By whom do your sons cast them out?". This *argumentum ad hominem* suggests that some of their own people practiced exorcism. If they acknowledged those exorcisms as legitimate, they were hypocritical in condemning Jesus for the same actions. The Pharisees› own exorcists would, in effect, be their judges, exposing their bias against Jesus.

The Coming of the Kingdom of God:

The core theological assertion in the passage is found in Jesus' conclusion: "But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you".

Evidence of Divine Power: Jesus' exorcisms are not an internal skirmish within the realm of evil, but a direct confrontation and

defeat of Satan's forces by the superior power of the Holy Spirit.

The Kingdom is Present: This demonstrates that the promised Kingdom of God, where God's Will is done and evil is defeated, is no longer just a future hope but is actively breaking into the present reality through Jesus' ministry. The physical manifestation of this divine power (healing the demon-possessed, blind, and mute man) is tangible proof of God's reign arriving 'upon' them.

Jesus the 'Strong Man':

This passage leads into the parable of the 'strong man' (Matthew 12:29), which provides further insights into the spiritual conflict.

Binding the Strong Man: Satan is the 'strong man' guarding his 'house' (his domain/those in spiritual captivity). Jesus is the 'one stronger' who must first bind Satan in order to 'plunder his goods' (free the captives).

Spiritual Warfare as Liberation: Jesus' ministry is portrayed as a mission of liberation, actively invading and dismantling the kingdom of darkness by overpowering its ruler.

Call for Decisive Commitment:

Implicit in the passage is a call for decisive commitment (made explicit in Matthew 12:30, "He who is not with me is against me").

No Neutral Ground: Jesus emphasizes that there are only two kingdoms, God's and Satan's, and no one can be neutral. The Pharisees, by refusing to acknowledge God's work through Jesus, were effectively opposing God's kingdom and aligning with Satan's.

Unity Among Believers: The principle of a 'house divided' is also applied to believers, urging unity among Christians for their collective strength and efficacy in their mission. Division weakens the church's witness to the world.

The ultimate warning in this context concerns the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which Jesus identifies as the unforgivable

sin—attributing the clear, undeniable work of God's Spirit to Satan. This highlights the danger of a hardened heart and wilful spiritual blindness to God's redemptive work.

A key principle derived from these passages is the necessity of a singular orientation. Jesus identifies that His power comes from the "Spirit of God" (Matthew) or the "finger of God" (Luke), pointing to a unified divine source. For a family to remain undivided, its members must align themselves with a common spiritual centre. When family members operate under different or conflicting spirits—such as pride, self-interest, or resentment—the household becomes "laid waste." True unity, therefore, is not merely the absence of an argument, but the presence of a shared purpose that transcends individual egos, ensuring that the "house" remains a fortified space of peace rather than a battlefield of competing wills.

Furthermore, these passages highlight the discernment of influence. Jesus warns that those who do not recognize the source of unity are in danger of falling into desolation. In a family context, this suggests that members must be vigilant against the "divided house" syndrome, where small fissures in communication or trust are allowed to grow. By affirming that the Kingdom of God has come upon those who witness the casting out of demons, Jesus implies that unity is a sign of God's active presence. An undivided family is thus a theological witness; it proves that the power of God is at work, binding people together in a way that the "strong man" of discord cannot break.

The principle of collaborative strength is central to these verses. Jesus' rhetorical question about who his followers' children cast out demons by suggests a shared heritage of authority. In an undivided family, authority and support are not tools for control, but means of mutual empowerment. When a family stands together, it becomes a "kingdom" that can withstand external pressures because it is not fighting itself

from within. By prioritizing the health of the whole over the whims of the part, the family mirrors the integrity of Christ's mission, creating a domestic church that is both resilient and spiritually vibrant.

