

BOOK REVIEW

Thomas Kadankavil, *Chavara: A Multidimensional Saint*, Kottayam: Deepika Book House, 2016, pages: 235.

The book under review, *Chavara: A Multidimensional Saint* is a praiseworthy one as it helps to understand the various dimensions of the saintly personality of Chavara. The book is a contribution in responding to the pastoral challenges of the family in the context of evangelization as deliberated in the third extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in 2015. Emmanuel Attel, furnishes the book with an enriching Preface that highlights the great contributions of Saint Chavara. As pointed out in the preface, the author, while developing the theme, “ventures to carve out a splendid and illustrious icon, Saint Kuriakose Elias, an ever vibrant symbol of religious life and social reformation... the entire fabric of this book is opulent with scientific presentation and accurate exposition” (p. 8), and the very vision is encapsulated in the title itself.

Let me now point out a few notable features of Kadankavil’s work. The book has two parts, and it unfolds itself in 13 chapters. The first part, *Chavara a Saintly Person*, presents nine essays that depict the biography of the saint and the author dwells on and analyzes the indelible contributions of Saint Kuriakose Chavara including his efforts to establish the first indigenous congregation. His visions of monastic and family life with relevant quotes from the saint himself make the book both inspiring and interesting. Chavara’s understanding of a good Christian family as the heaven on earth (p. 26-27), and the directives on family life (p. 29-30) are well expounded.

The author presents Chavara as a symbol of sanctity and a prototype of women empowerment activities in Kerala of his times, for it tells the story of the establishment of the first indigenous congregation for women (CMC) and the hardship the saint had to bear in its realization. The exhortations of the saint to the members of his community (p. 57-66) and the charism of the CMI Congregation are incorporated with meditative reflections (p. 66-91). The author succeeds in presenting the role of Chavara in the restoration of the liturgical worship, education of the faithful and the establishment of the Syro-Malabar Hierarchy (p. 150-157).

In the second part, *Chavara a Multidimensional Saint*, there are four entries. The first one establishes the fact that 'being for the Absolute is being for the other.' Chavara is presented as a man for others and the philosophy in reaching out to the other is delineated by underlining the primacy of love. The second entry is on the ideal life of St Chavara. Many of the qualities attributed to a prophetic leader of a religious movement is verified in St Chavara (p. 211-216). The author in the third entry highlights that the followers of Chavara in religious vocation have to become messengers of God's love and peace perfectly freed from their own selfishness. It also depicts the formation process he and his early followers have bequeathed to their posterity. The last entry sheds light on the ideal of being a creative and meaningful presence, and urges everyone to be a meaningful presence for others, for Chavara was a positive presence among the dalit community in Kerala (p. 227-235).

What is most interesting about the book is that the author with an inquisitive mind reflects on the multidimensional personality of Chavara. What attract a reader are the profound thoughts expressed in a simple language with examples, quotes from the writings of the saint, excerpts from Chronicles, terms from Indian Philosophy... etc. The author deserves appreciation for providing the building blocks for an in-depth research into the field of theological studies on St Chavara. The scientific study of the writings and exhortations of Chavara and the various dimensions of his personality require serious application of mind. The insights are relevant and beneficial in the present context, and challenge and urge everyone to live a holy life according to the call received.

A General Introduction and a Conclusion to the volume would have helped the reader to have a better understanding of the volume. An index and a bibliography at the end also would have provided better sense of the appendix. It is beyond any argument or doubt that the book draws attention to certain issues related to the life and mission of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara, which require further discussion and deeper reflection and research. Therefore, the present volume by Dr Thomas Kadankavil, a prolific writer, is a relevant and inspirational one, and I confidently recommend this book, for it is really worth engaging.

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