

PASTORAL MIND OF CHAVARA In the Light of the Apostolic Fathers

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Abstract: Sophy Rose attempts in this study to get closer to Chavara and see how his pastoral mind works as he makes various contributions to the Church. The author is making this study in the light of the contributions made by the Apostolic Fathers. Going through the writings of Chavara, she explores the pastoral and eschatological character of his literature, his discussions on the doctrine of baptism and efficacy of good works for salvation. She makes a detailed study of the Christology of Chavara to see how a picture of Christ is drawn as both divine and human, the titles of Christ and how he is seen both as father and mother. Finally, she reflects on how, like the Apologetic Fathers, Chavara defended and protected the unity of the Church.

Keywords: Church, Fathers of the Church, Doctors of the Church, antiquity, sanctity, orthodoxy, theologians, bishop, Mystical Body, *Magisterium*, poor, Syro-Malabar Church, doctrines, patrology, theology, dogma, Holy Father, *Chavarul*, Vicar General, Roccas, excommunication, schism, eschatology, parousia, *Qurbana*, baptism, Clement of Rome, salvation, *charity*, sick, aged, parishioners, Christology, Scripture, Trinity, experience, Rite, Spirit, Baccinelli, missionaries, liturgy, tradition, administration, death, Malabar, Coonan Cross, *Propaganda Fide*, *Padroado*, Chaldean, Bagdad, Pius IX, jurisdiction.

1. Introduction

In the Catholic Church, there are officially recognized and declared “Fathers of the Church” and “Doctors of the Church.” To belong to any one of these categories, a person should fulfil certain criteria. The Fathers of the Church fulfil the requirements of antiquity, sanctity, orthodoxy and ecclesiastical approval, whereas, the Doctors of the Church fulfil the conditions of sanctity, orthodoxy, intellectual contributions to the understanding of faith and ecclesiastical approval. Among these distinctive characteristics, sanctity and orthodoxy are the

most important features. In the Catholic Church, there are many canonically declared saints; but all of them are not known for their teachings as theologians. There were many renowned theologians; but all of them are not declared saints. Usually, it is a saint who complements the sanctity with eminent theology that is eligible to be considered as a doctor of the Church.

The Doctors of the Church manifest their faith in the Lord who is the fullness of God's revelation not only through their heroic and virtuous life but also through their erudite and orthodox teaching and writing on the revealed and incarnated Word and the Church, his Mystical Body. Moreover, their teachings should be authentic, edifying and enriching to the faithful of all times and places as well as supportive to the *Magisterium*. In brief, they must be faithful and outstanding witnesses to the sources of faith – the Holy Scripture and the Holy Tradition – through their life, writing and teaching. It is in this light that we ask if Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara of the Syro-Malabar Church could be considered such a theologian.¹ This study is a preliminary attempt to answer this question.

In order to understand the relevance of the writings of Chavara in the light of the doctrines inherent in them, in the following pages, we make a survey of these writings in the backdrop of the writings of the Early Fathers of the Church. In this study, we focus is the teachings of the Apostolic Fathers who lived immediately after the time of the apostles, i.e., the first and second centuries AD.

According to J. Quasten, an expert in Patrology, the Apostolic Fathers do not aim at a scientific exposition of the Christian faith; their writings contain occasional utterances rather than doctrinal definitions. This is all the more true with regard to Chavara's writings. He didn't write systematic and scientific treatises in view of teaching theology and imparting doctrines. But his writings have theology; just as in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers, we see certain authentic theological insights and doctrines in his writings.

¹See Benny Thettayil, "St. Chavara, a Father of the Eastern Church: Biblical and Theological Perspectives," *Herald of the East* 12, 1 (2016): 3-24, who analyses the life and teachings of Chavara to see how far he could be considered a Father of the Eastern Church. However, the consideration in the present study is to see how far Chavara could be considered a Doctor of the Church.

2. Pastoral Character

According to Quasten, typical characteristic feature of all the writings of the Apostolic Fathers is their *pastoral character*.² With regard to the content and style, they are closely related to the writings of the New Testament, especially to the Epistles of the Apostles.³

Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara (1805-1871), the first canonical indigenous religious priest and founder of two religious Congregations for men and women and the Vicar General of the Syro-Malabar Church, was basically a pastor. Just as the Epistles of St. Paul and early Fathers, most of his writings were also contextual. These *Letters* are addressed to the Holy Father, Prefect of the *Propaganda Fide*, to the co-religious, spiritual sons and daughters and the faithful. He wrote as per the need of his time: To the Holy Father and to the Prefect of the *Propaganda Fide* he wrote in order to clarify the doubts in order to tackle the problems faced by the Church. To the co-religious, spiritual sons and daughters he wrote to give advice and instructions. To the faithful he wrote in order to admonish them to be firm in their faith and to be obedient to their legitimate authority.

