

SAINT KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA A REFORMIST WITH A PASTORAL HEART

Mathew Maniampra CMI♦

Abstract: The grace of salvation given through Christ is for the whole person. It touches the deeper part of the unconscious as well as the socio-economic context, so that the person may experience a holistic growth. To effect this kind of growth one is often challenged to make anguished decisions and to develop new paths. The core elements of life-giving ministry are compassion and forgiveness. Kuriakose Elias Chavara had a rich depository of these attributes and hence, he was able to exercise a wholesome ministry in his times. As a compassionate pastor, Chavara totally engaged in ministering to his people in creative ways.

Keywords: Kuriakose Elias Chavara, pastoral personality, socio cultural context, pastoral leadership, Roccas schism, Syro-Malabar Church, latinisation, *malpan*, seminary formation, Fr Leopold, *Divini illius Magistri*, *Atmanuthapam*, *Inana Piyusham*, Confraternity for Happy Death, *Atmanuthapam*, *darsanaveedu*, *thapasu bhavanam*, Christian elegy, dirge, Synod of Diamper.

1. Introduction

In the latter part of the 20th century, we witnessed a renewed interest in the field of pastoral ministry in the Church. Jesus, taking the scriptural imagery of a shepherd, points out the characteristic features of a good shepherd (Jn 10:11). Feeding and protecting the flock and leading the sheep to greener pastures are vital part of pastoral ministry. Traditionally, in the life of the Church, a shepherd/pastor had the role of preaching and teaching. In this changed time, the Body of Christ needs to be built up by a holistic leadership and service that have far ranging

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- ♦ **Fr. Mathew Maniampra CMI** is an author of many inspiring, practice-oriented books and articles in holistic Psychology. He offers psycho-spiritual workshops and seminars for religious and priests. He is a teacher in the Institute of Formative Spirituality and Counselling at Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bengaluru. He earned his MS in Family Counselling, and PhD in Holistic Theology from USA. His holistic credentials include Post-Graduate Diplomas in Natural Health, Homeopathy, and Clinical Hypnosis. He is a much sought after Campus Counsellor.

implications in the true care of the faithful. Gifts natural or charismatic are given to individuals to build up the body of Christ. As a member of the community and as a disciple of Jesus, Kuriakose Elias Chavara saw so much good all-around even when there has been gloom occasionally. He maintained an optimistic outlook all through, which stirred him to be active.

2. Pastoral Personality of Chavara

Pastoral ministry calls for a pastoral personality. Not all are equally endowed with a pastoral personality but all can develop a personality that can enhance the pastoral attitude and continue the mission of Jesus. Priests, by virtue of their call, and religious by virtue of their commitment to Church and by the profession of evangelical counsels, are bound to develop a pastoral personality so that the ministry and mission of Jesus is continued in a more meaningful way in the given socio cultural context. Although, pastoral ministry is shared by all in the Church, in the priest/pastor who is anointed by the Holy Spirit, there is an abiding sense of Jesus as the word-made-flesh who invites all to come and see.¹

A pastor is anyone who is engaged in the mission of Jesus, continuing it in the here and now through a personal commitment announced publicly. Chavara was a pastor in this sense. While an action may be good, it is not ministry unless it is an expression and overflow of one's relationship with God. Commitment to ministry and mission warrants the skills to accompany people. Chavara, in his pastoral leadership and ministry, realized something that is similar to the Jungian position: "Condemnation does not liberate, it oppresses, and I am the oppressor of the person I condemn not his friend and fellow traveler."² Pastors and ministers shall first accept their own flaws in the love of Christ that they may know that they are loved at a deeper level, with this knowledge, they can listen to others in a non-judgmental manner. To accept oneself with all wretchedness is the hardest of all human tasks and almost impossible to fulfill. Owning one's own shadow is the primary task for all pastors before they set out to help. Chavara accepted and owned even his minor shortcomings. He was not in need of projecting the unwanted

¹ Ronald Bowlby, "Parish: Pastoral Care", in Alastair V. Campbell (ed.), *Dictionary of Pastoral Care*, New York: Crossroad, 1987, 183.

