

RELIGIOUS LIFE IN CHAVARA'S VISION

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Abstract: Paul Kalluveetil CMI reflects on religious life in the vision of Chavara. The lack of a house of penance (*tapasbhavanam*) in the land goaded him to desire for a house of vision (*darsanavîdu*). The *tapasbhavanam* and *darsanavîdu* have to be understood in a deeper spiritual sense. The persons of *tapasbhavanam* totally dedicate themselves in communion and communication with God and humans and make the *darsanavîdu* a holy abode, where the devotees see the celestial visions and divine dreams. There, the members abide in the love of Jesus, sit before his eyes, walk close to him and converse always with him. Religious life is a call to live in the Holy Family. In the presence of Jesus, Chavara dwelt in the metaphorical world considering himself Zacchaeus of Lk 19, the prodigal son of Lk 15 and many more. There the religious learn the art of seeing, the art of remembering and the art of venerating the divine and thus become a consecrated community. It is the ecclesial art of Chavara that prompted him to find refuge in the *tapasbhavanam* and *darsanavîdu* and subsequently to lead hundreds to serve the Mother Church.

Keywords: Mannanam, *Chronicles*, religious, priest, *tapasbhavanam*, *darsanavîdu*, asceticism, charism, *Letters*, mysticism, devotees, David, Elisha, Mary, Abraham, Enoch, meditation, *Colloquies*, bridegroom, *bes rauma*, Holy Family, grace, metaphor, theology, Trinity, remembrance, liturgy, *dukrâna*, monastery, benefactors, salvation, self-realization, God-realization, Saviour, community, consecration, destitute, Joseph, Congregation, prayer, martyrdom, Carmel, rosary, money, Jacob, Roccas, authority, freedom, righteousness, judgement, obedience, poverty, celibacy, *Magnificat*, crucifixion, humility, Malpan.

1. Introduction

The words of St Chavara on pages 15-16 of the first volume of *Mannanam Chronicles* encapsulate his ideal of religious life:¹ "Since there is no house of penance (*tapasbhavanam*) in this Malayalam (land) there are a lot of defects in good things. There was a desire (I earnestly

¹The translations of the works of St Chavara are given literally in the study, since the existing English versions are defective.

desired) that at least the priest should have a house of vision (*darsanavîdu*), but was feeling sad since there did not exist any help."

2. Two Sententious Titles

Chavara designates the religious house as *tapasbhavanam* and *darsanavîdu*. Both names have to be understood in a deeper spiritual sense. *Tapas* belonged to Indian ascetical tradition of *rishis*, who used to spend many years in meditative invocation of the name of a god (*namajapa*), renouncing all the bodily needs. Their rigid asceticism finally would please the deity, who willingly will grant to them whatever boon or largess they were longing for. Now the Chronicler envisages a community of *rishis*, and not individualistic endeavours. These persons of *tapasbhavanam* with a single heart and soul are supposed to totally dedicate themselves in communion and communication with God and humans, His living images. The second title given to such holy abode is *darsanavîdu*, where the devotees will be granted the charism of seeing the celestial visions and divine dreams, concerning the creator's designs for the whole world, especially human beings. The Book of Genesis has repeated seven times in the narration of creation (Gen 1:3, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31), the phrase, "and God saw that it was good (*tôb*). The phrase may be thus interpreted. God, the source of fullness of goodness, filled the whole creation with His goodness; in everything there irradiated His beautiful and radiant face. But sin disfigured this radiance; especially human faces became ugly. Now the inhabitants of the *tapasbhavanam* and *darsanavîdu*, at this wretched sight, were prompted to spend their whole life to reinstate the primeval beauty to these disfigured faces.²

3. The Compendium of Religious Life

For St Chavara, religious life was a call to live in mystical union with Christ. In *Letters*, VII,6 he gives it the following articulation: "Abiding (*pārkal*) in the love of Jesus Christ, sitting always before His eyes (*kanmunbil irikkal*), walking close to Him (*arika nadakkal*) and

²The first religious house built at Mannanam hill was called *bes Rauma*, the house at top. It has spiritual and biblical significance. Mountains, which separate one from creatures, were considered as nearest to heaven, where humans can enter into communion and communication with God, e.g., Mount Horeb (Ex 3:1-2; 1 Kg 19:9-18), Mount Sinai (Ex 19), Mount Zion on which Jerusalem temple stood, Mount Tabor (Mt 17:1-8), and Mount of Olives (Acts 1:10-12). Most of the early religious houses were built on hills.

conversing always with Him (*thannodu kûde samsarikkal*).” These four acts make one bride, devotee (*bhakta*) and beloved friend of the heavenly Bridegroom.

3.1. The Abiding Ones

In popular Malayalam language *pārkal* implies the ideas of celebration, bliss, peace and self-realization. Those who enter the *Bes Rauma* have to make their whole life a *pārkal*. They are called to lead a life of bride/children in Jesus' house of celebration. For Chavara the room of the religious was the bride chamber of Christ (*Letters*, VII,2). It is a tiny heaven (*Letters*, VI,4). In John *menein* (abide) expresses the permanency of relationship between Father and Son, and between Son and Christian, which binds together Father, Son and Christian. This indeed connotes intimacy of union and love between Jesus and his disciples, which is patterned on the Father-Son relationship. Thus St Chavara envisioned religious life in its most sublime and mystical sense.