He wrote two letters to his parishioners. (1) Testament of a Loving Father, a letter addressed to the Families, titled *Chavarul*. (2) A letter instructing the people to open a house of charity and to constitute a Confraternity of St. Joseph for Happy Death. These two long letters are personal and are addressed to the parishioners of Kainakary, which might be considered a local Church. The letters contain admonitions, instructions, practical means, etc., which have biblical, spiritual, pastoral, moral and social insights. For example, the second letter written in 1869 is a call to the people to collect alms from the people and to open the house of charity attached to their chapel, in a modest way where they can give free hospice to the poor and the destitute and to take care of all their material and spiritual needs.

In this letter, he mentions certain revealed truths as well as some traditional beliefs very vividly. He writes:

The grace of a happy death is necessary for all men... God the Father sent His only Son to the world. He lived here for thirty-three years and in the end offered his life and save mankind. The gates of heaven will be opened only to those who die in the state of grace. However holy a person be, if he loves a single sin and dies in that state, merits eternal death. However great a sinner may be, if he

²J. Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. I, Westminster: Maryland, Christian Classics, 1993, 40.

³Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. I, 40.

repents over his sins at the moment of death, like the good thief who was hanged on the right hand side of the Lord, the gates of heaven will automatically be opened to him. This is the greatest happiness a man can have. *Of all the helps given to a man, the greatest is that given to him at the moment of death. This is again the greatest act of mercy. This is also the supreme act of charity.*⁴

This letter is a very rich admonition to serve both body and soul in view of eternal life. It is saturated with pastoral insights; ultimately his concern is towards the souls and his eagerness is to save them.

When he writes a circular to the people as Vicar General in the context of Roccas schism he exhorts: "I tell you all this my dear brethren, *being desirous of your eternal salvation* and lest you fall in to the schism and incur the excommunication of the Pope and suffer the loss of your soul."⁵ It is very clear that as the pastor, his primary concern was the salvation of the souls.

3. Eschatological Character of his Writings

Another important character typical of the writings of the Apostolic Fathers is their eschatological. The second coming of Christ was considered imminent by them. Consequently, the writings of the Apostolic Fathers reveal *a deep longing for Christ*, the departed and expected Saviour, a longing which very often takes a mystical expression.

Although we do not find an idea of immediate Parousia in the writings of St. Chavara, often we come across the doctrine regarding the four destinies of human beings such as death, judgment, heaven and hell. Moreover, we find rich insights and doctrines concerning purgatory, the necessity of praying and doing charitable acts for the souls in purgatory and the insistence to practice virtue in one's life to face the last judgment peacefully. These ideas are found mainly in *Maranaveettil Padunnathinulla Pana (Dirge)* his poetic composition.

In his *letter to the parishioners* instructing them to open a charity home, he wrote very clearly the necessity of preparing for death:

There are only two things that are important: in the first place see that you don't forget at any time that you will die at the most unexpected moment, that death will creep on you like a thief and so you must remember the words of our Lord: 'watch and pray for

⁴*Complete Works of Bl. Chavara* (hereafter CWC), vol. IV, Mannanam: 1990; Letters, IX/7.

⁵CWC vol. IV, Letters IX/4.

you know not when the moment will come' and secondly, keep away from mortal sin that will engender fear of death and when you realize that you have sinned mortally, at once, through confession or perfect act of contrition seek pardon of sin. Only then should you go to sleep.⁶

Although death is a definite fact, the time is indefinite. So we must be vigilant and always be ready to encounter death. Vigilance and preparation are the two requirements that every person should cultivate in order to face death peacefully and joyfully. Here, in this letter also the thrust is the four destinies of human being: death, judgment and the reward either heaven or hell. The exhortation to pray for the departed and to offer Holy *Qurbana* for them, to give alms as reparation for their sins, etc., indicate how far the author has imbibed all the traditional belief of the Church and his pastoral mind and concern that made him convey these ideas for the good of the people.

As mentioned above, we do not find the idea of an immediate parousia in Chavara's writings as in the case of Apostolic Fathers. Nevertheless, his writings, especially, the poetic literature reveal a very deep longing for the vision of God, an unquenchable thirst, as we see in the psalmist as well as in St. Thomas the Apostle. According to Pedro Lopez Quintana, former Apostolic Nuncio of India:

It was a unique initiative of saint Chavara who had a prophetic insight to realize that the Church in India needed a confluence of her Christian patrimony with the rich and age-old heritage of the Indian spiritual traditions. The spiritual power of the Syro-Malabar Church, which can be traced to the deeply personal Jesus experience of St. Thomas, had to be blended with the spiritual classics of India with their long tradition of craving and longing for God realization. This indeed is what Chavara attempted to do.⁷

The observation of the Nuncio seems to be very relevant and is endorsed by Chavara in his *Atmanuthapam*, in which, 168 lines of Cantos 3 and its Appendix together beautifully describe mostly the incident related to the life of Christ. He is contemplating the incarnate word, the babe, through the eyes of Mary, the mother. The beauty of it is that every other line ends with the words: "I long to see."