² C.G. Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, (trans. Cary F. Baynes), Marrickville, Australia: Imprint Harcourt Publishers, 1955.

part of his personality on to others. A failure to honor and integrate the negative experiences of life creates dissonance and disharmony.

Chavara was a man totally engaged in ministering to his people in creative ways. All the while, he was not obsessed with doing. He found time for prayer, manual work, learning, developing friendships, etc. Chavara's pastoral skills and ministries were such that they led people to *metanoia*, changing their attitude and mind to meet the greater plans of God as demanded by the gospel. In settling the conflicts among various groups and the way in which he solved the Roccas schism, we see this power in action. The power to change our understanding is a gift of the Holy Spirit that we are called to cooperate with and appropriate. For example, the Johannine Jesus emphasizes the gift aspect by telling the disciples that the Spirit would teach them everything and guide them into all truth (Jn 14:25; 16:13). Similarly, Paul exhorts Christians to cooperate and appropriate: "Be transformed by the renewing of your minds" (Rom 12:2) and "Be renewed in the spirit of your minds" (Eph 4:23). This tension between change as a gift and change as something we have to work at is illustrated by the Pentecost story in Acts 2.

A pastor is a caring person and his personality is a central factor in the caring ministry. Psychotherapeutic literature gives immense significance to the personality of the therapist. Likewise, a pastor's personality is vital in the church ministries. A high degree of self-awareness and an insight into the dynamics of one's own personality is essential. Chavara's pastoral personality is characterized by empathy, authentic respect for others, firmness and an ability to respond with genuineness and openness. Because a pastor's personality 'is a helping personality', usually motivated by high self-expectations and an altruistic desire to be helpful and to care for others accompanied by a strong sense of responsibility, they are likely to feel more guilt.³ Chavara became an example of integrating the traditional and modern in the ecclesial and social life. He was well aware of the preciousness of the apostolic traditions of the Kerala Church. This did not prevent him from adapting duly from other cultures, and rites. He widened his own ministry by adapting many things from Latin rite traditions. He wanted

³ A growing body of research suggests a distinctive helping personality is commonly found in the caring professions. Helping persons driven by idealistic expectations any, also deprive themselves of opportunities for pleasure and relaxation. These tendencies can be a source of tension unless properly looked into.

to have greater exposure for the Syro-Malabar community and wanted to bring it out of its confines. This good intent of Chavara has been misinterpreted in some quarters as *latinisation*. At a time when the Syro-Malabar Church was in decline due to the lack of proper leadership, God raised a holy man to ward off the spiritual and theological bankruptcy.

3. Reform of the Clergy

An urgent need of the Church in Kerala was the reform of the clergy. Chavara realized that if the priests were renewed in the model of Christ and are properly informed in the spiritual and theological disciplines, much of the problems in the Church could be solved. What Chavara says in the biography of *malpan* Palackal is indicative of the deficiencies in the system: The *malpans* of the time did not bother about this because they taught all that they knew only to their nephews or to a few others in whom they were interested in and taught the other students only how to offer the mass and recite the canonical prayers. Chavara and his colleagues felt that this situation could be redressed and much good could have been done if some form of consecrated/vowed life existed in this Church. They wanted to have such an opportunity in their land of apostolic tradition.

With his sense of history, Chavara knew that the religious orders in the west used to be centres of holiness, learning and social transformation. A lover of God, Church and people, Chavara wanted to make up for this deficit. However, he did not wait for a redeemer to come. He set himself on the path with a definitive purpose and vision and strenuously worked at the realization of religious life in the land. The religious communities that Chavara founded became models for many religious institutes for men and women and gave a boost to varied apostolic activities that energized the society and the Church.⁴ John Wesley, the protestant reformer had a motto: 'Do all good you can, by all the means you can, in all the places you can at all the times you can to all the people you can, as long as you ever can.' 'Do as much good by all means' was the guiding principle of Chavara. As in many champion saints of the Church, there was a fire in his heart to do something beautiful for God and his people.

