

CRITERIA FOR DECLARING A SAINT 'FATHER OF THE SYRO-MALABAR CHURCH *SUI IURIS*' AND 'DOCTOR OF THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH' AND THEIR APPLICATION ON SAINT CHAVARA*

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Abstract: Francis Thonippara presents St Kuriakose Elias Chavara of the Holy Family as the second founder of the Syro-Malabar Church. Chavara is worthy to be honoured with the title 'Father of the Syro-Malabar Church *sui iuris*' and 'Doctor of the Universal Church'. The present article has two sections; and section A presents the historical setting of the Syro-Malabar Church and the unique position of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara in the Church. This section also analyses the criteria for declaring a Saint 'Father of the Church' in the SMC and explores the possibility of conferring the title 'Father of the SMC' on St Kuriakose Elias Chavara. Section B presents St Kuriakose Elias Chavara as an eligible candidate to be declared a Doctor of the Universal Church. The author persuades the Holy Synod of the Bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church to exercise its privilege and power by declaring St Kuriakose

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Elias Chavara as Father of the SMC and by recommending him to be declared a Doctor in the Universal Church.

Keywords: Kuriakose Elias Chavara, Syro-Malabar Church, Father of the Church, Doctor of the Church, Universal Church, Second Founder, Synod of Udayamperur, Vicar General, *Pazhayakoottukar*, *Puthenkoottukar*, Archdeacon of All-India, Church *sui juris*, Synod.

Introduction

Kuriakose Elias Chavara of the Holy Family is a great saint of the Apostolic Church of the Saint Thomas Christians of the Syro-Malabar Church. Members of the Syro-Malabar Church preserve their Catholic faith despite the historical vicissitudes of the two thousand years. They retained and further developed communion with the Roman Pontiff and had to pay a big price to prove the orthodoxy of their faith and communion. Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara was a great champion of the unity of the community and Roman communion. By the canonisation of this great son of the Syro-Malabar Church on 23 November 2014, the Universal Church officially recognised his sanctity. However, his contributions to the Syro-Malabar Church in general as its second founder and his theological contributions in particular are yet to be recognised both by the Syro-Malabar Church *sui juris* and by the Universal Church, which may be duly rectified by declaring him as a Father of the Syro-Malabar Church *sui juris* and Doctor of the Universal Church. The present work is an attempt to highlight these two possibilities in the case of Saint Chavara. As the title indicates, the presentation will have two parts, namely, Saint Chavara as a Father of the Syro-Malabar Church and, as a Doctor of the Universal Church, with a clear focus on laying down certain criteria for both.

Section A

SAINT KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA, FATHER OF THE SYRO-MALABAR CHURCH

Criteria for Declaring a Saint Father of the Syro-Malabar Church *sui juris*

1. Historical Setting of the Syro-Malabar Church

For a better understanding of our discussion on the procedures to declare Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara a Father of the Syro-Malabar Church (SMC) or a Doctor of the Universal Church, it is good to have a clear perception of the history of the Saint Thomas Christians from which the saint hails. SMC is an ancient apostolic Church founded by Apostle Thomas and is the largest Oriental Catholic Church next to the

Ukrainian Church, numbering around five million members. It is the most vibrant Church in the Catholic communion blessed with innumerable religious and priestly vocations and many members of this ecclesial community are at the service of the Universal Church, transcending the ritual boundaries. SMC is a Church *sui juris* with Major Archiepiscopal status and, in 2017, recognising its missionary potential the all-India jurisdiction was restored to this Church. However, due to certain historical vicissitudes the Church could not produce many theological genius, till Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara who lived in the nineteenth century, may be with an exception of Mar Joseph Cariattil who lived in the second part of the eighteenth century.

Hence, the possibility of declaring a member of the SMC as a Father of the Syro-Malabar Church and a Doctor of the Universal Church should be contemplated, explored, and analysed in the wider context of the tradition of the Universal Church and the adaptation of the same could be made in the context of the unique historical trajectories of the SMC. In order to enumerate the norms for declaring a member of the SMC as a Father of the Church or a Doctor of the Universal Church, we need a clearer understanding of the SMC, which may be facilitated by exploring the history of the Saint Thomas Christians in four periods of its development.

1.1. Apostolic and Post-Apostolic Period

The time limit of this period is between the first and fourth century from which we do not have many written documents regarding the history and ecclesial life of this ancient Christian community. However, the oral tradition of the apostolic origin, which is a living tradition and which is handed over from generation to generation, is associated with places, families, customs, and celebrations.

1.2. The Persian and Chaldean Period

This period spans between the fourth and the sixteenth centuries and the Church was ruled by bishops from Persia and the effective temporal administration of the Church was in the hands of Archdeacon chosen from among the native priests by the Church Assembly. He was the common head of the community and his title was Archdeacon of All-India. It was a period of rather peaceful ecclesial existence.

1.3. Latin or Western Period

Latin or Western period comprises of years between 1498 and 1896, precisely from 1599 with the Synod of Udayamperur. With the arrival of the Latin missionaries from Europe, the Indian Christians came in

contact with the Western Latin Christians. In the beginning, the relationship was cordial. However, conflicts emerged due to the high-handed interferences of the European missionaries in the day-to-day affairs of the Indian Church. The identity, individuality, and autonomy of the Apostolic Church of India had been jeopardized by the consequences of the Synod of Udayamperur in 1599 and the subsequent Coonan Cross Oath in 1653, which led to the division in the Church. The saga of efforts and struggles for protecting and living the apostolic and liturgical heritage, protest against the high-handedness of the missionaries, efforts to obtain Syrian bishops, efforts of Mar Joseph Cariattil and Fr. Thomas Paremmakkel for the reunion of Churches and to regain autonomy and identity of the Syrian Christians are prominent developments during this period. During the last phase of this period, under the able leadership of Saint Chavara as the Vicar General of the community, gave a new life to the Apostolic Church by introducing all-round reform in the Church and by founding two indigenous religious congregations, one for men and the other for women. Members of the men congregation played a pivotal role in creating in the Community a new consciousness of the need for native leadership and regaining the lost identity and autonomy of the Community.

1.4. Syro-Malabar Period

The two Vicariates, Trichur and Kottayam, were erected by the Holy See in 1887 exclusively for the Syrian Christians, but administered by the Latin bishops. This jurisdictional arrangement was altered by the subsequent establishment of Trichur, Ernakulam, and Changanacherry Vicariates in 1896 and the administration was fully entrusted with the native bishops. Furthermore, in 1923, the Syro-Malabar hierarchy was re-established in view of regaining the identity and autonomy of Thomas Christians of India. Meanwhile, the life of the Church was revitalized by the foundations of various religious congregations, both for men and women. This led to the missionary expansion of the SMC outside Malabar where several Syro-Malabar centres and dioceses were established. The life of the Church during this period was marked by enhanced liturgical renewal, pastoral apostolates, educational services, seminary education, theological developments, social ministries, etc. In December 1992, the SMC was raised to Major Archiepiscopal status with the Synodal structure and other canonical provisions. Taking the national and international migration of the Syro-Malabarians into consideration, pastoral care arrangements were extended to them resulting in the consequent establishment of Syro-Malabar dioceses

within India and abroad. After long waiting and continuous requests, the All-India Jurisdiction was restored with the historic letter of Pope Francis on October 9, 2017 to the Indian Catholic bishops and with the establishment of the Eparchy of Shamshabad on 10 October 2017.

2. Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara and his Unique Position in the History of the SMC¹

At this juncture, we need to consider the appointment of a native clergy as Vicar General in 1861 exclusively for the Catholic Thomas Christians, which was the most crucial turning point in the evolution of the ecclesial identity of the SMC. This appointment was in the context of the Roccas Schism, which practically caused the loss of unity of the community and majority of the members of the SMC followed Mar Roccas, presuming that he was sent with the proper approval of the Pope. Saint Chavara, through his charismatic leadership, could regain the lost unity of the community. This leadership of Saint Chavara created among the members of the community a new sense of identity and a new phase of life. It is in this context that the seminal contributions of Saint Chavara, the first Vicar General of the SMC, in view of regaining autonomy, identity, and overall unity of the Syrian Christians become vital. Reviewing the further major developments in the nineteenth century in the context of the Malabar Church, Chavara’s rudimentary pastoral, ecumenical, and administrative steps are considered the foundations of the future SMC, which continues to evolve. It is by taking these critical, significant, and creative ecclesial developments into consideration that we identify the nineteenth century as the formative period of the SMC as we have it today, with the Synodal structure and the Major Archiepiscopal status. Thus, there is a strong ground for recognising Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara as a Father of the SMC and his unique leadership in the theological, pastoral, ecumenical, and spiritual realms may pave the way for declaring him a Doctor of the Universal Church.

Following points make St Kuriakose Elias Chavara a unique personality in the history of the Syro-Malabar Church and based on these points we argue that St Chavara is the Second founder of the Syro-Malabar Church and thus worthy to be declared a Father of the Syro-Malabar Church and Doctor of the Universal Church. The Syro-Malabar Church of our discussion period was practically under the Varapuzha

¹ For a detailed discussion of the same topic, refer part 3 of the same article, subtitled *Eligibility of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara to be a Father of the Syro-Malabar Church* from point 1 to point 2.2.8.3.

jurisdiction of the Propaganda missionary system and the Carmelites were the Vicars Apostolic and missionaries.

In order to consider St Chavara the second founder of the Syro-Malabar Church, one should understand the unique role of St Chavara in the establishment of the Mannanam monastery in 1831. One of the intentions of St Chavara during the celebration of his first Holy Qurbana in 1829 was the earnest prayer for the realisation of monastic life among the St Thomas Christians.² The establishment of the monasteries reawakened the identity consciousness of the Syro-Malabar Community and the members of the CMI Congregation took the leadership in preparing the people to demand native bishops. One could with full certainty assert that the actual re-founding of the Syro-Malabar Church took place with the establishment of the monasteries under the charismatic leadership of St Chavara.

Experiencing the urgent need of enlightened priests in the SMC, the founding fathers of the Mannanam monastery started a seminary at Mannanam in 1833 even before an organized community life was begun. Later on, seminaries were started at Vazhakulam in 1866, at Elthuruth in 1868 and at Pulinkunnu in 1872. Thus, monasteries became centres of learning and spirituality.

In the caste-ridden society of Kerala no proper attention was given to the mission work among the low castes till the nineteenth century. The Syrian Christians in general were not very much for undertaking mission work among the low castes, Dalits, etc. The catechumenate at Mannanam established in 1853 was a breakthrough for the missionary apostolate of the Syro-Malabar Church among the low castes. Even before establishing a monastery in Chethipuzha, efforts have been made to accommodate the new converts in the same premises³. There were catechumenates attached to the monasteries and through them the dormant missionary zeal of the Syro-Malabarians found new life and the rays of this enkindled missionary zeal is found among the members of the Syro-Malabar Church even today as we come across them all over the world as missionaries.

² *Positio super Introductione Cause et super Virtutibus ex Officio Concinnata*, Vatican, 1977, 401, fn.40.

³ Bernard, *CMI Sabha Adhya Dashakangalil*, 1908, Reprint 1989, Kochi: P.G. House, 181.