In one of his letters, St. Chāvara writes to his listeners, "*A good Christian family is the image of heaven, where persons are living together, by the bond of blood and affection, duly respecting and obeying their parents, and walking peacefully before the Lord and people, ensures their salvation, according to each one's state of life.*"

- *The Family as a 'domestic Church' and 'image of heaven'*: The core reflection is on the family as a sacred space, mirroring the divine love and unity of the Holy Trinity. It is a *sanctum sanctorum* of society where God's presence is experienced, transforming the home into a place of peace and joy on earth.
- *The Primacy of Love and Affection*: The foundation of this heavenly image is the 'bond of blood and affection', emphasizing that mutual love, support, and unity of mind and heart are essential for family members to live in harmony.
- *Mutual Respect and Obedience*: The passage stresses the importance of an orderly life, where children respect and obey their parents, and all members show mutual respect. This order and discipline are vital for a family's well-being and moral foundation.
- *Peaceful Coexistence*: Living 'peacefully before the Lord and people' highlights the need for harmony not only within the family but also in the community. It means avoiding quarrels, slander, and lawsuits, and instead fostering a forgiving and charitable attitude.
- *Holiness and God-fearing Life*: The essential worth of a family consists in its holiness and fear of God. This spiritual foundation ensures divine blessings and guidance in navigating life's challenges.
- *The Goal of Eternal Salvation*: The ultimate purpose of a Christian family life, lived according to these principles, is to

ensure 'their salvation, according to each one's state of life.' All family activities should be oriented towards attaining union with God and eternal joy.

- *Parental Duty in Upbringing*: Parents have a primary duty to bring up their children in a God-fearing way, providing both natural and spiritual nourishment (e.g., teaching prayers, reading good books, guiding them) and helping them discern their vocation in life.
- *The Role of Example*: Parents are encouraged to be role models for their children, as their actions and example (e.g., honesty, common prayer) leave a deep and lasting impression on the children's character formation.
- *Reliance on Divine Providence*: Families are encouraged to trust in God's providence and entrust themselves to the protection of the Holy Family (Jesus, Mary, and Joseph), especially in times of trials and difficulties.

St. Chāvara understood that a family is the primary "kingdom" where the Spirit of God must reign to prevent desolation. He echoed the warnings of Matthew and Luke by exhorting families to cultivate mutual respect and transparency, knowing that even small seeds of discord can divide a house against itself. By integrating these Gospel principles into the daily rhythm of the domestic church, he taught that a family's strength lies in its spiritual alignment. When a household is anchored in the "finger of God" through prayer and charity, it becomes an invincible fortress of peace, fulfilling Christ's vision of a kingdom that cannot be shaken.

An Ideal Sannyasin

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel."

The child's father and mother marvelled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem."

(Luke 2: 25-38)

In the sacred narrative of Luke 2:25-38, we encounter Simeon and Anna—two figures who stand as sentinels of hope at the threshold of the New Covenant. Their presence in the Temple was not merely a matter of physical residence but a profound theological state of "watchful waiting." Having spent a lifetime refining their spiritual vision, they possessed the interior clarity to recognize the Messiah in the form of a humble infant. Their lives represent the pinnacle of faithful endurance, where the

external noise of the world had long since faded, leaving only a resonant, prayerful silence capable of perceiving the Divine.

The witness of Simeon and Anna reveals that the "evening" of life is not a season of fading away, but a sacred period of heightened perception. Their presence in the Temple was a theological statement: that a life lived in anticipation of God finds its ultimate fulfilment in a posture of reverent stillness. For them, the Temple was not merely a physical structure, but a state of soul where the noise of worldly ambition had been silenced to make room for the "Consolation of Israel." This period of their lives demonstrates that the most profound work one can do in their later years is to become a living sanctuary, holding a space where the Divine can be recognized and embraced.