The seminaries that were set up under the initiative of Palakkal, Porukara and Chavara brought about a new era and a paradigm shift in

⁴ Joseph Pathrapankal, "The Prophetic Ministry of St. Chavara in the Society during 19th Century", Key Note Address in the Workshop on Theological Studies on St. Chavara, Kakkannad: Chavara Central Secretariat, 2017, 13.

theological education among St. Thomas Christians.⁵ The visionary *malpans* formed a collaborative team as they felt the need of recasting seminary formation to revitalize the Church. They realized the importance of preparing new leaders in the Church with an enlightened mind and sound spiritual and theological outlook. They began to impart quality training for pastors and teachers. If there is any foundation for theological education in the New Testament, it is Jesus himself who trained his disciples in personal discussion, counseling, preaching, dialoging and listening.⁶

People imitate and follow other people. This is the basis of social learning theory, which proposes that new behaviors can be acquired by observing and imitating others. People learn by observing, imitating and modeling. Researchers have observed that children treated dolls exactly the way the seniors treated it. The theory of learning is what Jesus employed when he taught his disciples. Paul instructed the believers that they might follow his example, just as he followed Christ. Peter urged the Church leaders to be example to the flock. For Chavara verbal teaching was secondary because he himself was an embodiment of all that he taught and preached. What is lacking in the system of seminary formation in our times is adequate number of models who inspire and teach by their life.

4. Media for Christian Formation

The centrality of the media in today's life in social, political, economic and personal realms is beyond dispute. Media, whether audio or video, print or electronics is a powerful instrument to create networks of relationships and communication. The universality and the presence of media in different forms and shapes radically influence the life style of people whether they want it or not. As a writer, organizer, social reformer and above all, a spiritual guide, Chavara realized the significance of media and thought ahead of time and utilized it in the best possible ways. He turned his attention to the print media, which was the only main mass communication facility of the time. Pope Pius X in his encyclical *Divini illius Magistri* (1930), pointed out the need for healthy principles in the media. Chavara, with his farsightedness and

⁵ Gratian Mundadan, "CMI Legacy of Theological Education", in Thomas Kollamparapil (ed.), *Christian Leadership and Integration*, Bangalore: Dharmaram, 2007: 44-46, 45.

⁶ Paul Achandy, Inaugural speech in the CMI Philosophers and Theologians Forum, 2017.

visionary nature, sensed that the pastoral care of the people and the evangelization would not be complete without exploiting the potentialities of print media.

Modernity was introduced to the Church in Kerala by the endeavors of Chavara. Printing technology was strictly the monopoly of the foreign evangelical missionaries and the government. It was a rare and expensive technology unavailable to the general populace. Its trade was controlled by the colonial powers. Because of the political and economic interests of colonial powers, who did not want it to get into the hands of the commoners and the rival missionaries, it was a herculean task to avail it for indigenous purposes. Chavara, like the Prometheus of the Greek epic, who stole the fire from the gods for humanity's sake, made it happen. He foresaw the good it could bring to his community and the people at large. In dealing with people of all kinds, he displayed so much of sensitivity and inclusiveness that he did not alienate anyone in the planning and execution of his project. He was a catalyst of social reformation because of his spiritual outlook that encompassed everything that brought good to humanity.

The books of the divine office for clerical use were not available in print. This was a real concern for Chavara. To a great extent, the new press that he established helped to make up for the lack of books on the Bible, liturgy and spirituality. Many Malayalam and Tamil books came out from the press that Chavara launched. These changed the spiritual and intellectual climate of Kerala at a critical time in the history.⁷ Although he was involved in promoting modernity in his society and Church, he was never oblivious of the primacy of the spirituality of his people. The first book he printed in the press in 1846 was *Jnana Piyusham*. This is the first book that was made available to the Christians in Kerala in their mother tongue. It was a translation of a Tamil Christian book. It is in the same press that the first Malayalam daily *Nasrani Deepika* was printed. It is interesting to note that Chavara did not print any of his own literary works. The year after his demise, Fr Leopold printed *Atmanuthapam* of Chavara at the Immaculate Mother Press, Koonammavu. By using the print media to bring out books on faith and life, he was announcing the good news from the 'house top.'

