

## Book Review

**Francis Kanichikattil CMI, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara: The Wise Liturgical Reformer of the Thomas Christians of Malabar*, (Theological Studies on Saint Chavara 5), Kochi; Chavara Central Secretariat & Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2020; pages: x+149; ISBN: 978-81-944061-3-6.**

The book under review is the fifth number in the series of the theological studies on St. Chavara, which is a collective attempt of CMI and CMC congregations to promote and publish the unique and varied theological insights of Saint Chavara in the form of monographs. The present book by Kanichikattil stands out in the contemporary liturgical context of the St Thomas Christians as it presents St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara as the wise liturgical reformer of the Thomas Christians of Malabar. When Kuriakose Elias Chavara was the Vicar General of the Thomas Christians, he revised the liturgy in view of awakening the sacramental life of the clergy and the people and to have a spiritual renewal within the Church. It is heartening to see that the work of Francis Kanichikattil CMI fills the vacuum of a serious study of the liturgical contributions of St. Chavara to the St. Thomas Christians.

The present work is well researched. Besides a general introduction and conclusion, it is broadly divided into two parts with eight chapters. The first part provides a brief account of St. Chavara's liturgical contributions to the Malabar Church of Thomas Christians; and the second part is a detailed study of *Thukasa* and divine office.

The first chapter delineates the liturgical contributions of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara to the Church of St. Thomas Christians. According to an account of Fr. Placid J. Podipara CMI, a scholar of St. Thomas Christian community, Chavara's liturgical contributions consists in the organization of the liturgical books, the rubrics of the Eucharistic celebration, the book of divine office, the office for the dead, and the liturgical calendar (P. 24). Though St. Chavara is falsely accused of a follower of Roman tradition, he was never a liturgical reformer with western thought patterns. He had borrowed certain practices from Latin

tradition, for he thought that it would enrich the spiritual life of the faithful of Malabar Church.

Chapter two portrays the context of St. Chavara's liturgical reformation. The Synod of Diamper very much latinized the liturgy of the Thomas Christians. The Portuguese missionaries introduced many Latin additions in the then existing *taksa* and Latin rubrics for the celebration. The Syro Malabar priests were asked to use the Latin liturgical calendar and Latin vestments. There was no uniformity in the celebration of Divine liturgy in the Malabar Church. This adversely affected the clergy and the people and their spirituality was declining (P. 43). At this juncture, St. Chavara did everything possible to bring forth a renewal in the sacramental life of the Thomas Christians of Malabar. He wrote *Thukasa* for the clergy to ensure a fruitful celebration of the Divine liturgy, compiled the Divine office for the clergy and the people in oriental patterns, edited the office for the dead from the existing manuscripts in Syriac style and especially the 40-hour adoration in the monasteries for the spiritual awakening of the Malabar Christians. The CMI monasteries established by St. Chavara at Mannanam, Koonammavu, Elthuruth and Vazhakulam remained as the liturgical centres from where a spiritual renewal spread all over Kerala (P. 47).

The author discusses in detail *Thukasa* the 'Order' of the Eucharistic liturgy in the chapters three to seven. The third chapter deals with how St. Chavara explained the preparation of the priest for the Holy Qurbana. He insisted that the priest should spend sufficient amount of time in mental prayer and recite certain prescribed prayers as a preparation for the celebration. He uses the Holy objects with utmost respect, and sufficient care should be given to the liturgical vestments which help the priest to put on Christ, so that the liturgical celebrations would be very meaningful and appealing to the people (P. 63).

Chapter four elucidates the *Enarxis* (introductory part) and liturgy of the Word in the *Thukasa*. St. Chavara gives the content, meaning and detailed instructions for performing each ritual. Regarding the *slotha* after 'Our Father' St. Chavara makes a very minute mention: "On praying the celebrant extends his hands in a modest way and the palms of hands in a 'face to face' position and at the end he places the folded hands on his breast" (P. 68). His explanations on how to read the Gospel is admirable and relevant even today.

Fifth chapter gives an account of the Offertory till the anaphora prayer in the *Thukasa*. St. Chavara meticulously explained the rituals,

prayers, symbolism and the disposition of the priest and the community for the preparation and presentation of the body and blood of Our Lord. He further clarifies the ritual of the washing of hands and approaching the altar (P. 81-83).

Chapter six describes the structure, features, historical and theological developments pertaining to the anaphora of Mar Addai and Mar Mari (P. 86, 88). The content and meaning of various prayers in the *Gehanta* prayers are unfolded in this section. St. Chavara's instructions to the priest regarding 'Epiclesis' highlighted the pneumatological aspect of the liturgy (P. 104).

Chapter seven precisely deals with the central and concluding part of the liturgy that includes consecration of the Bread and Wine, Fraction, Consignation and the Holy Communion and concluding prayers. The most important part is consecration. St. Chavara in *Thukasa* explains the rite of consecration meticulously. It highlights the significance of the celebrant priest spending time meditating on the 'Passion of Christ' (P. 106).

Chapter eight throws light on the effort of St. Chavara to prepare the divine office for the St. Thomas Christians. He faced two problems in its course: first the breviary was going out of practice and second there was lack of proper integration. In order to bring conformity in the recitation of the divine office St. Chavara with the consent of the Vicar Apostolic assembled many *Malpans* (scholars) in the monastery at Koonammavu for consultation and correction. He transcribed the whole breviary in his own hand with the intention of getting it printed. It manifested his interest and desire in serving the Church and its spiritual nourishment and wellbeing (P. 122).

This present volume, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara: The Wise Liturgical Reformer of Thomas Christians of Malabar* indubitably proves that St. Chavara is a liturgical luminary, a Doctor of the Church and Father of the St. Thomas Christians. The book highlights the liturgical contributions of St. Chavara with a special emphasis on *Thukasa* (order of the mass) and divine office. It is greatly significant to have a profound understanding of the efforts of St. Chavara to preserve the identity and traditions of St. Thomas Christians of Malabar. This book is an answer to St. Chavara's critics who blame him as a blind follower of the Latin tradition in liturgical matters (P. 47-49, 141, 211). This book affirms not only the strenuous efforts of St. Chavara but also of the monastic community he founded to promote unity in the church (P. 49-51). The

immense contributions of Chavara and his confreres is a paradigm for the members of the Congregation to follow in the current crisis of the Syro- Malabar Church. The book is a good reference material on the liturgy of the St. Thomas Christians of Malabar in the nineteenth century.

The general editor of the 'Theological Studies on Saint Chavara' at the beginning of the book clearly communicates the purpose, and the elaborate introduction sets the historical background of the book. Most of the chapters are framed with introductions and conclusions to facilitate the reading. The bibliography at the end establishes the fact that the book is well researched and grounded on reliable sources. The book addresses many liturgical questions (P. 105, 108, 117) and also presents different perspectives of the debated matters. The author has incorporated in it certain prayers from both the then *taksa* and the present one; and makes a comparison between them. The minor language errors (P. 50, 58, 61) do not diminish the value of the book. Though there are some such limitations, the book deserves a wider readership. I congratulate the author of the volume for bringing into light the liturgical contributions of St. Chavara, which were undermined for years, due to some or other reason.

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