St Chavara understood the importance of education in transforming the society and he was aware of the negative impact of the lack of English education for the members of the SMC. He had great desire for establishing a university college for promoting English education. He could be satisfied for the time being with the establishment of a Sanskrit school in 1846 at Mannanam. He sent circulars to all the parish priests to establish schools attached to the churches and thereby popularised the education.

To deepen the knowledge of the faithful in the Sacred Scripture and to spread the devotional literature, it was decided to start a printing press at Mannanam. The establishment of the printing press at Mannanam in 1846 and the publication of books and pious literature really helped the spiritual renewal of the Syro-Malabar Community. The first book printed at Mannanam was *Jnanapeeyusham*, which was a basic catechism text book for the Syro-Malabar Community.

The canonical foundation of the CMI Congregation in 1855 and the foundation of the first convent at Koonammavu for women in 1866 (CMC) by Fr Chavara assisted by Fr Leopold Beccaro OCD had been landmarks in the history of the Christian religion in India.

St Chavara was aware of the importance of the reunion of all the churches of St Thomas tradition as is clear from one of the letters he had written to the Prefect of the Propaganda Congregation in 1859. Here he suggested to separate the Syro-Malabar Catholics from Propaganda jurisdiction of Varapuzha Vicariate. One of the reasons he alluded to, was that it would facilitate the reunion of the separated communities.⁴ The CMI fathers after sixty-two years took the lead in bringing back a section of Jacobites into the Catholic Church and finally in 1930 they reunited with the Catholic Church under the leadership of Mar Ivanios and thus the Syro-Malankara Hierarchy was established in 1932. Here it is worth quoting the popular saying among the St Thomas Christians: "If the Congregation (CMI) had been started two centuries earlier, the division of the Community into *Pazhayakoottukar* and *Puthenkoottukar* would not have taken place as a result of the Coonan Cross Oath of 1653."

St Chavara himself had started a charitable organization in 1869 with the cooperation of the people of Chennankary parish at Kainakary and

⁴ Bernard, *CMI Sabha Adhya Dashakangalil*, 22.

developed an institute called *Upavishala* (House of Charity) for the service of the poor, destitute and old people.⁵

The arrival of the Chaldean bishop Roccas in 1861 divided the Syro-Malabar Community and a good number of churches followed bishop Roccas believing that he was sent by proper ecclesiastical authorities. The Vicar Apostolic of Varapuzha understood the unique influence and undisputed leadership of St Chavara on the Christian Community and he was made the Vicar General to fight against Roccas and to bring unity in the Church. St Chavara succeeded in his mission and in appreciation of his great achievement, there was move even to make him the bishop of the Syro-Malabar Community, which remained as a dream.

The aim of the founding fathers of the CMI Congregation was the spiritual renewal and the reawakening of the spiritually and socially dormant Syro-Malabar Church. For this purpose from the very foundation of the Mannanam monastery, the CMI fathers visited the parishes and preached the Word of God on Sundays and days of obligation and explained to the faithful the basic Christian doctrines and clarified their doubts. Bishop Ludvic Martin, the Vicar Apostolic of Varapuzha, appointed St Chavara and the priests from the Mannanam monastery as retreat preachers both in the Syriac and Latin parishes. As the Vicar General, St Chavara took keen interest in visiting the parishes and instructed to establish catechism school attached to each parish. Parishes were divided and put under different districts and a member of the CMI Congregation was responsible for each district.

Chavarul, Testament of a Loving Father, was written by St Chavara in 1868 and it was addressed to the parishioners of Chennankari and its content is relevant to all the families. It is a *magna carta* of the theology of family life and it lays a solid and sound foundation to the family life of the children of God and for the renewal of families and the upbringing of the children. It offers a programme for the renewal and sustenance of Christian families. This Testament is relevant even in contemporary societies.

It is worth mentioning the titles given to St Chavara by different authorities. "*Innu Malayalathinte Kodi Veenu*" (the flag staff of Kerala has fallen today). With these introductory words the prominent preacher of Kerala, Fr Mathai Kappil began his funeral oration of St Chavara. In the

⁵ 175 Years, 1831-2006, Carmelites of Mary Immaculate, Kakkanad: Chavara Hills, 2007, 24.

CMC Chronicle at Koonammavu St Chavara is described as the "pillar of the Catholic Church". In the same Chronicle again we read "St Chavara as light and mirror". In the words of Bishop Marcellinose, St Chavara is a "flower that blossomed at Mannanam". Elthuruth monastery Chronicle describes St Chavara as *Jnanadeepam*, beacon light of wisdom. Fr Leopold Beccaro OCD, the confessor of St Chavara writes the following on the day of the death of St Chavara: "O! Holy and beautiful Soul! Pray for me". One biographer describes him as the "unordained bishop of the Syriac Christians". Fr Kuriakose Eliswa Porukkara, the successor of St Chavara depicts him as the "Ark of Noha of the Syro-Malabar Church". The main reasons for these qualifications are the great work done by him to send back bishop Roccas and the resulting unity in the Church.

Mar Kuriakose Kunnacherry, the former Archbishop of Kottayam, compared St Chavara to St Benedict and Mannanam to Monte Cassino, and affirmed St Chavara as the pioneer of Indian monasticism and Mannanam monastery as the first Indian Christian monastery. On the occasion of the national thanksgiving ceremony held at Kakkanad, on November 29, 2014, Major Archbishop George Cardinal Alencherry said: "St Chavara played a unique role in the process of the restoration of the Syro-Malabar Hierarchy and the constitution of the Major Archiepiscopal Church. In this historical evolution St Chavara is the last link."⁶ Joseph Kallarangatt, an ecclesiologist and bishop of Pala, concludes his evaluation of the contributions of St Chavara in the following words: "St. Chavara, holy, ascetic and scholar, is a great gift to the Syro-Malabar Church. He gave the leadership to the Church at a time when the Syro-Malabar Church was undergoing a crisis and it was a critical period in its history. St Chavara was a great bible scholar, linguist and an expert in liturgical matters. He was the first one to codify the breviary of the Syro-Malabar Church. Let us wish and pray that this great scholar and saintly religious may be declared a Doctor of the Church in the immediate future."⁷

⁶ *Footprints of Holiness, Souvenir of the Canonization of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara & St Euphrasia Eluvathingal (23 November 2014)*, Kakkanad: CMI Prior General House & Thaikkattukara: Mount Carmel Generalate, 2015, 16-17.

⁷ Joseph Kallarangatt, "Ella Mekhalakalilekkum Kathipadarnna Atmeeya Tejassu," (Mal.), in *Footprints of Holiness, Souvenir of the Canonization of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara & St Euphrasia Eluvathingal (23 November 2014)*,

In the light of all these developments, as we enquire the criteria for declaring a member of the SMC as a Father of the Church, we may deduce the following conclusions as norms. Surprisingly, I never come across either in the Latin Code of Canons or in the Oriental Code any reference to the norms of declaring one a Father of the Church. In the *Pastor Bonus* of Pope John Paul II of 1988, Article 73 states: "The Congregation (for the Causes of Saints) is also competent to examine what is necessary for the granting of the title of Doctor to Saints, after having received the recommendation of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith concerning outstanding teaching." In the Apostolic Constitution of Pope Francis *Praedicate Evangelium*, which replaces *Pastor Bonus* in Dicastery for the Causes of Saints Article 102 we read: "The Dicastery is also competent to make a determination regarding the granting of the title *Doctor of the Church* to a given saint, after having received the *votum* of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith concerning his or her outstanding teaching." In the *Particular Laws* of the SMC there are provisions for conferring honorary titles to the deserving candidates of the members of the SMC like *Vaidikaratnam* (for the priests who have rendered meritorious services in pastoral ministry), *Malpan* (for those priests who have made remarkable contributions in the field of sacred theology, ecclesiology, history, etc.), and Syro-Malabar *Sabhatharam* (for the laity who have done dedicated service and outstanding ministry for the Church).⁸ There is, however, no mention of someone declaring a Father of the Church or Doctor of the Church. It is the privilege and duty of the Synod of the SMC to exercise its real power as a Church *sui juris* with Synodal structure to declare Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara as a Father of SMC. Since Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara had contributed uniquely to the re-founding of the Syro-Malabar Church *sui juris*, there is every reason to appeal to the Holy Father to declare him a Doctor of the Universal Church.

3. Criteria for Declaring a Saint as 'Father of the Church' in the Syro-Malabar Church *sui juris* and Exploring the Possibility of Conferring the Title 'Father of the Syro-Malabar Church' on Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara

The letter of His Beatitude George Alencherry, the Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church, dated 22 February 2016, to Mar Kuriakose

Kakkanad: CMI Prior General House & Thaikkattukara: Mount Carmel Generalate, 2015, 95-96.

⁸ *Code of Particular Law of the Syro-Malabar Church*, Mount Saint Thomas: Syro-Malabar Major Archiepiscopal Curia, 2013, 172.

Bharanikulangara, Convener of the Committee instituted by the Syro-Malabar Bishops' Synod held in January 2016, gave him the mandate "to explore the possibility of conferring the title, *Father of the Syro-Malabar Church* on Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara and to define the criteria for declaring a saint 'Father of the Church'."

Mar Kuriakose Bharanikulangara, in his letter, dated 23 March 2016, asked a sub-committee consisting of a few members of the CMI and CMC congregations to prepare a dossier, consisting of a set of criteria and its possible application upon Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara to be presented for the perusal and revision by all the members of the Synodal Committee consisting of Mar Andrews Thazhath, Mar Joseph Kallarangatt, Mar Antony Kariyil, Malpan Mathew Vellanickal, and Dr Joseph Pamplany. In the same letter, it was suggested that these criteria could be identified by dwelling on (1) the theological and doctrinal bases of identifying and declaring the Fathers of the Church, (2) identifying the canonical aspects of the process of declaring a Father of the Church, and (3) the Fatherhood of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara. In response to this mandate, the following text was prepared for the consideration of the committee members.

Part 1: General Norms for Declaring a Saint 'Father of the Church'

In this part, we explore the general theological and doctrinal norms on the basis of which a saint, recognized by the Universal Church, is declared a 'Father of the Church'.

1. Process of Declaring the Fathers of the Church in History

Today, the Catholic Church is blessed with many Fathers of the Church and 38 officially declared Doctors of the Church. 'Father of the Church' is not an officially conferred title and there is no definitive list as is the case with those who are honoured with the title 'Doctor of the Church'. 'Early Church Father' is a title that gradually came to be applied to certain Christian leaders distinguished by antiquity, holiness, orthodoxy, and ecclesiastical approval.

In understanding the title 'Fathers of the Church', a note is provided by Saint Clement of Alexandria: "Words are the progeny of the soul; hence we call those that instructed us 'fathers'."⁹ Since the principal teacher of any early Christian community was its bishop, the title 'Father' was first applied to them. In fact, the bishops who gathered in the various councils of the Church were referred to as 'council fathers'.

⁹ *Stromateis* 1.1.2-2.1; see also Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.41.2.