The Lord of Mercy, the Son of God

⁶CWC IV; *Letters*, 119.

⁷Pedro Lopez Quintana (Apostolic Nuncio of India), "Blessed Chavara and the Confluence of Christian Patrimony in India," *Herald of the East* 1, 1 (2006): 2.

His glorious splendour, *I long to see*
 The fountain of mercy, God incarnate
 Who, the form of man assumed
 To uproot him from the slush of sin
 The redeemer of human kind, *I long to see*

How he stayed for nine months
 In the womb of His mother *I long to see*
 Born in her womb, to Bethlehem he came
 To obey mighty Ceaser, *I long to see*

God becoming one with man
 "Emmanuel", *I long to see*
 His parents denied a resting place
 Though painful, *I long to see ...*

The good shepherd seeking his flock
 That has gone astray, *I long to see*
 The Lord of goodness, proclaiming himself
 As our loving friend, *I long to see.*⁸

What we see in this Canto III is the description of the longing of the poet to see the joyful movements of the infant Jesus and the way his pretty mother nurses him. In the first reading, it may not give us any eschatological ideas. Nevertheless, the inner craving of the poet, to see and to experience God who came to us in order to be with us, shows his eagerness to see God and to be with Him. This is corroborated by his words in other contexts. For example, in his letter to the sisters he writes: "Oh Lord, do not be separate from us until we are one with you."⁹

4. Doctrine of Baptism

Another important theological concept that is predominant in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers is the importance they have given to baptism. According to St. Clement of Rome, "Baptism is called the *seal* as St. Paul says in 2 Cor 1:21-22 and this seal must be kept inviolate; for of those who have not kept the seal he says: 'Their worm shall not die, and their fire shall not be quenched and he shall not be a spectacle for

⁸Atmanuthapam, Cantos III, 1-100.

⁹CWC vol. IV; Letter VII/6.

all flesh', 'This therefore is what he says: Keep flesh pure and seal without spot, they may receive eternal life.'"¹⁰

Chavara was a man who acknowledged baptism as a gift of God and by that he became a spotless and fair son of God and to see and enjoy the heavenly joy. In *Atmanuthapam*, he writes frequently regarding his reception of baptism and the graces that bestowed upon him as the son of God. See what he writes:

O Fount of Mercy, in your crystal streams of grace
Was my soul once cleansed and made spotless fair
Beauteous, bright, bedecked in gems of virtue
Through my Baptism, a boon, a day of days

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

Through Baptism's grace, you made me your cherished son,
And showed me heaven's joys to tend me grow¹¹
Then Your saving gaze fell upon me
And cleansing waters of Baptism I received

The dawn of grace led to growth in virtue
Sumptuous goodness swelled my soul, as
In sacred waters, I was lavishly laved
And cleansed from guilt to *divine sonship restored*.

The fountain of grace, flushed forth from my soul
On that grace-filled day, Heaven rejoiced
As my name was writ on Eternity's page
Never so blessed a day, has seen my life.¹²

Chavara spells out the important graces that God has showered upon Christians through baptism. It has cleansed the soul and made it spotless, holy and bright, made the person His cherished son/daughter; showed him/her heaven's joy; led him/her to grow in virtue; and has written his/her name in Eternity's page. He lived the baptismal purity in its fullness until his death and received the eternal life. This he acknowledged when he was on the death bed: "By the

¹⁰Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. I, 56.

¹¹CWC vol. II, *Atmanuthapam*, Cantos I, 32-42.

¹²Cantos II, 105-114.

grace of God, I dare say that with their (the Holy Family's) help, I had no occasion to lose the grace I received in baptism."¹³

5. Efficacy of Good Works for Salvation

According to the Fathers, especially St. Clement, almsgiving is the principal means by which sins are remitted. It is better than fasting and prayer but almsgiving is better than both. In Clement's Sermon, we read: "Almsgiving is therefore good even as penance for sin. Fasting is better than prayer but almsgiving is better than both. Love covers a multitude of sins, but prayer from a good conscience delivers from death. Blessed is every man that is found full of these things, for alms giving removes the burden of sin."¹⁴

Chavara was conscious about these realities. He was a great soul who adorned his life with selfless deeds and great zeal towards the salvation of souls. In the *Chavarul* he writes: "the days of your life that do not see some noble action done may be counted as deleted from your life... Do not allow beggars to leave your house empty handed."¹⁵