Following their model, we are invited to see our own "evening" as a call to intentional interiority. Retreating to the temple of the heart serves as a vital transition from the "doing" of our youth to the "being" of our maturity. It is a time to refine our spiritual vision, ensuring that our final witness is one of peace and recognition rather than regret or restlessness. By embracing this lifestyle of watchful prayer and quiet devotion, we transform the later chapters of our journey into a liturgy of waiting. Like Simeon and Anna, we find that when we remain anchored in the presence of the Lord, our lives become a beacon of hope for others, proving that the light of Christ shines most clearly in those who have learned to sit quietly in His shadow.

For the modern believer, this theological alignment of the Temple witnesses offers a vital practical model for aging and transition. We are invited to see the "evening" of our lives—or even the quiet moments of our busy days—not as a time of unproductive stasis, but as a period of "sacred recognition." This means intentionally thinning the veil between our daily duties and our spiritual consciousness, ensuring that our final contributions to the world are seasoned with the wisdom of one who has truly seen the Lord.

St. Chāvara's transition from the active, revolutionary reformer to the contemplative mystic was not a withdrawal from the world, but a deeper immersion into the Source of all action. By anchoring his final days in intense interiority, he demonstrated that the true measure of a life's work is found not in its visible completion, but in its ultimate surrender to the Providence of God. Just as St. Chāvara moved from the construction sites of Mannanam to the sanctuary of his heart, we are encouraged to cultivate a habit of interiority.

According to Father Leopold Boccaro, the contemporary and co-worker of St. Chāvara, *Āthmānuthāpam* was written by St. Chāvara in the evening of his life, probably in the year 1869-70. St. Chāvara retreated to intense prayer life and reflection. He must have followed the life and example of Anna and Simon who was spending their whole time in the temple. Probably because St. Chāvara was inspired by the life and example of Anna and Simon, St. Chāvara meditated upon the early life of Child Jesus in *Āthmānuthāpam* which he 'longed to see' (*kānākenam*).

St. Chāvara, at the closing chapter of his earthly journey, demonstrated the essence of a true *sanyasi*, systematically withdrawing from the clamour of the world to dedicate his final years entirely to spiritual contemplation and preparation for eternity. His actions during this period provide a profound example of the monastic ideal: a focused return to the divine source.

This period was characterized by an intense internal scrutiny, a reflective 'examination of conscience' that every sincere spiritual seeker ought to undertake. St. Chāvara was engaged in making an evaluation of his entire life's mission, measuring his actions not by worldly metrics of success, but by their fidelity to the Gospel and the Will of God. This deep assessment fortified his conviction that his path had been true to his calling.

He meditatively reflected on his life, acknowledging both his accomplishments and his perceived failures with humility. As a real *sanyasi*, he understood that even setbacks and human frailties are part of the divine tapestry, opportunities for grace and growth. He did not dwell on these failures with despair, but processed them through the lens of faith, transforming them into lessons that deepened his reliance on God.

A source of genuine rejoicing for him was the steadfast knowledge that, through all trials and tribulations, he had managed to safeguard his personal faith and prayer life. This inner core of spirituality was the true treasure of his existence. For a *sanyasi*, maintaining an unbroken communion with God is the ultimate triumph, providing a lasting peace that the world cannot give.

He experienced profound happiness in the realization that he had served as a humble instrument in the hands of God to strengthen the Church. He never claimed the glory for himself; he merely saw himself as a conduit for divine grace. This self-effacing perspective is the hallmark of a holy person who understands that all good works flow from God's providence, not personal ability.

His gratitude extended to his concrete institutional legacy: he thanked God for being able to establish two religious Congregations - the CMI for men and the CMC for women - and nurture them in their initial stages. The survival and growth of these orders were, to him, clear signs of God's blessing, providing lasting structures for future generations to embrace the consecrated life.

Finally, he praised God specifically for the grace of helping to strengthen the faith of Catholics in Kerala, a region fractured by the turbulent days of the schisms. St. Chāvara's leadership during these challenging times required both administrative nous and spiritual fortitude. His ability to guide the community through crisis reaffirmed the power of prayer and faith in

overcoming division, leaving a legacy of unity that endures to this day.