This is a reflection of the Pauline New Testament tradition: "For though you might have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers. Indeed, in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel" (1 Cor 4:15). However, since many of the important early Christian teachers were laymen (e.g., Saint Justin), deacons (e.g., Saint Ephrem), and priests (e.g., Saint Jerome), it became customary from the fourth century to reckon these eminent teachers among 'the Fathers'.¹⁰ Later, when there were disputes about the interpretation of the Scripture, all the early exegetes sought 'consensus of the Fathers' in support of their points of view. The 'Fathers' here denoted the teachers of an earlier era who demonstrated how the apostolic writings in the Scripture were applied by the apostles and understood by their immediate successors. While all early Christian pastors and catechists 'fathered' their particular portion of the flock during their lifetime, only those 'Fathers' who put their teaching in writing could continue to serve as guides to the whole Church in every age.

Hence, the 'Fathers of the Church' came to refer to those important Christian writers after the New Testament era who, because of their closeness to that era, bore witness to the authentic apostolic way of interpreting the Scripture handed on to them by the Apostolic Tradition.¹¹ These writers played a crucial role in articulating and transmitting the Christian doctrine and bringing them to more mature expressions, at least in their most fundamental features. While the Church's understanding of revelation will continue to deepen until the Lord returns, the dogmas of the Trinity and the Incarnation, which stand at the centre of the "Hierarchy of Truths" (*Unitatis Redintegratio* 11), were defined during the period of the Fathers (i.e., the patristic era). It is significant that the age of the Early Church Fathers, commonly regarded as closing with Isidore of Seville in the West (+636), Saint John Damascene in the Greek Church (+749), is roughly co-terminus with the period of the first six great Ecumenical Councils which defined these two central mysteries of faith and drew out their most important implications. However, no such clear limit is assigned to the Syriac Fathers.¹²

¹⁰ J. H. Crehan, "Fathers of the Church" in *A Catholic Dictionary of Theology*, vol. 2, Melbourne: Nelson, 1967, [288-289], 289.

¹¹ J. Chapman, "Fathers of the Church" in *The Catholic Encyclopaedia*, vol. VI, New York: Gilmary Society, 1913, [1-18], 1.

¹² Crehan, "Fathers of the Church," 288.

In short, the Church looks for four major characteristic features in the life and works of an early Church leader who made his contributions to defend, expound, and develop Christian doctrines, in order to be considered a 'Father of the Church'. These are antiquity, doctrinal orthodoxy, personal sanctity, and approval of the Church.¹³

2. Basic Categories of the Fathers in the Early Church

The early Church Fathers fall into three basic categories: Apostolic Church Fathers, ante-Nicene Church Fathers, and post-Nicene Church Fathers. The Apostolic Church Fathers, like Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch, were the immediate successors of the Apostles and were probably taught by them. They were concerned about the proclamation of the Gospel just as the Apostles themselves proclaimed it. Although most of them were not bent on formulating theological doctrines, they were zealous in rooting out and exposing any false doctrine that cropped up in the early Church based on the Gospel taught to them by the Apostles.

The ante-Nicene Fathers also remained true to the Gospel, but they had an additional concern. Several spurious writings were in circulation claiming to have the same authority as the established writings of Peter, Paul, and Luke. Many of the Fathers in this era spent their time defending the Christian faith against false doctrines that were in vogue. In several of these defences we have the beginnings of the doctrine of the Church.

The post-Nicene Fathers carried out the mission of defending the gospel against all kinds of doctrinal heresies. They articulated the tenets of faith based on the Scripture and the Apostolic Tradition. However, the Fathers in this era were engaged more in developing methods of defending the Gospel and less in transmitting the same in its true and pure form.

3. Outstanding Features of the Fathers/Doctors of the Church¹⁴

The foundations of Christian theology are the Scripture and the Tradition. The Tradition is rooted in the activities of the Apostles and ancient Christian teachers, who set up models of exegesis, theologizing, and pastoral guidelines for the future generations as well as for their

¹³ J. Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. 1, Westminster: Christian Classics, 1984, 10.

¹⁴ Congregation for Catholic Education, *Instruction on the Study of the Fathers of the Church*, *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition (English), 15 January 1990, 8-15.

own communities. In this respect, the ancient Christian writers in general, and the Fathers of the Church in particular stand as foundation and models for posterity.

3.1. Privileged Testimonies of the Tradition

The Fathers handed down faithfully what they had received, learned, and practised to the subsequent generations either in their oral or written teachings. In the early Church, the bishops were called 'Fathers' (see 1 Cor 4:15) as successors of the Apostles, on account of their teaching authority, which is the *Magisterium* of the Church to which is given the official duty to interpret the Word of God (*Dei Verbum* 10).¹⁵

3.2. Love of the Scripture and the Tradition

The Fathers of the Church represent the true interrelationship between the Scripture and the Tradition.¹⁶ According to them, the Sacred Scripture represented the ultimate source of religious truth. They venerated, studied, explained, and defended it with loving submission to it in faith. It became the foundation of their faith, subject of their preaching, nutrition for their piety and the soul of their theological undertakings.

3.3. Originality of Christianity

The Fathers of the Church were convinced of the fundamental transformation that occurred and was occurring in the world brought about by the Christ event. This transformation was something initiated by the divine power, giving a new vision of the reality, a new hermeneutic of humanity, world and God. The Fathers of the Church have reinterpreted all good achievements of humanity with their new Christian vision.¹⁷

3.4. Masters and Promoters of Dogmatic Development

The Fathers of the Church, while defending the truth against various heresies, formulated and established the basic dogmatic teachings of the Church. From these basic teachings, the Church began to make her dogmatic progress.¹⁸ It was the Fathers who, with their intuition of faith,

¹⁵ Congregation for Catholic Education, *Instruction on the Study of the Fathers*, 9.

¹⁶ Congregation for Catholic Education, *Instruction on the Study of the Fathers*, 9.

¹⁷ Congregation for Catholic Education, *Instruction on the Study of the Fathers*, 10.

¹⁸ Congregation for Catholic Education, *Instruction on the Study of the Fathers*, 9.

propounded the formula for various articles of faith as guidance for the growth of faith and dogmatic teachings.

3.5. Sense of Mystery and Experience of the Divine

The sense of the Mystery and awareness of the Divine Economy among the Fathers overshadowed their theological reasoning and led them to cultivate an attitude of piety, asceticism, humble and deep faith, as well as assiduous prayer and contemplation. These attitudes of the Fathers gave them the facility to experience the Divine in their life of faith and practice. They synthesized their mystical experience and the luminosity of theological activity. The result of this synthesis was a happy blend of faith and reason, knowledge and charity that enhanced the Christian life of faith in them and in their communities.¹⁹

3.6. Pastors and Interpreters of Salvation History

The theological articulations of the Fathers were aimed at the pastoral care of the faithful. Their writings were responses to the questions of their times, be it catechism for the instruction of the faithful, homilies for the nourishment of life, exposition of the scripture, confrontation of the errors, exhortations for perfection, or defence of the identity as Christians. They approached the realities of life in the light of the history of salvation.²⁰ At the same time, they defended orthodoxy and promoted orthopraxis, which, in their understanding, were inseparable.

Fathers of the Church recognized the centrality of the mystery of Christ. All other mysteries within the salvation history are subsumed into this central mystery, the mystery of Christ. They exposed the mystery of salvation stressing the unity of the present, in the activity of the Holy Spirit, with the tradition of the past and pointing to the expectation of the eschatological future.

4. Criteria and Norms to Declare Someone a Father of the Church

1. The title 'Fathers of the Church' was not applied to any one based on a canonical process or a set of previously approved norms.
2. The fourfold criterion of Fathers of the Church (antiquity, holiness, orthodoxy, and ecclesiastical approval) does not reflect any previously approved norms, but evolved through what had

¹⁹ Congregation for Catholic Education, *Instruction on the Study of the Fathers*, 10-11.

²⁰ Congregation for Catholic Education, *Instruction on the Study of the Fathers*, 9.

happened in the history of the Church and in and through her lived faith.

3. The universal Church considers only those persons who lived during the formative period of Christianity (i.e., until the eighth century). They contributed to the spiritual, doctrinal, theological, and pastoral building up of the Church.
4. The most important norms based on which one is canonically recognised 'Father of the Church' are based on the holiness and doctrinal orthodoxy of the person.

Part 2: Criteria for Declaring a Saint as Father of the Syro-Malabar Church *sui juris*

In the light of all these developments as we enquire the criteria for declaring one as the Father of the Syro-Malabar Church, we deduce the following conclusions as norms:

1. Just as the Universal Church considers only those persons during the formative period of the early Church as Fathers, the SMC also can consider those persons of crucial importance throughout its *formative period* in modern times (*Antiquity*).
2. Only a canonized saint who took rather an outstanding leadership in the spiritual, pastoral, and doctrinal realms in the SMC could be declared a Father of the Church (*Holiness and Leadership*).
3. The one who had the firm belief in the apostolicity of the SMC and showed much enthusiasm to take substantial efforts to protect the faith, received from Saint Thomas, the Apostle, even amidst oppositions and difficulties, and to safeguard the unity of the Church. However, he should have shown the courage to fight for the lawful rights of the SMC (*Defender of Apostolic Faith*).
4. He should be a person who stood for the cause of the SMC, which are the unity of the SMC, communion of Churches, and faithfulness and obedience to the Holy See (*Cause of the Church*).
5. A Father of the SMC should be a person who has contributed uniquely, substantially and far-sightedly for the building up of the Church and the renewal of the people at large (*Building up of the Church*).
6. He should have the zeal for the salvation of souls and the readiness to make sacrifices for the sake of Christ and the Church (*Zeal for Souls*).

7. He should have taken radical steps for the proclamation of the Word of God relevant to the people at all times (*Proclamation of the Word of God*).
8. He should be capable of disseminating faithfully what he had received, learned, and practised to the later generations through his authentic writings (*Writings*).
9. He should have a sense of the Divine Mystery which led him to lead a life of holiness, cultivating an attitude of piety, asceticism, humble and deep faith, as well as assiduous prayer and contemplation (*Mystical Experience*).

Part 3: Eligibility of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara to be a 'Father of the Syro-Malabar Church'

The main concern of this part is to study the life and activities of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara, a faithful and Spirit-filled son of the SMC, and to explore the possibilities of conferring on him the title 'Father of the Syro-Malabar Church *sui juris*' in the light of the criteria and outstanding features described above. The whole analysis is divided into two parts. In the first part, the profile of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara and his socio-cultural and ecclesial background are explored. The second part constitutes the core of the analysis underlining his ecclesiastical, spiritual, and socio-cultural contributions. His insightful teachings and services enabled the SMC not only to keep up her own apostolic faith and traditions, but also to renew her life in accordance with the signs of the times. An overview of the profile of Saint Chavara is very pertinent since the saint was a strong pillar who spearheaded the formative period of the SMC in the nineteenth century, a crucial time in the quest to regain her identity and autonomy, while keeping intact the unity of the Church Universal.

1. A Profile of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara of the Holy Family

Saint Kuriakose Elias was born on 10 February 1805 in the Chavara family at Kainakary. At the age of 13 he joined the Seminary at Pallipuram. During his seminary life he lost his parents and his only brother, leaving him the sole stem of his family lineage.²¹ Although he was forced to leave the seminary in order to care for the family for a short

²¹ Kuriakose Elias Porukara, *Karmalitha Nishpaduka Munnam Sabhakarude Adisthanakaranum Onnamathe Priorumaya Chavara Kuriakose Malpanate Charitram* (Life of Chavara), *StapakaPithākkannmar Mannanam*, 1905, 31.

period of time, he made arrangements for the maintenance of the family and resumed his priestly studies.