The letter of instruction for the establishment of the *Upavisala* (*home of charity*) is a classical text that speaks very clearly on the necessity and benefit of good works and acts of charity especially the love and care one should show to the beggars, sick and those who are terminally ill. For the projects of helping the poor, Chavara used to approach the rich people and they used to contribute generously to his just demands. Through his life, Chavara enkindled concern for the poor and the sick. By starting the *Confraternity of St. Joseph* for a Happy Death, Chavara initiated a new apostolate of helping and caring for the sick. The members of this Confraternity were exhorted to attend to the needs of the sick and the suffering, and to adopt a poor family in the neighbourhood and provide it with food and clothes on the feast of St. Joseph. After launching the *Confraternity* among the parishioners of Kainakary in 1869, Chavara instructed them to establish in the parish a Home of Charity to take care of the poor and the aged. He asked his people not to abandon the aged, the sick, the orphans and the poor. In the Testament, he gave clear guidelines about the importance of giving

¹³*Positio*, 548.

¹⁴Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. I, 57.

¹⁵Chavara, *Chavarul*, 14.

concern to the poor people, which would make their own lives sublime.¹⁶

The key idea behind his 'home of charity' and the 'Confraternity for Happy Death' is "... of all the benefits we can render to a man the greatest is what we render to him at the time of his departure from this world... This is a gain, the greatest act of mercy. This is also the supreme act of charity. One cannot measure the greatness of such a deed."¹⁷ The means to actualize this project according to him is the alms that they receive from the parishioners. Thus he showed the means to attain eternal life not only to the poor and the needy but also to those who have money and wealth by inspiring them to give alms for the wellbeing of the poor.

6. Christology

In general, the Apostolic Fathers do not present a uniform Christological doctrine since they lived before the time of definitions made by the Ecumenical Councils. Their Christology is primarily Scripture based. Christ is, to them, the Son of God, who is pre-existent and who collaborated in the creation of the world.¹⁸ This is typically an articulation based on the Gospel of John especially the Prologue.

The Christology of Ignatius of Antioch is exceedingly clear in his teachings both, on the divinity and on the humanity of Christ. "There is only one physician, both for carnal and spiritual, born and unborn, God became man, true life in death, sprung both from Mary and from God first subject to suffering and then incapable of it – Jesus Christ Our Lord."¹⁹ Similarly, he would write to the Smyrneans: "He is really of the line of David according to the flesh and the Son of God by the will and power of God; was really born of a virgin, and baptized by John in order to comply with every ordinance."²⁰ Here the author presents both the divinity and humanity of the incarnated Word Jesus Christ in one Person. The same doctrine is found in the writings of Chavara.

¹⁶J. Pathrapankal, "The Prophetic Personality of Blessed Chavara," *Herald of the East* 1, 1 (2006): 27.

¹⁷CWC vol. IV; *Letters* IX/7.

¹⁸Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. I, 41.

¹⁹Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to Ephesians* 7,2.

²⁰Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to Smyrneans* I, 1.

6.1. Christ, Divine and Human

In his writings, especially, in the *Atmanuthapam*, we find a profound Christology of Chavara. According to it, the second person of the Trinity, the Son, assumed human form. As the fulfilment of the promise made by God, the Son of God incarnated in the purest womb of Mother Mary. He is True God and True man. He was born as the first born of all creation and became our eldest brother. We read in *Atmanuthapam* as follows:

Of God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit
The Son Incarnate in Mary's purest womb.²¹

Your promise to fulfil, came your Son
Assumed human form, on the earth
True man and true God you came from above
And on earth sojourned our Elder brother.²²

The Almighty, the fountain of all goodness
The King of kings, Omniscient Lord of All
The second person of the Holy Trinity
The Lord borne by the Queen of the world.²³

Again, the one who was born on earth as man is the Eternal Son of God. However, except sin. He identified with the humanity.

Though born on earth as man
Though from Eternity the Father's Son
Though as man he took upon Him
The full human nature, all
Except the original stain of sin
A grace to match it, there was none.²⁴

In *Atmanuthapam*, we have a very beautiful presentation of the incarnation of the second person of the Trinity as *Emmanuel* with minute details, which the poet longs to see. Canto III of the poem consists of 100 lines that describe the details of the birth of the Son. A very rich theology of incarnation can be found here.

The fountain mercy, God incarnate
Who ugly form of man assumed.²⁵

²¹Cantos I, 71-72.

²²Cantos II, 169-172.

²³Cantos IV, 29-32.

²⁴Cantos XI, 187-192.

²⁵Cantos III, 3-4.

He concealed in his form
The effulgence that dims the stars
The nativity of God the highest
From Mercy, the virgin, *I long to see*.²⁶

God became one with man
"Emmanuel" *I long to see*.²⁷

In the Appendix of Canto III, lines 1-68, the poet narrates the very purpose of incarnation, God become *Emmanuel*, as to save the humanity from the stain of sin and to elevate them to the right hand of God. *Emmanuel* is the Saviour of the world.