His last days offer a powerful testament to spiritual discipline and a conscious preparation for death, presenting a significant challenge to modern followers living in a world characterized by busy-ness and an aversion to discussing mortality.

During his final illness at Koonammāvu in late 1870, St. Chāvara underwent a profound shift from his active life of social reform and leadership to one of intense spiritual focus and introspection. Recognizing his impending death, he affixed a note to his door requesting that visitors engage with him exclusively on spiritual matters. He further requested that edifying spiritual books be read to him constantly, demonstrating a deep desire for continuous nourishment of the soul. This intensified a lifelong practice of rigorous prayer, known for including long periods of tearful meditation on his knees as he prepared to meet his Creator. His peaceful acceptance of his mortality was evident in his calm instruction to those gathered at his bedside not to be sad, stating, "Every man whoever he be, has to die one day. Now it is my time." This exemplified an exemplary death full of hope rooted in the faith in divine providence and the result of a life lived without losing the baptismal grace.

St. Chāvara's example challenges followers in several critical areas. First, it demands a re-evaluation of priorities, urging them to prioritize the eternal over the temporary. In a world often 'tensed with activity and tired of involvement', his actions challenge believers to shift focus from worldly achievements toward spiritual readiness and eternal salvation.

Second, he calls for the cultivation of a deep interior life. St. Chāvara maintained a life of 'constant union with God' amidst his many activities. This challenges followers to find necessary time for silence, reflection, and prayer within their

busy schedules, moving beyond superficial spirituality to a genuine, personal 'colloquy' with God.

Third, his conscious preparation for death challenges a modern society that often avoids the topic entirely. His calm, active preparation for his final moments encourages followers to lead a 'virtuous and God-fearing life' that enables them to face death without fear.

Fourth, his example highlights the necessity of maintaining purity of heart. His declaration on his deathbed that he had "never lost the grace" of his baptism, despite having a 'deep sense of sin', challenges followers to strive for a life of heroic virtue, purity, and constant repentance.

Finally, St. Chāvara's life provides a model for balancing action and contemplation. He was both a man of prayer and intense charity, as well as a tireless social reformer and administrator. His life challenges followers to harmonize contemplation with active service to others, ensuring that all action springs from a deep spiritual source.

The provided facts confirm that St. Chāvara composed the vast majority of his significant, non-chronicle writings - including *Āthmānuthāpam* (1868), *Oru Nalla Appante Chāvarul* (1868), *Dhyāna Sallāpangal* (1866–1868), and the *Dirge* (1869-70) within a short span of three-to-four-year period close to the end of his life. This concentration of spiritual and reflective literature strongly suggests that he retreated from active administrative duties during his final years. The works themselves demonstrate a profound turn inward, focusing on themes of compunction, personal spirituality, guidance for family life, and meditations on death, rather than the historical documentation that characterized his earlier *Mānnānam Chronicles*.

This shift in literary output provides compelling evidence that St. Chāvara consciously withdrew to a life of solitude and contemplation during his final days. While physical infirmity and ill health likely necessitated a reduction in his

active engagements, he chose not to spend his time in idleness. Instead, he dedicated this period to intense reading, writing, meditation, adoration, and prayer. The nature of works like the *Dirge* (written around 1869-1870, shortly before his death in January 1871) indicates a profound spiritual preparation for death and an increased closeness with God Almighty.

Ultimately, St. Chāvara's final years offer a powerful model for monastic life. His example illustrates the ideal of a true *sannyasin* (mendicant), demonstrating that the 'evening of life' is a crucial time to withdraw into a life centred entirely on prayer and spiritual growth. The rich literary legacy he left behind serves as a testament to the fruitfulness of utilizing periods of quiet retreat to deepen one's spirituality and relationship with God. Practically, this calls for a "Simeon-like" patience in our prayer lives and an "Anna-like" consistency in our devotion. By embracing this lifestyle of interior retreat, we transform our own lives into a living temple. We learn that to "depart in peace" is only possible for those who have spent their lives learning to recognize the Light of Christ in the ordinary, making our later years a powerful testament of hope for the generations that follow.