1.1. Saint Chavara: A Servant of the Church

Kuriakose Elias Chavara was ordained a priest by Bishop Maurelius Stabilini at Arthunkal on 29 November 1829. Along with Malpan Thomas Palackal and Father Thomas Porukara, Chavara was involved in the establishment of a religious community for men at Mannanam on 11 May 1831. After the death of Malpan Palackal and Malpan Thomas Porukara in 1841 and 1846, respectively, Saint Chavara was the only survivor responsible for the canonical erection of the religious community at Mannanam on 8 December 1855. The life and activities of the members of this religious community under the leadership of Saint Chavara, providing pastorally oriented services revitalized the Church and society in Malabar, which, in turn, enhanced the regaining of her identity and autonomy in the formative period of the Syrian Christians in the nineteenth century. Apart from the monastery at Mannanam, seven more monasteries²² were started (1857-1870) during the time of Saint Chavara in different parts of Malabar as requested by the parish priests and people of those areas.²³

The arrival of a Persian bishop named Thomas Roccas from Bagdad created much confusion and turbulence in the Church. To tackle this situation, on 8 June 1861, Archbishop Bernadine Baccinelli, the then Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly, appointed Chavara Vicar General of the Syrians.²⁴ In his capacity as the Vicar General, Chavara maintained not only the unity within the Malabar Church, but also had proper accord with the Vicar Apostolic and with the Holy See.

The foundation of the Third Order of Carmelites Discalced (TOCD), the first indigenous religious congregation for women in Kerala, at Koonammavu in 1866 by Saint Chavara, with the help of Fr Leopold Beccaro OCD, was another milestone in the history of the Malabar Church.²⁵

²² Koonammavu, Elthuruth, Plassanal, Vazhakulam, Pulincunnu, Ampazhakkadu, and Mutholy.

²³ A. Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2008, 110-126.

²⁴ *Positio*, 216f.; Mundadan, *Chavara*, 206.

²⁵ Chavara Kuriakose Elias, *Complete Works of Chavara* (CWC), vol. I: *Nalagamam*, Ernakulam, 1981, 126; English translation (1990), *Chronicle*, 194; see also Mundadan, *Chavara*, 281.

On 3 January 1871, after a dynamic and fruitful life of 65 years, Chavara was called back for his heavenly reward. After completing the due canonical processes, on 23 November 2014, the Universal Church recognized the sanctity of Kuriakose Elias Chavara through his canonization in Rome by Pope Francis. In order to have a better understanding of the contributions of Chavara towards the spiritual and material rejuvenation of the Malabar Church, an overview of the state of the society and the Church in Kerala in his days is inevitable.

1.2. Socio-Cultural and Ecclesial Background of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara

In the nineteenth century, the Thomas Christians were living in a caste-ridden society of Kerala, which was not based on the principles of social freedom and equality. Untouchability, social marginalization of women, economic inequality, and illiteracy deeply affected the social and religious life of the Kerala society.²⁶ It is in this context the social reforms initiated by Saint Chavara stand as insightful and impactful with a prophetic resonance in the Malabar society.

Though the Church in Malabar was very proud of her apostolic origins, in her existence for nineteen centuries, she had made no significant progress in establishing her individuality. Saint Chavara enumerated the reasons for the same: (1) The unfortunate status of the local church deprived of bishops of their own Rite or nationality to lead their priests and the people in accordance with their own apostolic faith and tradition.²⁷ (2) The lack of consecrated men and women who practised religious virtues and the absence of monasteries and convents caused the omission of immense good. (3) Spiritual blindness and lack of committed personnel to impart education by means of sowing the seeds of wisdom and nurturing the saplings of virtue through the glow of education, as a result of which the Church produced no canonized saints like some other Churches that received faith much later.²⁸ With this critical state of the Church in mind, Saint Chavara prayed, practised mortification, worked extensively, and laboured day and night very zealously for her spiritual and temporal welfare.

²⁶ Navya Maria, *Empowered Womanhood*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2014, 89-156.

²⁷ CWC, Vol. I, *Chronicle* (1990), 146.

²⁸ CWC, Vol. I, *Chronicle* (1990), 146.

2. Saint Chavara: A Strong Pillar of the Malabar Church

Although a man of the nineteenth century, a great prophet, Saint Chavara had awakened not only that era but also the twentieth century. Certainly, he continues to enliven the twenty-first century. Throughout his life, he laboured zealously for the spiritual and temporal welfare of the Church. Since all his apostolic services had the endorsement of his mystical experience, they still remain relevant to the Church and the society.²⁹

2.1. A Man of God and a Mystic

Ecclesiastical history has recorded the fact that only those men and women who led a life encircled by the Divine Spirit could make remarkable and lasting contributions to the Church and society. The mystical experience of Chavara stems from his personal and unique vision of God and the humankind. For him, God is a loving father; he himself is a son of this loving Father and the fellow beings are his siblings. *Dhyanasallapangal*, one of his literary works, stands out to be the most expressive channel of his God-experience and contemplative dimension. In the work, he continuously addresses God and Jesus as *appa* (father), *enteappa* (my father), which has the endearing and intimate meaning of 'father' reserved exclusively to the children. Consequently, the Saint acclaimed with a gentle heart: "my heart, however, tells me to call you by no other name than my Father (*enteappan*)."³⁰

The inner joy and serenity that Chavara experienced from this *abba* experience enabled him to spend long hours in the divine presence of the Eucharist without any interruption.³¹ However, his God-experience did not keep him away from his fellow beings; rather, it made him listen to their cries, see their sufferings and understand their hardships.³² The longer the time he spent in mystical union with God, the greater was his dedication in selfless service to uplift the flock of the Father. His works

²⁹ The well-known Kerala historian, M.G.S. Narayanan, in his article "Navōthāna Pathayil Munpe Nadanna Nāyakan" (*A Renaissance Leader Who Walked before Time*) in *Chavarayachan*, John Mannarathara, ed., Kozhikode: Mathrubhoomi Books, 2014, 16-20, regrets that he did not make an elaborate study on Chavara's person and contributions. He writes that the life and achievements of Father Chavara cannot be restricted to the Catholic Church. They are relevant to all communities and to all times. It can be said that Chavara was a great personality born before the times.

³⁰ CWC, Vol. III, *Colloquies*, 5.

³¹ *Positio*, 541.

³² Mundadan, *Chavara*, 252.

were natural expressions and extensions of his intimate God-experience and lived-mysticism. Mystical experience is a mark of a person who is close to God in sanctity. It is worth noting that all the fathers of the Church in both the East and the West were men of God although not all of them were mystics.

2.2. A Zealous Pastor and a Servant Leader

The life of Saint Chavara, who started his pastoral life as an ordinary parish priest, made extraordinary achievements for the Church by means of his dynamic activities. He dedicated his life for the faith formation of the people of God. He fostered their faith, assured its protection, and served the people and brought about their spiritual revival. He was convinced that as an anointed priest, his primary concern was to be involved in the ministry of the Word of God. He initiated or reformed several aspects of the ecclesial life of his time. Some of these are the formation of the clergy, opening of catechumenates for the newly converted, foundation of religious communities for men and women, liturgical reforms,³³ starting of schools for public education of all sorts of people irrespective of caste and creed,³⁴ development of print media,³⁵ and charity home³⁶ for the destitute. As a zealous pastor, he focused on the building up of the Church as well as the social, cultural, and economic development of the society based on the Gospel values.³⁷ A detailed note on some of such efforts will disclose the love and dedication of Saint Chavara to the Church in Malabar.

2.2.1. A Preacher of the Word of God

Saint Chavara was convinced that his fundamental mission, as a pastor, was the proclamation of the Word of God. He intensified the practice of sharing the Word of God on Sundays by means of sermons, which was initially started by Porukara.³⁸ He organized retreats in parishes as a

³³ Thomas Kochumuttom, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bombay: St Pauls, 2014, 239-248.

³⁴ Kochumuttom, *Chavara*, 249-250.

³⁵ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 346-354.

³⁶ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 161.

³⁷ The letter that Archbishop Baccinelli wrote to Rome recommending the consecration of Chavara as the bishop co-adjutor attests to the pastoral zeal of Chavara that made the Archbishop to propose him as his successor. See Mundadan, *Chavara*, 229.

³⁸ Joseph Kanjiramattathil, *The Pastoral Vision of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1986, 51.

common feature in Kerala, which could not only reinvigorate their faith life but also facilitate settlement of many family disputes and quarrels between neighbours. This resulted in the conversion and renewal of life.³⁹ Impressed by the effective proclamation of the Word of God preached by Saint Chavara and his confreres, and seeing the fruit that they bore, the Vicar Apostolic appointed the religious priests at Mannanam the formal preachers of the Word of God in his Vicariate.⁴⁰

Saint Chavara was not only a preacher of the Word of God. He meditated over it, interiorized it so as to live and articulate its message powerfully for the common good of the faithful. As the Word was his food and drink, life and consolation, his preaching and writings were inspiringly saturated with the Word of God.

2.2.2. Seminary Formation and the Renewal of the Clergy

Saint Chavara had received spiritual and intellectual discipline and directives for an effective pastoral life from Malpan Palackal. Based on his personal experience, he was aware of the importance and implications of an adequate seminary formation. He realised that “an uneducated priest was not only inefficient to do anything worthwhile in his pastoral work, but may be even detrimental to the salvation of souls.”⁴¹ He insisted that wisdom coupled with sanctity was inevitable for a fruitful priestly life. He knew that if priests were empowered by means of a suitable training and formation, they would contribute immensely towards the growth and spiritual uplift of the people of God.⁴²

The pioneering members of the monastery at Mannanam had established a seminary attached to the monastery in 1833.⁴³ Later, since the seminary at Mannanam was insufficient to cater to the needs of the Church, Saint Chavara, with the permission of the Vicar Apostolic, established seminaries attached to the monasteries at Vazhakulam (1866) and Elthuruth (1869).⁴⁴ It is notable that those priests who had their

³⁹ Kanjiramattathil, *Pastoral Vision*, 52.

⁴⁰ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 119.

⁴¹ Leopold Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Mannanam: Saint Joseph's Monastery, 2003, 6; *Ciriaco Elia Chavara*, Postulator, Roma, 1974, 10.

⁴² Kanjiramattathil, *Pastoral Vision*, 38.

⁴³ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 68-76.

⁴⁴ Valerian Plathottam, *Vannya Divyasree Chavara Kuriakose Elisachan*, Mannanam, 1936, 87.

education in these seminaries were the ones who co-operated with Saint Chavara to confront the schisms. He reformed the ecclesiastical education according to the need of the hour.⁴⁵ It is a historical fact that at a time when the Malabar Church had no effective native leadership or headquarters of its own, the monastery at Mannanam and Saint Chavara stepped in to fill this ecclesial vacuum.