To redeem mankind born low, Him
O that I may see!
Sinful me, to enrich with grace
To sorrow you bent
How you became the son of man
To save me I would see.²⁸

To elevate us to the Right hand of God
You the perfect, became man.²⁹

The sweet smile you show your parents
Beloved Babe, I long to see
O God Emmanuel, I, a sinner
With love, adore.³⁰

The basis of Christian faith is the mystery of the Triune God who is the communion of three divine persons, Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. It is the Father who sent the Son to the world in order to redeem the world from sin and sent the Spirit to be with us always. Nevertheless, it is through the Son we reach God and approach the divine mysteries; since no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him (Mt 11:27). Jesus said: "No one comes to the Father except through me" (Jn 14:6) and "he who has seen me, has seen the Father, he who has heard me, has heard the Father and he who has received me, receives Father who has sent me" (Jn 14:9). Imbibing the spirit of these words of Jesus, Chavara

²⁶Cantos III, 7-10.

²⁷Cantos III, 15-16.

²⁸Cantos III, Appendix, 13-18.

²⁹Cantos III, Appendix, 47-48.

³⁰Cantos III, Appendix, 61-64

turned to Jesus who is both perfect man and God, to see, hear and experience the Father.

6.2. Titles of Christ and Christological Themes

In the writings of Chavara, almost all the Christological confessions and titles pronounced by the early Church and the writings of the Fathers are found. He clearly presents the basic Christological dogma, the divinity and humanity of Jesus in one person. He imbibed the faith confession of St. Thomas the Apostle, his Father in faith: *My Lord My God*.³¹

The Christological titles found in his writings are: Son of God (III, 1, 27), Redeemer of human kind, Cantos (III, 6), My Lord (II, 75, 87), Son Incarnate in Mary's purest womb (I, 72), True man and true God (II, 171), Our Elder brother (II, 172), God-man (II, 241; VI, 162), Son of Man (III, Appendix 17), Son of Almighty God (III, Appendix 1), Saviour of man (V, 141), Emmanuel (III, 16), Christ (I, 60), King of Kings (I, 60; IV, 30; V, 76, 141; VI, 41), Son of Royal David (IV, 170), Baby Son as great as the Father (V, 131), My Lord the Blessed babe Emmanuel (IV, 189), Lord of Mercy (II, 1; III, 1; VI, 261), God of Mercy (II, 43), Almighty God supreme (II, 62), Good Shepherd (III, 97), Goodness infinite (II, 92), Lord of All (III, Appendix, 57; IV, 183; V, 25, 142; VI, 7; VII, 53, 265), O Lord of the Gospel (III, 95), Lord of Goodness (III, 99) Redeemer (IV, 206; VI, 288), my Treasure (IV, 206), God-born man (V, 5), Saviour of all (V, 28), my father (V, 147), my maker (V, 147), Shepherd Gracious (V, 173), Son of God (VI, 7; VII, 8), Lord of Lords (VI, 7), Son of the Most High (VI, 41), only begotten Son of God the Father (VI, 45), Son of the Mighty God (VI, 71), Lord of Justice (VI, 155; VII, 552), Lord and Master (VI, 286), Lord of the world (VI, 304), World's redeemer (VI, 307), My Lord (VI, 309, 327, 333, 351; VII, 85, 141, 231), My Master (VI, 333), Saviour (VI, 333), My Hope (VI, 333), Redeemer (VII, 9), New Star (VII, 14, 20), king of the Jews (VII, 29; VII, 594), Lord God of the universe (VII, 51), my master (VII, 51), author of all (VII, 55), creator supreme (VII, 93), Light of the World (VII, 111), Son of the mighty (VII, 124), O Lord my God (VII, 214), eternal Son of God (VII, 258), Co-existent with the Lord of all (VII, 259), Sovereign of mankind (VII, 260), royal Son of David (VII, 260), My Father Beloved (VII, 280), God of All (VII, 280), I'm your Father benevolent (VII, 286), I am He (VII, 306), I'm the Creator (VII, 315), I'm your Father, I your loving God (VII, 332), my Father, my Creator, my Lord (VII, 334) My

³¹Cantos I, 37; Cantos XII, 170.

loving Father I'm your son (VII, 416), My God, my Love, my Master (VIII, 1), O Loving God (VIII, 6), my Father Beloved (VIII, 1), my loving Father God eternal (VIII, 35), the Saviour (VIII, 50), O my God (VIII, 55), My blessed Father (VIII, 61), My beloved Lord, my Father (VIII, 66) Lord of the triple world (IX, 71), Christ our Lord (XII, 62), My Son, beloved my Lord my God (XII, 170).

6.2.1. Christ as *Appan*, the Father

The basic God consciousness of Jesus was this: God is his Father and He was the Father's Son. *Atmanuthapam* brings to the fore a similar experience of Chavara as he writes:

While being nurtured in body and mind

Was I beloved too of God, *my Father*.³²

His experience and articulation that God is his Father and he is His son is the most sublime aspect of his God experience and awareness. This he attained through Jesus.