⁷ Thomas Kochumuttom, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Mumbai: St. Paul's, 2014, 112.

5. Liturgical Innovations

Chavara sensed the significance of liturgy in the life of the faithful. He composed no less than ten books for liturgical use in the Malabar Church. Prior to this composition, the liturgical texts of the time contained various errors and the Synod of Diamper had effected radical changes in the liturgy. Many East Syrian and Indian usages were replaced by the missionaries with those of the western Church, especially those sanctioned by the Council of Trent. This produced an unhappy admixture of Latin, East Syrian and Indian practices. The intention of Chavara in attempting to reform the liturgy was that the public worship should be performed with decorum and dignity. He borrowed from Latin sources wherever it was found appropriate. His close associations with the western missionaries and the Latin practices prompted him to draw whatever was good for enhancing the piety and devotion among his people.

Chavara was anxious to preserve all that was good in the traditional liturgy of the time. One also needs to take into account the fact that he was the Vicar General of the faithful of the Malabar Church under the Latin Vicar Apostolic. Prompted by pastoral concern for his people, whatever he found helpful in other traditions, he brought into the devotional practices of the Malabar Church. Pastoral concerns sometimes demand some amount of flexibility in matters of worship. As long as the essential characteristics of the liturgy are retained and the purpose of the liturgy is maintained, adaptations are welcome. Liturgical formulas and expressions shall be conducive to enhance the spirit of worship.

6. Renewal of Parishes

The Church, religious life and its various forms have no existence in itself apart from the mission of Christ. The mission of the Church is to enlighten the world by the gospel truth, bringing the gospel message of God's love and salvation to all. In this mission naturally humans will be able to enjoy greater sense of dignity and belongingness to the family God. The Church in Kerala was in need of a reform. Other than keeping traditions blindly, there were not much scriptural and theological wisdom disseminated in the community. Chavara and his group of religious took it upon themselves to preach the word of God and challenged the faithful to be real vehicle of the gospel. Through preaching, teaching and print media he let some fresh air into the rigidly conservative mindset of the St Thomas Christians.

He realized that in the formation of the Christian community, it should be properly fed with the Divine word, for the Church is built upon the word of God; she is born from and lives by that word. "We declare to you what we have always seen and heard so that you may also have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his son Jesus Christ" (1 Jn 1:3). We believe all that exists came into being because God "spoke". The existence and identity of the Christian community are derived fully from God's word, spoken in history by the one like us.

Listening to God's word is one of the fundamental principles of Catholic theology.⁸ Chavara was a motivational speaker. With style and substance, he influenced the faithful and led them to the desired destination. Immediately after his ordination, he began undertaking preaching ministries. He began parish retreats for the renewal of the parish and encouraged his colleagues to do it and made it a feature of parish life thereafter. Again, he was deputed to preach and bring back people who strayed to the schismatic bishop. In his last testament to his parish family, he wrote how to face and live through difficult times. His paternal heart and pastoral mind is seen vividly in the testament. He never preached anything that he did not practice. Since he walked his talk his words enjoyed the power of authenticity.

7. Reforms for Suffering Humanity

Chavara wanted everyone to enjoy the human dignity conferred by the creator. Being created in the image of God, the final and critical stage of life shall have loftiness despite any physical illness. Dying people shall have an inner joy and peace that comes from the spiritual resources available to them. He felt that the Church has an immediate and urgent responsibility to confer the spiritual joy and peace that come from the hope of eternal life. The sacraments of the Church designed to help the dying, especially sacraments of reconciliation and anointing of the sick shall be available to all. In his pastoral openness, he took special care in this regard.