Hand in hand with the reformation of ecclesiastical education, the renewal of the clergy was also a pressing need of the time. Their on-going formation was ensured by him with special retreats preached for them. In addition, he made spiritual books and other literature available to them. Annual enlightenment retreats for the priests were organized at Mannanam every year.⁴⁶ In special cases, the bishop sent his priests to the monastery to make their retreats.

Saint Chavara was hailed as the ambassador of reconciliation between the bishop and the priests and between priests and the people of God.⁴⁷ His life and example were instrumental for many vocations to monastic priesthood and the foundation of many a formation centre. In short, as priests are obliged to relentlessly strive to seek the good will and salvation of others, Saint Chavara considered their personal salvation and growth in virtue as his primary concern.

2.2.3. Founder of Indigenous Religious Congregations

Chavara often lamented the barren status of the Church in India, which despite its antiquity and apostolic connection, had not produced even a single saint, whereas lands that received faith much later have produced them in great numbers.⁴⁸ Moreover, he was aware of the fact that "many a good thing was not done owing to the want of a religious house."⁴⁹ It was in order to fill this spiritual vacuum that Chavara longed for a special arrangement in which individuals could withdraw from the society and lead a life that would nurture holiness. This dream of Chavara which he shared with two of his mentors, who had cherished

⁴⁵ Kanjiramattathil, *Pastoral Vision*, 38-39.

⁴⁶ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 343-345.

⁴⁷ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 463.

⁴⁸ CWC, vol. III: *AdhyatmikaKruthikal* (1981), 173f.; English translation (1990), 146.

⁴⁹ CWC, vol. III: *AdhyatmikaKruthikal* (1981), 1; English translation (1990), 1.

similar dreams,⁵⁰ resulted in no less than three religious congregations – one for men and two for women.

2.2.3.1. Religious Congregation for Men

Despite the fact that Indian Church historians find several references to the existence of monastic life in India⁵¹ and among Saint Thomas Christians,⁵² the founding fathers of the indigenous religious congregation for men (CMI) had no extant monastic or religious models to build on;⁵³ they had to begin from the scratch. The initiatives for founding a religious congregation came from Fathers Palackal and Porukara.⁵⁴ They were mostly responsible for obtaining the necessary permission⁵⁵ and laying the foundation for the first religious house for men at Mannanam in 1831.⁵⁶ Regarding the event of the foundation of the religious house, Saint Chavara noted: “It was these two fathers who laboured most for this endeavour. But this writer, Chavara Kuriakose, who had decided to live according to the will of this Malpan... offered the first mass with the bishop after his ordination at Arthunkal for the fulfilment of this work.”⁵⁷

Chavara’s role in the formal establishment of the new religious community became prominent after the death of Thomas Palackal and Thomas Porukara in 1841 and 1846, respectively.⁵⁸ As the leader of the community, Chavara made several requests to the Vicar Apostolic for the canonical approbation of the community. Finally, the Primitive Rule of the Carmelite Order was given to the community with some changes made to suit the life in the land.⁵⁹ With this ecclesiastical recognition of the first indigenous religious community in place, on 8 December 1855, Chavara, the leading member of the community, made his first religious profession before Father Marcelline Berardi, the Delegate of the Vicar Apostolic, and the newly founded religious community was named

⁵⁰ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 109. He notes that “these two were the first to have the inspiration and start work on the foundation.”

⁵¹ A.M. Mundadan, *History and Beyond*, Aluva, 1997, 157ff. See also *History of Christianity in India*, vol. I (revised edition), Bangalore, 2001, 187ff.

⁵² Mundadan, *History and Beyond*, 158-161.

⁵³ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 67.

⁵⁴ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 75.

⁵⁵ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 77.

⁵⁶ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 67.

⁵⁷ CWC, Vol. I, *Chronicle*, 26.

⁵⁸ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 112-113.

⁵⁹ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 103.

"Servants of Mary Immaculate of Mount Carmel."⁶⁰ On the same day, the remaining members of the community made their profession before Chavara, as he was made the superior of the community and was called Prior and he continued in that office until his death in 1871.⁶¹

2.2.3.2. Religious Congregation for Women

With the religious community for men established and having relished the positive influence this community had on the Church and the society in Kerala, Chavara began to harbour thoughts about the possibility of a similar arrangement for women who might desire to live a life of consecrated commitment.⁶² However, a few attempts at such a venture did not have any lasting effect⁶³ and the attempts of Baccinelli himself seemed to have failed.⁶⁴ Meanwhile, on a certain occasion, Father Leopold Beccaro OCD, who was the spiritual director of Chavara, brought up the question regarding the possibility of a few women coming together to lead a life of prayer. Since the idea was a pleasant coincidence, Chavara wholeheartedly declared his support to the proposal. Leopold presented the matter to Archbishop Baccinelli, the Vicar Apostolic, and sought his permission for such a venture.⁶⁵

The episcopal permission having been granted, they turned to the practicalities. Owing to the scarcity of funds, they built a temporary bamboo shack in a small plot of land at Koonammavu, and sisters began to live there from 13 February 1866 onwards.⁶⁶ Kuriakose Porukara, the successor of Chavara as the Prior General and his first biographer, testifies: "As there was no opportunity in this region for women to dedicate their virginity to God and to live in prayer, he (Chavara) wished them also to this happiness. Therefore, with the Provincial (Leopold) and others, trusting in God, received some women who were prepared to

⁶⁰ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 102, note 44.

⁶¹ CWC, Vol. I, *The Chronicles*, 57, 77-78.

⁶² Mundadan, *Chavara*, 281 indicates the possibility that the request that was placed before Archbishop Baccinelli included a vision for religious life both for men and women.

⁶³ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 343.

⁶⁴ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 283, 289-290.

⁶⁵ *Positio*, 558; P. Koyipallil, *A Short Biography of Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara of the Holy Family: The First Prior General of Our Congregation* (Malayalam manuscript AMSJ), 1929, 57.

⁶⁶ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 67; see also Kanjiramattathil, *Pastoral Vision*, 66-73.

live this kind of life and accommodated them in a temporary house.”⁶⁷ Eventually, thanks to the hard and tireless efforts of Chavara and Leopold, a permanent and proper house was built for the women to live in and to pursue their life of consecration.⁶⁸

The purpose of the foundation of the religious community for women was the empowerment and wellbeing of women of the area in general as well as the spiritual realization of its members. This was a time when women were largely denied even the basic rights of education, property, and proper clothing. They had no role in decision making in the family, the Church, and the society.⁶⁹ In this context, the founding of a religious congregation for women was certainly a step towards the empowerment of women through education and various other welfare activities that helped raise the status of women.⁷⁰

2.2.4. Liturgical Renewal and Faith Formation

Saint Chavara realized that a real renewal of the Malabar Church is possible only based on the Word of God and the Liturgy. He learnt Syriac and Latin, the liturgical languages, with great zeal and enthusiasm. Ordering the rubrics of the Holy Qurbana, the codification of the Divine Office for the clergy, introduction of several para-liturgical practices such as Eucharistic adoration, way of the cross, rosary devotion, novenas to the Blessed Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph, etc., brought about a revival in the spiritual life of the ordinary faithful of the Malabar Church.

2.2.4.1. The *Tukasa*

Saint Chavara prepared the *Tukasa*, the ‘Order of the Mass’ to ensure the celebration of the Eucharist with devotion, attention, and order.⁷¹ He prepared and got it printed in 1868.⁷² It was a remarkable work, which was used by the Church for almost a century as the only means to bring about uniformity in the rubrics of the liturgical celebration.

⁶⁷ Kuriakose Eliseus Porukara, *Stapaka Pithākanmar*, Mannanam, 1905,

⁶⁸ CWC, Vol. III: *Adhyatmika Kruthikal* (1981), 138; English translation (1990), 115f.

⁶⁹ CWC, Vol. I, 84-85; Navya Maria, *Empowered Womanhood*, 145-146.

⁷⁰ Joseph Pathrapankal, *An Iconoclast in His Own Right*, in Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara, John Mannarathara, ed., New Delhi: Viva Books, 2015, [234-241], 241.

⁷¹ Kanjiramattathil, *Pastoral Vision*, 56.

⁷² *Positio*, 308; Mundadan, *Chavara*, 267-268.

2.2.4.2. Divine Office for Priests

The compilation of the Divine Office recited by priests was another notable service of Chavara. The prayers that were in use were gathered from four different sources, namely, *Hudra*, *Kaskol*, *Gaza*, and *Kala* and it was not easy to recite it in an orderly and uniform manner. The priests were inclined almost to ignore its use. Chavara took up the challenge of preparing a handy Divine Office.⁷³ Later, when he became the Vicar General, he revised it and sent it to Rome for approval, printed it, and made it available for the use of the priests.

2.2.4.3. Divine Office for Sisters

Chavara was conscientious also in compiling the Divine Office for the use the sisters at Koonammavu. The Chronicle of the Convent at Koonammavu records that he compiled it in his own hand, marked it with different colours of ink to make them understand the order in which it was to be recited and gave them practice accordingly.⁷⁴

2.2.4.4. The Holy Saturday Service

Since there was no special liturgical service on Holy Saturday in the Syrian rite, he translated the Holy Saturday service of the Latin liturgy into Syriac for the use in Syrian churches. In this regard he wrote to Cardinal Simeon, the head of the Propaganda Congregation, in 1864: "Our churches remain closed on that day like the Jewish Synagogues. So, I request you to approve it for us and send it back as early as possible."⁷⁵

2.2.4.5. Forty-Hour Adoration

Saint Chavara's love for liturgy emerged from his personal love and profound faith in the Eucharistic presence. He aspired intently that all should know the merciful love of Jesus present in the Holy Eucharist and that all should love him. As a great devotee and an apostle of the Holy Eucharist, with the permission of the Vicar Apostolic, he introduced the practice of Forty-Hour Adoration in various monasteries. It was initiated at Koonammavu in 1866.⁷⁶ Soon it became very popular in the Malabar Church as a powerful source of spiritual nourishment.

⁷³ Porukara, *Stapaka Pithākkannmar*, 30; Podipara, *Nammude Ritu* (Our Rite), Mannanam: Saint Joseph's Press, 1943, 132f.; Kanjiramattathil, *Pastoral Vision*, 57.

⁷⁴ CWC, Vol. IV, *Letters*, 22.

⁷⁵ CWC, Vol. IV, 1990, 11; 1982, 22f.; Mundadan, *Chavara*, 277.

⁷⁶ *Positio*, 282ff.; Mundadan, *Chavara*, 278.

2.2.4.6. Devotional Practices for Spiritual Revival

Popular devotions played a significant role in the spiritual revival of the Malabar Church. In order to revitalize the ecclesial life of the faithful, he adapted several popular devotions in the model of the ones found in the Latin tradition. He translated these devotions both from Latin and Tamil into Malayalam. The Way of the Cross, Eucharistic adoration, the rosary devotion, devotion to the Carmelite scapular, devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph are some of the devotions that he promoted.

2.2.5. Revolutionary Educationist

With the arrival of the CMS, LMS, and Basel missionaries in the nineteenth century, English education became popular in Kerala.⁷⁷ However, Catholics were not allowed to learn English language as the Catholic missionaries feared that study of that language would be an occasion for the Protestant ideas to infiltrate among the Catholics.⁷⁸ Chavara would not let this prohibition to shut the door of literacy before his people.⁷⁹ He would set in motion a process of literary formation of the people beginning with the foundation of a Sanskrit school at Mannanam in 1846; he introduced innovative educational methods like establishing schools attached to all the parishes in his jurisdiction, which appealed to the general public and revolutionized the educational scenario of Kerala and, eventually, led to the spread of literacy in the state.