At the zenith of his God experience, Chavara addresses Christ, the second person of the Holy Trinity also as Father. It is particularly when he meditates on the agony of Jesus that he calls Him 'Father' most affectionately. The following lines of *Atmanuthapam* which describe the agony of Jesus standing before Pilot express this fact:

Many a query the villain made to you

O God most pure, your blessed voice to hear

But he, a sinner deserved not the grace

"*My Loving Father*", *I'm your son*.³³

He assumes the same feeling when he narrates the scenes at the foot of the Cross:

His words divine he recalled to his mind

"I'm your Father, I'm your loving God

Yet, you thrust this cruel spear in my heart"

Alas, my Father, my creator, my Lord.³⁴

Eight times, Jesus is called Father in the seventh Canto of *Atmanuthapam* and twice in the eighth Canto.³⁵

In *Dhyanasallapangal*, when he meditates on the passion of Jesus he calls Him '*Appa*' meaning *Father*: "*Oh merciful Father*, I am unable to

³²Cantos I, 85-86

³³Cantos VII, 413-416

³⁴Cantos VII, 331-33

³⁵Cantos VII, 223, 286, 343, 345, 416, 419, 532, 548. See also in VIII 61, 63, etc.

raise my eyes and look at your face. Lord, looking at your holy head, I feel frightened to think how it came to be pierced with thorns... O *my Father (ente appa)*, how graceful is your face! The rapturous Song of David in praise of the beauty of your face rings in my ears... But, *my Father*, my heart now gets heavy to look at your face... Alas! I myself disfigured *my Father's* face, the beauty of which David the prophet sang plentifully...³⁶ The extraordinary style of addressing Jesus as the Father expresses his union with the divine persons. It is also an indication of his mystical union with the second person of the Trinity who himself says: "I and my Father are one" (Jn 10:30). It is noteworthy that when Chavara contemplated on the passion of Christ that he addressed Jesus as Father. Possibly, it is when he meditated on the passion of Christ that he experienced the intensity of God's undefinable love in its depth and perceived the manifestation of that love in the self-oblation of Jesus on the cross. The overwhelming love led him to a mystical realm that was beyond the categories of human mind and intellect. This may be the reason for him to ignore the distinction between Father and Son.

6.2.2. Christ as the Mother

Christ for Chavara is not only his Father, but also his mother. This is a very unique way of expressing Christ experience. See what he writes in *Atmanuthapam*:

You like a *father* patiently followed my trail
Whispered unto my heart, "you are my love
Mark ye, my son, a good *Father* am I
And a *mother* both" – you filled my mind.³⁷

We do not come across spiritual works in which Christ is described or addressed as mother. But there are clear references in the Scripture presenting God as a loving mother. For example, Prophet Isaiah says: "Can a mother forget her sucking child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even if she forgets, I shall not forget you" (Is 49:15-16). Again, Jesus laments: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem... How often I would have gathered your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not" (Mt 23:37). In these texts, the Scripture highlights the maternal character of *God's* love. Here, Chavara recalls the caring, forgiving, self-giving, tender and merciful and maternal love of *Christ*, who searched for him,

³⁶CWC vol. III, 6.

³⁷Cantos VII, 343-346.

carried his sins, healed his sickness and sacrificed His life for him. It is this heartfelt, sweet experience of the maternal love of Christ that made his life beautiful like a green pasture, fruitful like a vineyard, sheltering like a tree and dynamic like a running stream.

7. Defender of Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction

In the history of Dogma, the Epistles of St. Clement of Rome, especially the *Epistle to the Corinthians* are very significant. It may be well called the *manifesto* of ecclesiastical jurisdiction. The context of the Letter is the outbreak of disputes within the Church of Corinth during the reign of Domitian. The disputes impelled the author to intervene. Some arrogant and impudent individuals had rebelled against ecclesiastical authority and driven the incumbents from office. Only a very small minority of community remained loyal to the deposed presbyters. Writing the letter, Clement's intention was to settle the difference and to repair the scandal given to the pagans.³⁸ Here, in Clement, for the first time, we find a clear and explicit declaration of the doctrine of apostolic succession.

The letter of Clement stressed that the presbyters cannot be deposed by the members of the community on their own, because the authority is not bestowed by them. The right to rule derives from the Apostles, who exercised their power in obedience to Christ, who in turn was sent by God.³⁹ He writes:

The apostles preached to us the Gospel received from Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ was God's Ambassador. Christ, in other words, comes with a message from God and the Apostles with a message from Christ. Both of these orderly arrangements therefore, originate from the will of God... From land to land they preached and from their earliest converts appointed men whom they had tested by the Spirit to act as bishops and deacons for the future believers. And this was no innovation, for a long time before the Scripture had spoken about bishops and deacons; for somewhere it says: 'I will establish their overseers in observance of the law and their ministers in fidelity'... Consequently, we deem it injustice to eject from the sacred ministry the person who was appointed either by them or later with the consent of the whole Church, by other men in high repute.⁴⁰

³⁸Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. I, 43.