Chavara himself went to people who were dying of epidemic to console and give the last rites and blessings despite warning that it was dangerous to his health. Although he was dissuaded, he acted courageously and set an example before the whole community that he was pasturing. He witnessed the peace and joy of many people as they

⁸ Paul Achandy, "Inaugural Address," in *Contextual Ecclesial Education, and the Evangelizing Mission of the Church*, Bangalore: Dharmaram, 2017, 14-20, 16.

received the sacraments and blessings of the Church. He nursed his own colleagues Valliara and Nelliserry who happened to be sick. He saw the difference in the dying people as they are surrounded by loving and caring people who represent the Church. He saw that no Christian people shall die without the necessary spiritual care and assistance that they need in the last minutes of their life, because the whole life will lose its luster, if human beings die like animals. This prompted him to make a *Confraternity for Happy Death*. He asked the people of Kainakary to keep a charity box to collect enough money to meet the expenses of the dying people.⁹ He pointed out to the parishioners how important it is to prepare ourselves and others for a salutary death. In response to his request the parishioners wrote:

We shall not only pray for all those who were instrumental in establishing this confraternity in our chapel so that all may be blessed with happy death, but we also pray for the poor folk who have none to take care of them so that they also may be given a happy death, and we propose to open here a hospice for the poor and the destitute and to take care of all their needs. Hoping to get from our Christian brethren small gifts by way of charity to aid us in this venture, we have placed here a charity box.¹⁰

As a man of compassion and Christian charity, Chavara desired that the poor and the destitute feel wanted and loved and to be taken care of in their helpless situations. When he asked his parishioners to constitute the *Confraternity for Happy Death*, he was proving to be a father to all in their spiritual and material needs. Palliative care for the terminally ill is deemed as a modern concept. In fact, Chavara began it in his humble settings. He knew that by experiencing personal love and care in distressed time, people are more naturally disposed to be recipient of God's love and grace. Palliative care units are founded all over Kerala now and are supported by numerous welfare agencies. It is now deemed as a specialized medical care to improve the quality of life even when the disease is incurable.

When a person's health cannot be restored, it is time to focus on the other dimension of life, namely spiritual. Towards the end of life, naturally people have a greater opening towards the spiritual. But they need help and guidance, especially for people who have been away from

⁹ Thomas Panthaplackal, *Athisahanangalum Athyandadangalum*, Kakkanadu: CMI Department of Research and Documentation, Chavara Hills, 2017, 135.

¹⁰ CWC IV *Letters: Testament*, 127-28.

the religious practices, to take steps towards further growth. In fact, human spiritual consciousness is expanded through suffering and struggles. We see that even great spiritual giants had lot of suffering, physical and mental by which they further rose in their spiritual consciousness and were seen at their best.

In 1843, Chavara sent a circular letter to all priests to establish more of such confraternities. What Mother Teresa did in the streets of Calcutta, he had done in a different context; that is helping people to die with dignity receiving human love and warmth thus helping them to open up to the grace of salvation if they were lacking it. As sons and daughters, they should be able to have a glimpse of the future in the wake of their death. Most people are able to have some glimpse of their future at these moments and could prepare themselves in a more radical way. Chavara who helped and witnessed the happy death of his predecessors Thomas Palackkal and Thomas Porukkara and many others whom he personally assisted in thier illness, felt the need of more facilities to care for the sick in order to help them towards a happy death.

The desire to save souls was the motivational fire behind such acts that Chavara initiated. What you give away with love, you are likely to receive, perhaps in manifold ways as the Lord himself said: "And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life" (Mt 19:29). He was blessed with a happy death in the company of all who loved him, of course, with the Holy Family and hosts of saints invisibly present with him. Fr. Leopold wrote in his diary: "Today on 3 January 1871, Tuesday at 7.15 am, Fr. Cyriac Elias of Holy family, the first Prior died after a life of great innocence. He could declare before his death that he had never lost the baptismal innocence."¹¹

8. Rendering Wholeness to the Mourners

Death in Christian life cannot be overlooked, for, Christian life is orchestrated from the very beginning to the end for a happy death. A happy death means dying in full human dignity knowing one's status as the son/daughter of God. To modern man, death is an unpleasant topic that is to be avoided as much as possible. But mortality is part of being human. Human beings will not be human without having the mortality