2.2.5.1. Education to the Deprived Classes

Chavara was born and lived in an era when education to the lower classes remained a far cry.⁸⁰ Chavara's social vision evinced that the integral development of a society can be brought about only by means of a common outlook on life by all members of the society. It was with this aim that he gave an impetus to the education of the deprived classes,

⁷⁷ V. Nagam Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, vol 2, Trivandrum: Asian Educational Service, 1989, 474; *LMS Report, The Report of the Directors to the Members of the Missionary Society*. London: 1823, 70.

⁷⁸ K. S. Mathew, "Introduction," in *Indian Constitution, Education and Minorities in Kerala*, eds. K. S. Mathew and T. K. Sebastian, 1-29, Tellicherry: Institute for Research in Social Science and Humanities, 2009, 9.

⁷⁹ J. Kanjiramattathil, *Pastoral Vision*, 2, 83.

⁸⁰ K. S. Padma, *Study on the Status and Role of Women in the Public Life of Kerala from 1850-1956*, PhD Dissertation, Thiruvananthapuram: University of Kerala, 2002, 34.

which included even the untouchables.⁸¹ A school established solely for the Dalits, in 1865, at Arpukara,⁸² an area where the upper and lower classes could not be brought together, is an example of this kind of a venture of Chavara.⁸³

2.2.5.2. Mid-Day Meal to Promote Education

The Dalits and the untouchables were so bound to the basic exigencies of life that they could never dream of an education. Even if they did, most of them could not afford it on their own.⁸⁴ It is for such willing, but deprived children that Chavara came up with a scheme of mid-day meal. The children from a deprived background who were willing to come to school, were not only encouraged with education free of charge, but also were given mid-day meal as a perk.⁸⁵

2.2.5.3. The Sanskrit School

In the days of Chavara, the prospect of teaching the untouchables was unthinkable.⁸⁶ However, Chavara who would not leave any stone unturned when it came to the question of the common good of the society, would tactically find a way out. He established a Sanskrit school at Mannanam where children from all social classes were taught.⁸⁷ He appointed a *savarna* to teach Sanskrit that the teacher would act as a shock absorber between the two classes of the society.⁸⁸

2.2.5.4. The *Pallikkoodam*

As an ecclesiastical leader, Chavara opened the door of education to his people. However, his universal outlook on the extended ecclesial

⁸¹ K. C. Chacko, *Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Mannanam, 1959, 72.

⁸² Mundadan, *Chavara*, 257; John Paul, ed., *IdayaNatakangal (Ecologues: Shepherd Plays)* by Chavara Kuriakose Elias, Thrissur: Kerala Sahithya Academy, 2014, 133.

⁸³ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 256; V. Plathottam, *Malankara Sabha Mathavinte OruVeera Santhanam*, 37.

⁸⁴ H. Wingram, *A Commentary on Malabar Laws and Customs*, Madras: Higginbotham and Co., 1900, 100.

⁸⁵ Mundadan, *Chavara*, p. 259.

⁸⁶ Mateer Samuel, *Land of Charity: A Descriptive Account of Travancore and its People*, New Delhi: Asian Educational Service, 1991 (Reprint), 29; V. Parappuram, *The Chronicles of the Monastery at Koonammavu*, ASJM, Mannanam, 1474.

⁸⁷ Plathottam, *Malankara Sabha Mathavinte Veera Santhanam*, 137.

⁸⁸ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 256; *Alochanapusthakam* (Book of Consultation in the Monastery at Mannanam), 1864-1871, ASJM, Mannanam, 94-95, 26-27, 159.

ministry to others impelled him to open the opportunity to the deprived classes too.⁸⁹ As a viable tool available to him to implement his educational scheme, he roped in all the parish churches and made them forums of education where all could pursue their education.⁹⁰

2.2.5.5. The Publications

With the assistance of a carpenter, Chavara prepared and installed a hand-made printing press at Mannanam. The modest proliferation of the materials in print that came out of the rudimentary printing device (1846) that Chavara established, and eventually developed into a full-fledged printing press. This press brought in a publication revolution in the life of those people who would otherwise have neither opportunity nor resources to have access to such literary facilities.⁹¹ Home-made reading materials presented to them at an affordable cost gave this populace an opportunity to come in contact with letters.⁹² Moreover, those partially privileged ones, even among Christians, who were deprived of literature found a literary solace in the prayer books and other catechetical publications that Chavara eventually brought out from the press at Mannanam.

2.2.6. Social Apostolate

The Church can never be looked at as a monad that is detached from the world or apart from the society that the Church subsists in. It is in this perspective that the contributions that Chavara made to the society have to be taken into account. He considered his social life as an integral part of his religious life. Hence, he said: "The days in which you have not done a service to someone else will not be counted among the days of your life."⁹³ There are many more pieces of advice of this kind that Chavara gave his confreres and parishioners. His concern for the elderly and terminally ill from among the poor and deprived groups was materialized in the *Upavisala* at Kainakari (1869) and the Confraternity of Saint Joseph for Good Death at Kainakari (1869).⁹⁴

⁸⁹ Kochumuttom, *Chavara*, 250.

⁹⁰ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 257. Mundadan also refers to the controversy regarding the origin of the idea and the circular enjoining the parish priests to establish a school adjacent to the churches.

⁹¹ Kanjiramattathil, *Pastoral Vision*, 86-87.

⁹² Mundadan, *Chavara*, 353.

⁹³ CWC, Vol IV: *The Letters*, IX/6, "Kudumbachattom," No. 13.

⁹⁴ CWC, Vol IV: *The Letters*, IX/7.

2.2.6.1. Social Implications of *The Testament of a Loving Father*

The testament that Chavara wrote to the parishioners of his home-parish is a code of conduct for the family, which, among other instructions, in a special way emphasized the need of an orderly upbringing of the children.⁹⁵ The testament and the instructions positively influenced the society both directly and indirectly:⁹⁶ directly, by means of the dissemination of the instructions among the Catholics throughout Kerala enhanced by the two wings of the Carmelites – men and women – that he co-founded; indirectly, the reflexive benefit that the society had through the social intercourse among the Christian children and their fellow students in the schools and neighbourhood emerged slowly, but certainly made significant advancement.

2.2.6.2. Empowerment of Women

The social action that Chavara set in motion was so comprehensive and ground-breaking for his time that it touched all possible aspects of social life. Life of women in Kerala in the nineteenth century was far from a dignified one and education was far from realised.⁹⁷ This was the case both with the women who were *savarnas* and *avarnas*.⁹⁸ The tentacles of gender discrimination remained biased: all women of all religious allegiances were denied the basic rights and were deprived of the opportunities to become independent in any way.⁹⁹ Chavara addressed this dehumanizing issue in two ways: Firstly, he empowered the women of the religious congregation that he founded in such a way that, in turn, as agents of change, they would, by means of various skill development programmes,¹⁰⁰ empower their fellow women in the society. Secondly, the convents that he established would have centres (*educandat*)¹⁰¹ for girl children to live and pursue their studies unhindered by the social pressure of whatever tag they bore.

⁹⁵ CWC, Vol. IV: *The Letters*, X/6, "Rules for a Family," Nos. 10, 22.

⁹⁶ Kanjiramattathil, *Pastoral Vision*, 76-79.

⁹⁷ K. P. Padmanabha Menon, *History of Kerala*, 4 vols. (Reprint), New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1982, 294.

⁹⁸ L. E. Sahanam, *The Contributions of LMS Missionaries in the Field of Education in South Travancore: A Historical Enquiry*, Bangalore: United Theological College, 1976, 24.

⁹⁹ K. K. N. Kurup and E. Ismail, *Emergence of Islam in Kerala in 20th Century*, New Delhi: Standard Publishers, 2008, 52.

¹⁰⁰ CWC, Vol. IV: *The Letters*, VII/6 (language) and CKC, Vol. I, 11-12 (fine skills in handicrafts).

¹⁰¹ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 308.

2.2.7. In the Service of the Malabar Church

Chavara had the profound conviction that the Church was built on the precepts the Apostles and the ensuing apostolic origin of the Malabar Church. Referring to the historical origin of monasteries and convents in Kerala, Chavara wrote: "This Malabar which had received the faith from Saint Thomas, the Apostle, confesses the true faith from ancient times." Chavara continued: "We, the Nazarenes, are Christians of ancient origin..."¹⁰² The zeal with which he advanced to keep the Church from Roccas and to protect it from the possible division makes him an avid defender of the Church. He was very proud of the antiquity of his faith and tradition.

2.2.7.1. Promoter of Indigenous Ecclesial Leadership

Although the Malabar Church was an apostolic Church, at the time of Chavara, it was under the jurisdiction of foreign prelates and the desire for a native leadership was acute among the faithful. After the appointment of Chavara as the Vicar General, the efforts for a native bishop gathered momentum. Enumerating the benefits of such an arrangement, especially for the sake of the stability of the Church, Chavara appealed to the Holy See to appoint native bishops in the Malabar Church.

Chavara wrote to Cardinal Alexander Bernaba, the head of the Propaganda Fide: "We are Mar Thoma Christians who have received our faith from Saint Thomas. For the past many years we had no bishop of our own. But those who have received their faith in very recent times have a bishop of their own. Provoked by such envious thoughts when they get an opportunity they will go to Babel, saying 'Let us resort to Babel for getting a bishop of our own rite.' Hence, Your Eminence, I am placing before you a suggestion... It is good to have two bishops here: one for the Latin Church, and the other for the Syrian Church."¹⁰³

2.2.7.2. Chavara, the Vicar General

On 8 June 1861, Monsignor Bernardine Baccinelli, the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly, appointed Chavara the Vicar General of the Malabar Church.¹⁰⁴ It was a recognition that Baccinelli gave Chavara for the leadership that he was giving already to the faithful. Ever since the canonical inception of the religious community at Mannanam, he was

¹⁰² CWC, Vol. IV, *Letters*, 1990, 14.

¹⁰³ CWC, Vol. IV, *Letters*, 1990, 14.

¹⁰⁴ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 206; 224-229.

leading it as its Prior.¹⁰⁵ The human qualities that he displayed at the parish church at Lalam,¹⁰⁶ the polite but stern manner in which he received Denha, a Chaldean priest at Mannanam,¹⁰⁷ and the prudence that he exhibited in refusing to kiss the ring of Roccas, an unauthorized Bishop from Babylon,¹⁰⁸ would have sent signals to the Vicar Apostolic that there was no leader in Malabar more fit to lead the Church than Chavara.