³⁹Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. I, 46.

⁴⁰Quoted from Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. I, 46.

A similar occasion arose in the Syro-Malabar Church during in the times of Chavara. In the 19th century, the apostolic Church of St. Thomas was under the jurisdiction of the Propaganda Fide. As per the decision of the Holy See, the Church was ruled by Msgr Bernardine Baccinelli, the Latin bishop of Verapoly. Although he was a Latin prelate, he was the legitimate authority of the St. Thomas Christians. The dissatisfaction of the Malabar Christians with the leadership of the Latin prelates from 16th century onwards had caused a longing in them for bishops of their own from the Chaldean Rite. Indeed, until 16th century, it was the Chaldean bishops from Bagdad who had given spiritual leadership to the Christians of Malabar and they were satisfied with their presence and shepherding. But the arrival of the Portuguese missionaries in the sixteenth century, and their interference in their ancient liturgy, tradition and administration created a rivalry between the Syrians and the Latin authority. The native Syrian Catholics could not bear the changes that they made to their liturgy, which was part of their apostolic heritage, received from St. Thomas, their father in faith, nourished and transmitted to the subsequent generations. It caused dissatisfaction among the Syrian Christians and finally it led to a protest from the part of the Syrian Catholics of Malabar, and the oath at the Coonan Cross in 1653.

Although, the *Propaganda Fide* took care of the Church after the rupture of relationship between the *Padroado* and the St. Thomas Christians, they were not much satisfied with the Propaganda's rule either, since, in reality, they were also Latin bishops alien to the Syrian community. In order to bring a solution to the problem, the Syrian community desired to bring back the Chaldean bishops of their own Rite and apostolic patrimony from Bagdad. Some St. Thomas Christians made serious efforts to have their own bishops and they succeeded in their effort. The arrival of bishop Thomas Roccas in 1861 from Bagdad is to be evaluated in this context. But the effort to bring back the Chaldean bishop as their pastor was not according to the will and consent of the Holy See. The arrival as well as the acceptance of Bp. Roccas was not legitimate.

Though the arrival of Thomas Roccas was illegitimate, when the bishop arrived, a majority of the Syrian Catholics went after him. Since the bishop got a very solemn reception from the Syrian Catholics and he was a validly ordained bishop of Chaldean Rite, he began to exercise the Episcopal duties in the Malabar Church. Many people followed Roccas and rejected Msgr. Bernardine Baccinelli of the Vicariate of Verapoly. This created a chaos in the Church. Naturally,

bishop Baccinelli became helpless and could not control the faithful from going after the new bishop and a schism emerged in the Church. It is in this context Baccinelli appointed Kuriakose Chavara, the Prior of the Monasteries, as the Vicar General of the Syrian Christians.

Chavara, a man of prudence and obedience, understood the error of his people. He tried his level best to bring back the people to be in communion with the legitimate bishop. He fought against the unlawful intervention and rule of Roccas. Meanwhile, he wrote letters to the Holy Father enquiring the legitimacy of Roccas to exercise Episcopal power among the Syrian Catholics of Kerala. His intention was to know the truth about the standpoint of the Holy See regarding Roccas and thereby to convey to the people the actual status of Roccas. Having been informed by the Holy See, Chavara wrote letters to the Syrian community about the rightful authority of bishop Baccinelli who was lawfully appointed by the Holy See and the duty and responsibility of the people to be obedient to him. Hence, the community of the faithful did not have the right and permission to substitute Roccas in the place of Baccinelli. In this way, he defended the ecclesiastical jurisdiction among the Syrian Catholics of Kerala like St. Clement of Rome.

The following letters of Chavara to and from the Holy Father provide a clear picture of the situation in the Church and what was his contribution in bringing about a solution to the situation. In his letter to the Holy Father Pius IX, he wrote:

On May 9, 1861, a bishop Thomas Roccas by name came to us under the orders of Joseph Audo, the Patriarch of Babylon... This bishop preaches to the entire body of the faithful, that he has been sent by the patriarch with instruction to govern the Chaldean Christians of Malabar with the permission and orders of your Holiness. But Archbishop Bernardine, our Vicar Apostolic has clearly stated in his personal letter as follows: 'The patriarch has sent the above mentioned bishop on his own wish, contrary to your wish and Order. So, anyone who receives holy Orders or authority at his hands and the one who confers such authority will automatically stand expelled from the Church.'