¹¹ Leopold Beccaro, *A Biography of the Venerable Person*, published at Koonammavu in 1871 as part of *Atmanuthapam* and later published by Lucas Vithuvattikkal in 2003, 17.

built into his being. It gives the sense of urgency to make life beautiful. The art of good living involves the art of dying well. Death is related to life and life is related to death; they mutually enrich each other. Life and soul surpass the body, for body did not create it. Body has been an aid for the soul to evolve, grow and reach its destination. Body is the mediator we could see, feel and interact easily; therefore, the loss of it is painful for the survivors. This pain is real. This pain needs to be addressed. All religions and cultures have many rituals in the wake of death. It is often presented as helping the soul departed: in fact, it is all for the grieving people. Rituals help them to grieve properly taking time, revisiting the traumatic times and incidents. Recalling and verbalizing our loss giving it spiritual vibrations help people to reconnect with lives after traumatic experiences of death.

Faith gives immense hope in crisis time. Faith in a loving God who brings the deceased to a new life is consoling. The scriptures, rituals, prayers all help grieving people to grieve well so that life may be restored. Today psychologists are sent to people who experience heavy losses in catastrophic incidents. They are often desensitized by slow exposure to the sad episodes by means of different therapies. People who grieve well can easily return to normal life. Fortyone-day commemorative gathering in memory of the diseased is a wakeup call to leave behind the episode after the sadness for a span of time. Sadness frozen into the humans without grieving leads to depression for a lifetime unless it is addressed. Hence, we have a tradition of mourning for forty days or a similar period of grieving time.

Religions in their wisdom, had found different rituals of mourning so that after its completion, one can get along with life. The Book of Lamentations and the Book of Job have this kind of significance too. Chavara who had insight into the human nature, felt the need of an elegy, which he couched in a religious language filled with hope. We have a better appreciation of his poetic work titled *Pana* (Dirge) as we view it from this angle. One of the common messages that runs through such religious elegies is the evanescence of life and the need to reconstruct one's own life in the light of its brevity and its unexpected termination. By composing *Maranaveetil padunnathinulla pana*, Chavara was fulfilling the need of a Christian elegy or dirge in the best tradition of Christian faith. Collective public display of emotions of sadness and loss has been part of all cultures. We see such images in Greek mythologies and in the Indian epic of Mahabharata. In some locales this kind of mourning was organized and performed by traditional

mourners. Rather than gritting the teeth and face it, it makes more sense to feel one's pain and sadness so that we are not alienated from real self.

The *pana* begins with the parable of a man who had three friends. They had promised to each other that each will be alert to come to the other to rescue him in the wake of any tragedy. In spite of the assurance, the King sentenced one of them to death. The parable unravels the nature and identity of each companion and why they could not help. The first companion is the world. All the powers of the world, medicine, money and magic cannot help the one who is dying. All human means are obviously powerless in the event of death. The second friend represents the kith and kin. Their love and good will are not enough. They are helpless like anyone else at this critical moment. And the third is one's own ego, which perceives that it has no prospect of survival. When all friends failed and were helpless, the real friend enters the scene namely 'Virtue.' The only friend who could help at this critical moment was his own virtues he had earned in life. The fourth friend was invisible and had refrained from making any promises. This last friend was the only helpful friend in the journey to heaven. The chant is powerful enough to evoke a sober mood in the sad and disheartened people mourning around the deceased. The personal emotions are raised to a universal and supernatural sphere.¹²

In a culture, where mortality was very high on account of epidemics like small pox, cholera, malaria etc., Chavara felt the need of people to deal with these exigencies of life in a religiously mature manner making use of faith in the eternal life and the redemptive love of Christ. He himself was a victim of such a calamity as he lost his whole family early in life. Bible and Christian theology are the obvious sources of his inspiration and his immediate purpose was spiritual consolation. In the Christian perspective, life is like a journey to one's heavenly abode. For, here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city, which is to come (Heb 13:14). John Bunyan's monumental work *Pilgrim's Progress* tells the story of a pilgrim Christian who makes his way from the city of destruction (the world) to the celestial city (heaven). We are pilgrims here on earth, naturally this pilgrimage comes to an end when it reaches the pilgrims destination. This and similar messages are seen in many classic Christian literary works.