The appointment of Chavara was a result of the urgent resolve of Baccinelli "for the spiritual progress of the faithful and to fight the schism more effectively."¹⁰⁹ What is noteworthy is the reason for the appointment: "On account of the difficulties, which we feel for a long time, in the administration of the churches under our jurisdiction, and on account of our advanced age, and ... ill health, and above all, since I do not find the desired spiritual fruits either among the priests or among the laity ... hereby I nominate you vicar general ... of the Syro-Malabar Church under our jurisdiction."¹¹⁰ The personal credentials of Chavara for this unprecedented consideration are enumerated by Baccinelli: "I am convinced that you have the fortitude, ability and the virtue necessary to carry out this office."¹¹¹

2.2.7.3. Church Administration

The credit for the great uplift that Malabar witnessed in the nineteenth century is mainly to be attributed to the zeal of Monsignor Baccinelli and Chavara, his Vicar General, who was granted "the authority and privileges, which the common law acknowledges," and granted him "all those privileges, which I am entitled to impart in accordance with my patent letters ... by which you will be able to administer the spiritual matters to the priests and laity included in the Syro-Malabar Church under my jurisdiction and thus to govern the churches."¹¹² The administrative ability of Chavara was evident in the reforms that he had brought about. "It is worthy to mention that at this time, the whole of the Syrian Church was divided, by the Vicar General, into four districts,

¹⁰⁵ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 148ff.

¹⁰⁶ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 155.

¹⁰⁷ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 155.

¹⁰⁸ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 155.

¹⁰⁹ Kanjiramattathil, *Pastoral Vision*, 96.

¹¹⁰ *Positio*, 216; Mundadan, *Chavara*, 206.

¹¹¹ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 206.

¹¹² Mundadan, *Chavara*, 206.

each being entrusted to one of the Fathers of the Congregation. These Fathers were known, so to say, as the 'plenipotentiaries' or 'deputies' of the Vicar Apostolic, each in his district. They had special charge over the clergy and the laity; they supervised school work, conducted catechetical institutions, settled naughty disputes and quarrels and transacted other works of importance. Thus, the members of the congregation, directed by Father Cyriac Elias (Chavara), visited, from the beginning, all the Churches of Malabar, preached retreats and missions, corrected abuses, and even discharged parochial work, when the peculiar circumstances of a parish required it."¹¹³

2.2.7.4. Financial Security of the Vicariate

There was a time when the Vicariate was facing a serious financial crisis.¹¹⁴ To tide over it, the members of the community at Mannanam suggested to the Prior that the problem could be solved by pooling one tenth of the income of each church into the common fund. However, the Vicar Apostolic brought it down to five per cent.¹¹⁵ Accordingly, Chavara prepared a decree, which directed each parish to deliver, together with the annual statement of the accounts, five per cent of the total income of the parish to the episcopal curia. The Vicar Apostolic signed this decree, got it printed at Mannanam and sent it to all the churches.¹¹⁶

In the same line, Chavara introduced the collection of *pidiyari*¹¹⁷ and *kettuthengu*.¹¹⁸ He asked all the families that were able to afford it, to set apart a handful of rice as they began to cook for the day and set apart the produce of a coconut palm for the upkeep of the Church. Though simple in its execution, this practice became very popular in the course of time in the whole of the Malabar Church and, to a great extent, the dioceses met some of its expenses from this contribution from the faithful.

2.2.7.5. Catechumenates

The spread of the Kingdom of God depends upon the growth of the Church and those who are willing to embrace it must be prepared

¹¹³ P. Podipara, ed., *The Carmelite Congregation of Malabar 1831-1931*, Mannanam, 1932, 58-59; Mundadan, *Chavara*, 312, 313.

¹¹⁴ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 246.

¹¹⁵ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 247.

¹¹⁶ CWC, *Chronicles*, Vol. III, 44ff.

¹¹⁷ V. Parappuram, *Chronicle 1902-1905* (History of the Roccisian Schism, Malayalam, Vols. 1-2).

¹¹⁸ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 250.

adequately to receive the faith. However, the only school for the training of the catechumens was attached to the headquarters of the Vicar Apostolic. Considering the significant number of those who wanted to receive faith, in 1864, a catechumenate was opened at Mannanam, attached to the Monastery.¹¹⁹ The expenses incurred for the daily running of the catechumenate were sourced from the above-mentioned contributions of the faithful that Chavara had organized. This facilitated the conversion of the Dalits and the marginalized in the society.¹²⁰ Eventually, almost all the monasteries of the Congregation imitated the mother-house in opening catechumenates attached to them.¹²¹ In these, many adults and infants were cared for, instructed, and baptized every year. The effect of the ecclesial vision of Chavara, the Vicar General, was so far-reaching that between 1866 and 1931, more than 2,000 people were baptized in these catechumenates.¹²²

2.2.7.6. Defender of the Unity of the Church

In the absence of a native leadership, some of the Malabarians, dissatisfied with the Carmelite Vicars Apostolic, turned to Chaldea in the hope for a Chaldean bishop. In response, the Chaldean Patriarch Audouin sent Roccas Thomas, a Chaldean bishop, as visitor. The Church in general, assuming that he was sent with official authority, gave him a warm welcome. Out of the 154 parish churches, 86 of them completely and 30 partially followed the Chaldean bishop.¹²³

When Bishop Roccas began to exercise his episcopal powers, he was asked to produce his authorization letter. When he failed to do so, and when the situation was getting out of control on account of the following that he commanded, the Vicar Apostolic, who was convinced of Chavara's fortitude, prudence, and virtues, appointed him the Vicar General. His timely intervention saved the Church from a deep division and thereby kept the communion with the Holy See intact. The unity of the Church was always Chavara's primary concern. In his circular to the members of the parish churches warning them against Roccas, he wrote: "I tell you all this, my dear brethren, being desirous of your eternal salvation and lest you fall into the schism and incur the

¹¹⁹ Podipara, *Carmelite Congregation of Malabar*, 56.

¹²⁰ CWC, *Chronicles*, Vol. III, 30.

¹²¹ Podipara, *Carmelite Congregation of Malabar*, 57.

¹²² M. M. Palakunnel, *Chronicle* (Malayalam), ed., P. J. Sebastian, Changanassery, 1971, 114.

¹²³ CWC, Vol. I, *Chronicles*, 1990, 148-176.

excommunication of the Pope and suffer the loss of your soul.”¹²⁴ Having overcome the crisis and Roccas having left for Bagdad, it was Chavara who led most of those who had followed Roccas back into Catholic communion.

This section on the leadership role of Chavara in the ecclesiastical plain can be concluded with a note on the proposal that Archbishop Baccinelli made regarding a co-adjutor bishop immediately after the appointment of Chavara as the Vicar General. In his letter to the Propaganda Fide, dated 15 June 1861, the Archbishop proposed Chavara to the post of his successor as the bishop.¹²⁵ The practical objections he would have against his own proposal notwithstanding, what is worthy of consideration here is that in the plausible event of appointing a bishop of Malabar origin at the time, there would be nobody else worthy of the proposal.

2.2.8. Apostle of Literature and Print Media

In the nineteenth century, Chavara emerged as a leader of the spiritual and social renaissance in Kerala. In order to give a momentum to this ferment, he tapped the most powerful media available, namely, the printing press. The printing press that he established at Mannanam in 1846 was a milestone in the process of the renaissance in the religious and public education.¹²⁶ The first printed work was *Jnanapeeyusham* (*Spiritual Ambrosia*), which was published from the new press in 1846.¹²⁷ The press gradually turned out to be the womb of the first Malayalam Daily *Deepika*, which shaped the social and political life of a large section of the society in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. When Chavara moved from Mannanam to Koonammavu, a branch of the press was established at Koonammavu as well.

¹²⁴ CWC, Vol. IV, *Letters*, 1990, 99.

¹²⁵ The Archbishop would also mention his minor reservation about his own proposal which was practical in nature. In comparison with the European bishops, Chavara would neither have the education nor the episcopal niceties. This is also to be read in conjunction with the objections made by Marcelline Berardi and Leopold Beccaro against the proposal (See *Positio*, 264, 265-269).

¹²⁶ P. K. Rajasekharan, “Vazhathada Revolution: Chavara and Indigenous Printing Technology” in *The Life and Legacy of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, ed., J. Mannarathara, [58-73], Delhi: Viva Books, 2015.

¹²⁷ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 353.

2.2.8.1. Apostle of Christian Literature

Chavara was a man of reading and reflection. In one of his letter to the sisters at Koonammavu, he wrote: "The time you save after your proper work and recreation should be spent in spiritual reading. Read the books that give you knowledge and devotion; if you love reading, you will love solitude. When a soul delights in solitude Jesus Christ will come to converse with it in solitude and begin communing with it."¹²⁸

Chavara was a prolific writer who wrote in the vernacular as did some of the Fathers of the Church in their time. His writings were heterogeneous, consisting of historical notes (Chronicles), Letters, Poems, Hymns, Dramas (Ecologues), Colloquies, Prayers, and Exhortations. Whatever may be the nature of the writing, one can notice in it a biblical, salvation historical, and mystical flavour. The writings reveal the very personal and spiritual experiences, outlooks and insights of the author.

2.2.8.2. Historical Writings

Chronicles that Chavara recorded throughout his life and the letters that he wrote to various individuals on various occasions are considered here. He had a very keen sense of history and the ability to record with great accuracy. These pieces of literature illustrate the socio-political life of Kerala and the history of the Church of his time. These writings reflect his historical consciousness, farsightedness, honesty in recording events, and the sense of justice.

2.2.8.3. Spiritual and Literary Writings

Some of the works of Chavara are grouped together in spiritual and literary works on account of their nature. *Atmanutapam* is a poetic work.¹²⁹ In this work, he reminisces his early life and outpours his sense of gratitude for the ineffable love and mercy of God. At the same time, he laments over his own shortcomings. *Parvam/ Pana (Dirge/Song of Mourning)* is Chavara's reflection on death, resurrection, and eternal life. A canto for the use in a bereaved family at the demise of a loved one (*Marana Veetil Paduwanulla Pana*)¹³⁰ notes the importance of a life focused on the heavenly bliss. *The Martyrdom of Anastasia*, the first Malayalam

¹²⁸ CWC, Vol. IV, *Letters*, 1990, 85.

¹²⁹ See Z. M. Moozhoor, *Atmanutapam: Gadyavishkaranam* (Malayalam), Thevara: Janata Books, 1990.

¹³⁰ CWC, Vol. II: *Compunction of the Soul, Dirge, Anastasia's Martyrdom*, 1989, 129-161.

spiritual lyric (*khanda-kavyam*), composed in 1861,¹³¹ is the story of a courageous virgin martyr of the early Church who enthused the community to remain firm in faith. In the context of the Roccas episode, it meant to encourage his people to uphold loyalty to the one Holy Catholic Church. *Dhyanasallapangal* expresses the God-experience and contemplative dimension of Chavara between 1866 and 1868.¹³²

His most intimate feelings reveal his childlike innocence. *Chavarul* is *The Testament of a Loving Father*, written towards the end of his life, meant to transform the family, the domestic Church, into a heavenly abode according to the plan of the Creator. He wrote it for his own parishioners as a sign of his indebtedness and concern for them.¹³³ It gives inspiration and guidelines to families and it has a lasting relevance. *Ecologues* are pastoral dramatic plays (1855-1856),¹³⁴ the first of its kind in Indian literature. These depict the Paschal Mystery in art form meant to deepen the spirituality and to impart the Gospel message among young people. All these literary works played a significant role in awakening and nurturing the spirituality of the Malabar Church.