Yet the priests and the faithful approve all his actions and continue flocking to him daily. They are following his footsteps. We fear that even before we receive a reply to this letter, all our parishes will have arrayed behind him, in obedience. All the parishes except those few that are managed by the Carmelite priests, will be his followers... Hence, in all humility, with tear-filled eyes we entreat your holiness to let us know the true state of affairs. The reply must be in our Chaldean Syriac language. It

*should specify clearly the request of the patriarch and your reply to him and direct us of the dual authorities we should obey. In this conflict-ridden atmosphere beset with problem, you who are adorned with all good will should point out to us the right path. We find such guidance absolutely necessary to give assurance to those brethren who are still in doubt.*⁴¹

In response to this letter, the Holy Father Pope Pius IX wrote a letter to him appreciating his earnestness in seeking his holiness' advice on how to deal with the 'unlawful' Bishop Roccas. Pope wrote as follows:

We are immensely pleased that you have consulted the Apostolic See, the Mother and Teacher of all the faithful, the great Church of Rome to remove the serious dispute among you on this vital issue. Now, my dear sons, you must know that as we on the 20th November 1860 had given a definite directive in writing to this patriarch that on no account he should interfere with the affairs of the churches of Malabar. Bishop Roccas has come there on the order of the Patriarch acting only on his own volition.

Hence, my dear children please understand that bishop Roccas has no ecclesiastical authority, that he was unlawfully appointed and that he has fallen under several ecclesiastical censures. And it is our brother, Bishop Mar Bernardine, the Archbishop of Persella and the representative of the Holy Apostolic See, who is the ordinary for the Churches of Malabar; and it is lawful for you to submit to him...

From the Church of St. Peter in Rome on the 5th of September 1861, in the 16th year of our Pontificate,

(sd)

*Pope Pius IX.*⁴²

The ecclesial vision of Chavara will be clearer if we go through the following official circular he wrote and sent to the parish churches in the context of the visit of Roccas:

He who is not with me is against me. He who does not stand with me scatters" (Lk 11:23), said the Lord. He who enters the sheepfold and exercises authority not having received it from the Pope, the successor of St. Peter does not gather but scatters the sheep. He who does not stand with the pope, the Vicar of Christ, is the enemy of Christ. Such a shepherd and all those who join hands with him will perish in the eternal fire intended for the enemies of Christ. There is no doubt about it. The shepherd who has now started from Bagdad has neither the mandate of the Pope nor his authorization. He is planning to enter the sheepfold of Christ,

⁴¹CWC IV; Letters I/1.

⁴²CSC IV; Letters I/2.

which is in Malabar as a wolf to scatter the sheep and drive them to the eternal fire of hell. I am fully convinced of this fact.

Hence, my beloved brethren, remember the words of our Lord that he who enters the sheepfold not through the right door is not the true shepherd, but the false one; is a wolf in sheep's clothing; if such shepherds come to you without the decree of the pope, be cautious not to give ear to their false teachings, nor take sides with them and be prepared even to suffer martyrdom at their hands for being faithful to the true vicar of the Pope, the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly. If you happen to suffer martyrdom at their hands, remember that it will be the greatest grace of God you would receive.

Besides, I want you to know that if any one comes with the permission and the decrees of the Pope, it is necessary that in testimony thereof, he should show it to one of our Vicars Apostolic, that is, either to the Archbishop of Verapoly or to the bishop of Quilon and only with the knowledge and permission of one of them, he can enter our churches and administer the sacraments or perform any other sacred ministry in the Church. I tell you all this, my dear brethren, being desirous of your eternal salvation and lest you fall in to the schism and incur the excommunication of the Pope and suffer the loss of your soul.⁴³

Chavara stands like a warrior who dutifully fights for the Kingdom of God to which he belongs. He expresses his readiness even to die for this noble cause. His concern is always the salvation of the souls. All these show his firm faith in the fact that Jesus instituted the Church upon Peter the Rock. The authority entrusted to Peter and his successors is divine and nobody can demolish that by any means. The apostolic succession and ecclesiastical jurisdiction are therefore not manmade but intended by God. He is the replica of Clement of Rome for the Church of St. Thomas, defender of the revealed truth – the apostolic succession and ecclesiastical jurisdiction.

8. Conclusion

A glance at the teachings of Chavara in comparison with the apostolic fathers made clear that, the writings of Chavara are loaded with theological ideas and insights. In the Church of Kerala, we do not come across anyone ahead of him coming up as a systematic theologian in the strict sense of the word to imitate or to follow. But by the divine grace, he articulated theological visions and insights so deeply and didactically through his writings. A closer and critical

⁴³CWC IV; Letters, IX/3.

study of his literature in the light of the writings of the Fathers and contemporary theology elucidates the fact that his literature contains revealed truth and multifaceted insights both theological and ecclesial. He is a pioneer in this realm and paved a legacy ahead of times.