¹² N. Gopinath "An Ode to Inner Engineering" in John Mannarathara (ed.), *The Life and Legacy of St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, New Delhi, Viva Books Pvt Ltd, 2015, 149-158, 152.

9. A Holistic Reformer of all Times

As a reformer in the Church, Chavara is more akin to Sts Francis Assisi, Benedict and Ignatius Loyola. Unlike Martin Luther, he tried to effect changes in the Church from within. There were several divisions in the Church. As an astute visionary, Chavara sensed that one more division in the Church would make no good to anyone. He wanted to keep the unity in faith and fellowship in the Church that he belonged to. He could inspire his people by his humility and sanctity, so much so that when he spoke, it was received as the voice of a father who always intended the good of the children. The true Christian discipleship involves the call to become the father of all needy and all people of good will. Church and society in Kerala was not free from the feudalistic remnants in the administrative and social set up. There were always different classes of people that were protectors and protected. The protected was not always really protected but were at the mercy of the protector's discretions. Socially, economically and religiously there were untouchables who maintained life apart from the normal stream of life. He understood that education was the only way to effect changes in the society.

In the religious sphere, Chavara wanted to have more *darsanaveedu* and *thapasu bhavanam* to promote authentic spiritual life. He himself was an epitome of integrated life with his simplicity, asceticism service and love for all humans without boundaries and segregations. He imbibed the Indian spiritual genius of Budha and Mahavira in his compassion and charity.¹³ Seeing the poor state of women in religion as well as in the socio economic realms, he wanted to start a religious congregation for women by means of which women could be empowered. He wanted the religious women to become effective agents to reform the society.

Chavara was a man of reformations in the Church. However, unlike many others, he did it through his humble and meek style. He felt the need of more organized formation and greater scholarship for priests in theology, languages and all socially relevant themes. He sensed the need of proper seminaries after the model of the western countries in his land. Hence, new seminaries were founded. Just as the Society of Jesuit was a tool and competent weapon during the Reformation to fight against the opponents who were negatively inspired by the corruption and unenlightened religious practices of the 16th century, so with the help of his newly founded congregation, Chavara brought about some

¹³ Govinda Pilla, *Sukrutham Smara*, Kakkanadu: Chavara Central Secretariat, 1998, 43.

meaningful reforms first in the Church and subsequently in the society at large.

All great *acharyas* who had a special vision and purpose in their life, after imparting it, always wanted it to be continued without fail for the greater good of humanity. In order to consolidate the gains, they started new movements defining the nature of the new institution or the principles and values to be adhered to while following the ideals envisaged. Chavara felt the need of such institution from the very beginning. Hence, he nurtured and maintained two religious congregations based on his initial ideals and reformatory acts. Even though in the initial periods it faced hurdles of different kinds, those institutions sustained by the virtue and vision of the founder today are innovatively in the forefront with multiple ministries. Chavara was basically a religious without any masks. Though he was a multifaceted genius, he kept his humanness without being corrupted by any pomp.

Chavara creatively planned many remedial programmes to strengthen his apostolic community. He awakened the giant that was sleeping. The reforms he started found its fruition by bringing up many to the path of holiness. He lamented that this Church with so much spiritual patrimony had been barren and had not produced saints. And today in this Apostolic Community, a few are raised to the status of blessed and sainthood and others are in line to be raised to the honour. He himself set the best example so much so that the Church raised him for universal veneration. Authentic people start reforms with themselves. His reforms in the Church of Kerala were successful in every respect, for he himself was their starting point. He did not blame the socio-political and ecclesial milieu of the 19th century and wait for the opportune time to arrive. The monastery he initiated at Mannanam became a reserve bank of spiritual currency and guidance that could refashion the ecclesial and social life of the 19th century and thereafter. However, an important characteristic feature of the society is that it is very slow in understanding and appreciating the significance of the role played by its great personalities.