Legacy of St. Chāvara – An Inspiration for Many

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord - and you are right, for that is what I am. So, if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you."

(John 13:12-15)

This passage offers profound insights about Jesus as the inspiration and exemplar par excellence. Jesus explicitly presents His actions as an example in verse 15, stating, "For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you." This highlights several aspects of Jesus as the role model.

Despite being their Teacher and Lord, Jesus performs a task typically done by a servant. This act exemplifies profound humility, demonstrating that true leadership involves serving others, regardless of one's status. The physical act of washing feet is a tangible example of humble service. It shows that followers are called to serve one another in practical, even humble, ways. Jesus' actions were deliberate. He understood the significance of what He was doing and wanted His disciples to understand it so. This showcases the importance of purposeful and conscious service.

Beyond providing a behavioural model, this passage is deeply inspiring. Jesus' act challenges conventional ideas of greatness and power. By linking authority with humble service, it inspires others to value character and service over status and worldly success. The act of washing the feet stems from Jesus' love for His disciples. Witnessing this self-emptying love can inspire a similar love and willingness to serve others with compassion and care.

Jesus' action was counter-cultural at the time. It inspires followers to challenge unjust social hierarchies and to live out the values of love and service, even when it is difficult or goes against societal expectations. This passage serves as a powerful testimony of Jesus as both a role model for *how* to live a life of humble service and an inspiration for *why* one should do so, rooted in love and a commitment to following His example.

The Catholic Church in Kerala in particular, and the global Church in general, continue to enjoy the abundant fruits of St. Chāvara's suitable interventions during his time on earth. In every activity he initiated, from founding new Congregations to reforming existing practices, there was a clear signature of God's providence at work through his hands. The stability and vibrancy that the Kerala Catholic Church, especially the Syro-Malabar Church, enjoys today is primarily due to his strenuous efforts and timely interventions during the pivotal and challenging period in Church history. His vision and foundational work laid a robust foundation for future growth and resilience.

One of the most visible and widespread fruits of his vision is the flourishing of vocations. The multitude of religious Congregations for both men and women that sprouted in Kerala following the inauguration of the CMI and CMC Congregations testifies to the fertility of the ground he prepared. Furthermore, the numerous religious men and women, priests, and missionaries who now toil day and night in different parts of the world are a direct result of the vocational zeal he instilled. This global missionary impact is a testament to the expansion of his initial vision far beyond the borders of Kerala.

St. Chāvara's impact on education and formation is equally profound. The rigorous seminary formation programs and the numerous formation houses established across the nation and abroad today are the aftermath of the modest seminary he started at Mānnānam in 1833. Beyond clerical formation,

his initiative to establish *Pallikkudam* (parish schools) led to the countless Catholic schools and educational institutions that impart knowledge and wisdom around the world, significantly raising the educational standards of the Christian community.

The deeply rooted Catholic faith in Kerala today is largely attributable to the liturgical renewal and faith formation strategies he championed. The pious associations, popular Catholic devotions such as adoration, the Rosary, and the Way of the Cross that he started or promoted are the very basis of the enlivened faith practice seen today. The renewal he initiated to revive Catholic faith within the family units is the root cause of the strong family bonds prevalent among Catholics in Kerala.

Finally, St. Chāvara's charitable and social initiatives continue to bear fruit in the modern era. The numerous hospitals, orphanages, special schools, and care homes that operate today are the fruits of his pioneering philanthropic endeavours. Even the proactive engagement with media by the Church can be traced back to his pioneering establishment of St. Joseph's Press at Mānnānam in 1846, an initiative that has taken the Catholic Church in Kerala ahead of that in even Catholic countries in the field of communication and evangelization.