From the above descriptions, it is clear that Saint Chavara, as in the case of most of the Fathers and Doctors of the early Church, was very much involved in the building up of the Malabar Church that was in the process of regaining her autonomy and identity in the formative period of the nineteenth century. Hence, he is eligible to be declared a 'Father of the Syro-Malabar Church *sui juris*'.

Section B

SAINT KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA, DOCTOR OF THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

Criteria for Declaring a Saint as Doctor of the Church

Nature and Relevance of a Doctor of the Church

"O blessed doctor, light of the holy Church and lover of God's law, pray to the Son of God for us." This antiphon – to be recited or sung at the beginning and end of Our Lady's hymn, *The Magnificat*, during vespers

¹³¹ CWC, Vol. II: *Compunction of the Soul, Dirge, Anasthasia's Martyrdom*, 1989, 163-172; Mundadan, *Chavara*, 366-368.

¹³² CWC, Vol. III: *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 1990.

¹³³ Chavara, *Testament of a Loving Father*, Kakkanad: Chavara Central Secretariat, 2014.

¹³⁴ John Paul, *Idaya Natakangal (Ecologues: Shepherd Plays) by Chavara Kuriakose Elias*, Thrissur: Kerala Sahithya Academy, 2014.

for the feast of a Doctor of the Church – was one of the distinguishing marks of the common prayers of the Divine Office (in the Latin tradition) for such feasts which were introduced into the liturgy by Pope Boniface VIII (1294-1303) in 1298. The antiphon underscores the connection of a Doctor of the Church with light and love, with God's law, with the Church and with the Son of God.

The title 'Doctor of the Church' was given to only thirty six prominent ecclesiastical writers of the Church in the two thousand years' history of the Church and they were honoured with this title on account of the great advantage the Church had gained through the life and writings of these authors.

There are three essential requirements, besides many other things, to declare someone a Doctor of the Church: (i) great sanctity, which is recognised with the canonisation; (ii) eminent learning, and (iii) proclamation as a Doctor of the Church by a Pope or Ecumenical Council.

There are eminent writers and teachers like Origen and since they are not canonised, they are not declared Doctors. This requirement indicates that the title is not concerned exclusively with a person's ability to expound the faith. It also presupposes that one's exposition of the faith is effective in radiating the supernatural character of the faith that draws humans to God; hence, the need for sanctity in a Doctor of the Church. In this connection, the following passage from the Bible is relevant here: "This is eternal life, that they may know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (Jn 17:3). Their writings are true and timeless and the title 'Doctor of the Church' is an official designation in recognition of the outstanding contribution a saintly person has made to the understanding and interpretation of the Sacred Scripture and the development of the Christian doctrine. All these Doctors of the Church advanced the knowledge of God through their writings on theology, spirituality, mysticism, or through their defence of the faith in the face of heresy and schism. In his announcement that John of Avila would be a Doctor, Pope Benedict XVI declared: "The declaration that a saint is a Doctor of the Universal Church implies the recognition of a charism of wisdom bestowed by the Holy Spirit for the good of the Church and evidenced by the beneficial influence of his teaching among the People of God."¹³⁵

¹³⁵ Pope Benedict XVI, "Apostolic Letter Proclaiming Saint John of Avila, Diocesan Priest, a Doctor of the Universal Church" (7 October 2012), 7.

A Brief Historical Note

If we go through the history of the declaration of the Doctor of the Church one notices that it was Pope Boniface VIII (1294-1303), in 1298, for the first time declared a few Doctors of the Church, that too belonging to the first six centuries of the Christian era. The Pope selected the best four from the West and the East, respectively, and they all were already recognised as Fathers of the Church. These Great Doctors of the Church are Saints Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome, and Gregory the Great from the West and John Chrysostom, Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Athanasius from the East. All these lived after persecution and, therefore, they were not martyrs. At present there are thirty six Doctors of the Church, twenty-seven from the West and nine from the East, out of which four are women. The last one added to the galaxy of Doctors is Saint Gregory of Narek, a monk of the tenth century from the Armenian Church. Pope Francis, in 2015, declared him a Doctor of the Church.

Interestingly, one observes the active involvement and initiative of the Popes in declaring a saint a Doctor of the Church. It is particularly true in the case of the last three, mainly because of the personal interests of Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis. Now, two more are in the waiting, Saint Pope John Paul II and Saint Oscar Amulfo Romero Y Galdamez, martyr Archbishop of San Salvador. In October 2019, the Polish Catholic Bishops' Conference formally petitioned Pope Francis to consider making Saint Pope John Paul II Doctor of the Church in an official proclamation, in recognition of his contributions to theology, philosophy, and Catholic literature, as well as the formal documents, encyclicals, apostolic letters, bulls, *Motu Proprio* documents, homilies, speeches that he had issued. Also the Archbishop of San Salvador, El Salvador has petitioned Pope Francis to name Saint Oscar Romero a Doctor of the Church. Still others in the making include Saint John Henry Newman, Saint Faustina Kowalska, and Saint Theresa of Kolkata. Thus, we see fluidity in the process of declaring a Doctor of the Church. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) wrote on Cardinal Newman: "The characteristic of the great Doctor of the Church, it seems to me, is that he teaches not only through his thought and speech but also by his life, because within him, thought and life are interpenetrated and defined. If this is so, then Newman belongs to the great teachers of the Church, because he both touches our hearts and enlightens our thinking."¹³⁶

¹³⁶ Joseph Ratzinger, *First Centenary of the Death of Cardinal John Henry Newman*, 27 April 1990.

The brief description about the Doctors of the Church is given above in the context of the proposal of the Synod of the Syro-Malabar Bishops to make efforts to declare Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara a Doctor of the Church. The development in history and the positions taken in the recent past clearly indicate that the proposal of the Synod can be substantiated by the life and teachings of Saint Chavara himself.

How to Proceed?

The first pre-requisite to begin the process is to make available a critical edition of the complete works of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara and the formal request to the Pope from the part of the National Bishops' Conference (CBCI) and in our case a strong endorsement from the part of the Synod of the Syro-Malabar Bishops. The whole critical work together with the petition is sent to the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, which Dicastery sends the writings of the Saint to the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith. Once the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith gives *nihil obstat*, the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints studies the matter thoroughly and refers the matter to the Pope for final approval. Here below I note down certain norms to declare a saint a Doctor of the Universal Church.

1. Reception of the teachings of a saint declared to be a Doctor of the Church should be quick, universal, and constant.
2. Powerful intercession of the saint and the universal character of the devotion of the saint.
3. Petition from the part of the faithful, episcopal conferences, national, regional, and Church *sui juris* to the Roman Pontiff is very important.
4. Focus and project on one dominant character of the teachings of the saint, as in the case of Saint John of God, a Doctor of mystical theology.
5. As sign of the ecclesiastical reception, the teachings of the doctoral candidate appear in the teachings of the ordinary Magisterium of the Church, like *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, teachings of the ecumenical councils, papal documents, etc.
6. Visit of the ecclesiastical higher authorities, including Pope, to the tombs, shrines, and places associated with the saint is another requirement to facilitate the official declaration of someone as a Doctor of the Church.

7. The frequency of the Papal pronouncements in public audiences regarding the uniqueness of the teachings of the saint is another norm to declare a saint a Doctor of the Church.
8. The attributions and qualifications made by ecclesiastical authorities starting with Pope about the saint. For example, in the case of Saint Therese of Lisieux, Pope Pius X said she was the greatest saint of modern times and Pope Benedict XV described her as the teacher of life. Pope Pius XII described her doctrine as the one which penetrated into the very heart of the Gospel.
9. Presence of religious societies, orders, congregations founded and named after the saint or inspired by the teachings of the saint, is another norm to consider a saint a Doctor of the Church.
10. Ecclesial movements inspired by the life and teachings of the saint (for example, the Little Way Association, in the case of Saint Therese of Lisieux).
11. Continuous petitions by the laity and group of lay associations who are great promoters of the saint to the ecclesiastical authorities to declare the saint a Doctor of the Church.
12. Another norm or criteria is the frequency of the Bible quotations, both Old Testament and New Testament, teachings of the Fathers of the Church in the writings of the saint.
13. The petitions of the study groups who dedicate themselves for the promotion of the teachings of the saint constitute another criterion to declare someone a Doctor of the Church.
14. The popularity of the writings of the saint in different languages and their dissemination is another requirement to declare a saint a Doctor of the Church.
15. The teachings of the saint should reflect a passionate love for the Word of God and a deeper and in-depth experience of the Word of God.
16. Writings of the saint in inspiring the Church teachings on Mother Mary.
17. Influence of the writings of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church in the theological, mystical, spiritual, and doctrinal evolution of the writings of the saint.

18. Care should be taken to identify any unique reference made by Pope in the documents of beatification and canonisation and during the sermon of the Pope or ecclesiastical higher authorities in the ceremony of beatification or canonisation.
19. What is very popular or unique with the teaching of the saint has to be focussed upon and in the case Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *sentire cum Ecclesia*, to feel with the Church, is a key to interpret his life and teachings.
20. The saint becomes a living icon of that God who, according to the Church's prayer, "shows his almighty power in his mercy and forgiveness" (Roman Missal, Opening Prayer, 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time).
21. Permanent communion with the Roman Pontiff and filial devotion to the See of Rome and to the successor of Saint Peter.

The arguments mentioned above in declaring Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara as a Father of the Syro-Malabar Church are valid also in the case of presenting the topic of declaring him a Doctor of the Universal Church.

Conclusion

In section one, part 1 of this study is an exploration of the evolution of the norms and criteria for declaring somebody as a Father of the Church by the Universal Church. Part 2 is an attempt to enunciate the general criteria for declaring a Father of the Syro-Malabar Church *sui juris* and criteria for declaring Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara a Father of the Syro-Malabar Church. It takes into account the four fundamental norms for the declaration of Saint Chavara as a Father of the Syro-Malabar Church *sui juris*. Part 3 applies the general norms to the person, life, writings, and other social and pastoral endeavours of Saint Chavara in the building up of the Church and society.

In section two, preliminary efforts have been made to highlight the not so easy task of declaring someone a Doctor of the Church. We need further study and research to go ahead with the project of declaring Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara a Doctor of the Universal Church.

When the person and mission of Saint Chavara, reviewed in the context of his socio-historical milieu and in the very historical evolution of the Syro-Malabar Church, the requirements or the criteria evolved could be seen fulfilled in him so as to consider him eligible to be declared

a Father of the Syro-Malabar Church *sui juris*. The eventual declaration of Saint Chavara a Father of the Syro-Malabar Church *sui juris* will render the apostolic Church more visibility and consequently more contributive to the communion consciousness of the Universal Church. Moreover, declarations of this sort would be affirming the *sui juris* nature of the Apostolic Church of Saint Thomas Christians and her legacy.

Syro-Malabar Church being an Apostolic Church enjoying synodal structure, the members of the Holy Synod could exercise its power by declaring Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara a Father of the Syro-Malabar Church, thereby, paving the way for the eventual declaration of Saint Chavara a Doctor of the Universal Church, taking into account his unique contributions in the building up of the Syro-Malabar Church in the nineteenth century, especially by preserving the unity of the Church, by maintaining the communion with the successor of Saint Peter and by revitalising the Christian life of the Church. In the true sense, Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara may be considered the re-founder of the Syro-Malabar Church.