10. Fundamentals of Wholesome Ministry

St. Chavara, through his spiritual leadership, attempted to reform the body of Christ. It was the love for the Church and Christ that stirred him to act untiringly. It is said that Christianity is not a do it yourself religion. God made us social creatures and declared that it is not good to be alone. All Christians by their baptism are called to be in the body of Christ acknowledging Jesus the head. Each one is given gifts and abilities to

build and perfect the body that is the Church, so that many may experience the gift of salvation in a more complete manner. All have varying degrees of responsibilities for spiritual formation based on their unique vocation in the Church. Christian formation includes all attempts, means, instructions and discipline intended towards deepening the faith and the furtherance of spiritual growth. By introducing retreats and homilies and making greater participation of the faithful in the liturgical worship possible, Chavara was reforming and rebuilding the Church.

The Church desires that the personality of a priest is to be a bridge and not a hindrance for others in their reaching out to God in Jesus Christ. The value of communion is one of the most eloquent signs and one of the most effective ways of transmitting the gospel message.¹⁴ The capacity for communion presupposes an adequate level of affective maturity in a person. As the humanity of the word-made-flesh was the channel of salvation, so the humanity of a priest is instrumental in mediating the redemptive gifts of Christ to the people.¹⁵ Pastoral ministry in the Church becomes a reality when priests involved in the projects have human maturity. The personality of the priest should be formed in such a way that it is acceptable to the community that he serves as well as to his team of ministers. The human formation that we emphasize today has been the need of all times in the ministry of the Church. Human qualities are to be fostered in oneself. Authorities in offices of the Church shall endeavor to promote human qualities for collaborative ministry. All that Chavara achieved was the result of fostering such qualities in himself and others. Chavara was a good steward of the temporal assets. He was prudent and discerning in public life resembling Christ in the Church. The human foundations of a priest's personality shall be strong enough to allow the divine grace to flow through him.

Authentic pastoral ministry can be carried out only by a man of balanced integration of feelings and values, so that he may not be driven by raw feelings and needs, but be powered by proper affectivity. This kind of affective growth is evidenced in his ability to live well with authority and in an ability to take direction from others. A mature and integrated person can exercise authority over the peers and can

¹⁴ John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis* # 43.

¹⁵ Linus Neli, "Human Formation in the Documents of the Church," in Shaji Kochuthara *et al.* (eds.), *Human Formation in Major Seminaries*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2017: 80-98, 96.

productively deal with conflicts and stress, which are part of ministry. Chavara, in his dealings with his peers as well as his authorities and faithful reveals how his integrated personality contributed to the efficiency of his ministry. As a sensitive, genuine and intuitive person, Jesus sensed what was part of humanity (Jn 2:25). Therefore, everyone involved in the ministry must make an effort to know what is in the depth of human heart in order to create trust and cooperation. Those who engage in mission and ministry are invited to transform themselves, society and culture by being individuals of deep living faith, with God as the very heart and centre of their lives and as they maintain the stewardship given by Christ.

Pope Francis spoke about the concept of mission in the following words: "My mission of being in the heart of the people is not just a part of my life or a badge I can take off; it is not just an extra or just another moment in life. Instead it is something which I cannot uproot from my being without destroying my very self. I am a mission on this earth; that is the reason why I am in the world."¹⁶ Chavara embodied the mission in his personality and pastoral ministry and lived the life of a true missionary that Pope Francis was speaking about.

11. Conclusion

Chavara was a charismatic personality. The gifts he was endowed with, he employed for doing good to his fellow human beings without any reserve. He extended his wings fully and flew to the horizons touching the subsequent centuries. As we live in the 21st century, we still can feel and experience the waves that the fluttering of his wings made. He was not born immortal; rather he achieved immortality by his good works and virtues. He lives in the heart of God and God's people. He was a true blessing to Kerala society and the Universal Church at large. He had many feathers on his cap being a poet, writer, literary genius, educationist, social reformer, administrator, orator, spiritual guide and more. It seems that he was not really concerned about titles, name or fame. He was all concerned about uplifting all in a holistic manner. Therefore, he explored different realms to bring about all that is good from all domains.

¹⁶ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* #273.