The enduring existence and expansive services of the CMI-CMC Congregations today provide convincing evidence that the zealous, devout life of its members - fuelled by the spirit of their founder - transcends the physical limitations of their walls. The sons and daughters of St. Chāvara partake in this rich heritage, and remain determined to carry forward the rich legacy of their founding father now and in the ages to come. As we continue this mission, we find strength and relevance in the words of St. Paul, which perfectly capture the adaptable and resilient spirit necessary for ministry in a changing world: "We know what it is to be in need, and we know what it is to have plenty. We have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in

plenty or in want. We can do all this through him who gives us strength." (Philippians 4:12–13)

In understanding the life and legacy of St. Chāvara, one is left not merely with a list of achievements but with the enduring image of a life that perfectly embodies the Gospel teaching that true strength lies in dedicated service, not worldly power. He demonstrated that the resilience of faith is not measured by the height of a monastery wall, but by the depth of one's compassion and the breadth of the works.

St. Chāvara transformed the theoretical ideal of Christian charity into a tangible social revolution. He did not just build institutions; he ventured to build the foundation for a society based on equality, justice, and dignity for all people. His work profoundly elevated the human spirit and left behind a clear blueprint for holistic human development, rooted firmly in spiritual wisdom and practical love.

His activities serve as a timeless inspiration, proving that the zeal of one person, anchored in prayer and a profound commitment to God, can shatter centuries of social injustice and illiteracy. St. Chāvara's legacy whispers a powerful message across generations: true monastic virtue is dynamic and outwardly focused. It calls us to leverage our spiritual strength - our 'religious zeal and the virtues of our inmates' - to transform the world around us. In his tireless efforts to educate the marginalized, empower women, and care for the destitutes, St. Chāvara taught us that a life built on the solid rock of faith, expressed through unwavering love and action, can withstand any storm and leave an indelible mark on history.

The legacy of St. Chāvara is not a relic of the past, but a living, breathing force that continues to shape the spiritual and social landscape of the modern world. His life was a rare symphony of contemplation and action, proving that a deep interior life with God naturally overflows into a radical love for humanity. As we look back at his "whispers," we see a man

who was centuries ahead of his time—a saint who understood that the dignity of the marginalized and the power of universal education were the true fruits of the Gospel. For the countless individuals, religious communities, and families who look to him today, he remains an enduring icon of what it means to be fully human and fully alive in Christ.

The true inspiration of St. Chāvara lies in his profound ability to integrate the "small acts" of charity with a grand vision for societal transformation. His legacy challenges us to move beyond a passive faith and to embrace a "tapas" of service, where our own talents and resources are used to build a "house on high" for all to see. To follow St. Chāvara is to believe that one person, anchored in the providence of God, can indeed change the course of history.

As this book draws to a close, the "whispers" we have explored serve as a spiritual compass for our own journey. St. Chāvara's example invites us to cultivate a habit of solitude in the early hours, to seek unity within our families, and to reject the hollow spectacles of power in favour of humble servant-leadership. By integrating his lived examples with the timeless truths of the Bible, we find a roadmap for authentic Christian living in a complex age. His legacy is an invitation to each of us to become a "living exegesis" of the Word, transforming our corners of the world through the same quiet strength and resilient charity that defined his saintly life.

May the message of St. Chāvara continue to resonate in our hearts, prompting us to live with the same astonishment and zeal that he carried for the Kingdom of God. In his life, we find proof that holiness is practical, mercy is powerful, and a life surrendered to God is never lived in vain. As we step forward from these pages, let us carry his spirit with us, ensuring that the light he kindled in the nineteenth century continues to burn brightly in the twenty-first, guiding us all toward the ultimate "House of Vision" in the presence of the Lord.

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