3.2. The Sitting Ones

It is the disciples and devotees who sit in the presence of the master (*guru*). In 2 Kings 4:38, we have the picture of the disciples of the prophet Elisha sitting at his feet. They fix their eyes on the face of the master and zealously and eagerly try to gather up every precious utterance which comes out of his mouth. When David was promised the grace of everlasting dynasty, he went and sat in the presence of his Master in order to give thanks in the language of heart (2 Sam 7:18-29). He acknowledged that he was a mere insignificant one whom the magnanimous Lord had made great. In Lk 10:39, Mary of Bethany is said to have sat at Jesus' feet listening to what he was saying. This is the real picture of a loving and dedicated *bhakta* in the Indian tradition. She was all eyes and ears in the presence of her Beloved, forgetting her duties of a host. The same evangelist tells the story of a sinful woman who wet Jesus' feet with her tears, wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them (Lk 7:37-38). The parable of Lazarus, the beggar who after his death was blessed to sit at the lap of the Abraham (Lk 16:19-31) is indeed fascinating. Abraham's lap was the symbol of heavenly bliss, celebration and self-realization. The only Begotten Son is depicted as sitting in the bosom of Father (Jn 1:18). St Chavara invites all the members of the religious community to attain this mystical status, in which the whole human person is inebriated by this blissful and celestial experience.

3.3. The Closely-Walking Ones

The inhabitants of the *darsanavîdu* should make their life not only acts of abiding and sitting, but also a continuous walking in the company of Jesus. This points out to their apostolic activities. Even their pastoral, social and educational apostolate should be performed in the company of Christ, in Him, with Him and for Him. Enoch is said to have walked with God; then he was no more; God took him (Gen 5:22, 24). This is what will happen to those who walk with God, making Him as bosom friend, listening to Him, speaking to Him and sharing the intimate secrets of the heart. One's joys and sorrows will become the joys and sorrows of the other. As a result of such an intimate union, the person of Enoch ceased to exist day by day; God made him His own. St Chavara envisages that the members of *darsanavîdu* should make their whole life an unceasing walking with God, so that they could say with Paul, "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20), and acts in me and through me.

3.4. The Conversing Ones

"Meditation means conversing with God; its work is to be in the company of God, sitting together with Him in love and conversing to a bosom friend" - thus has St Chavara defined meditation in his work *Colloquies*. According to him, the life of a religious should become an incessant colloquy with Christ the divine Bridegroom. The blessed father further explains this art: "When the friends sit together they will continue to converse together without stopping till they depart... they will not become silent as if they had no more matter for speaking. When there is love, there will be themes for conversation. No one needs to teach them such a colloquy. Even if the language is unknown, those who have love can understand whatever the other speaks... Even if they remain without uttering a word, they will find satisfaction in sitting nearby the beloved." Chavara and the members of *bes rauma* community practised this mystical art of contemplation. They became spouses/babies, both of whom will speak to the bride groom/mother whatever they think, want and dream. It is indeed the language of love, intimacy and freedom. According to Chavara the cell of a religious is the bridal chamber (*Letters*, VII,2), where one could hear the sweet voice of the loving Bridegroom (*Letters*, VII,7).

4. A Call to Live in the Holy Family

4.1. The Words of Chavara

According to St Chavara, the call of a religious is to live in the Holy Family, the members of which are Jesus, Mary and Joseph. He in his deathbed confessed to the inmates of the monastery at Koonammavu: "I have lived throughout my life in this Holy Trinity (pointing out to the picture of the Holy Family which was set near the bed so as it can be always seen). I am bearing the name Kuriakose of the Holy Family for this memory. My pious parents have made me remember this great family, Jesus, Mary and Joseph, and I am always seeing, remembering and venerating them in my heart, and because of it their blessing always protected me so that I have in the divine grace the courage to say that I have not lost the holy grace, which I had received in baptism."

4.2. A World of Metaphors

A special call of the CMI-CMC religious is to live in the world of metaphors. Chavara identifies the Holy Family with the Blessed Trinity. For him the Holy Family is not *like* the Blessed Trinity; it is not a simile. He does not merely compare them. This is indeed a mystical vision, which God will grant only to His beloved and selected children. Jesus, the Son of God lived in the world of metaphors, as he stated: "I am the bread of life" (Jn 6:35, 51); "I am the light of the world" (Jn 8:12); "I am the sheep gate" (Jn 10:7, 9); "I am the good shepherd" (Jn 10:11, 14); "I am the resurrection and the life" (Jn 11:25); "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6); "I am the real vine" (Jn 15). Chavara seems to have dwelt in the metaphorical world. For example:

- I, the Zacchaeus of Lk 19:1-10 (*Colloquies*)
- I, the prodigal son of Lk 15:11-32 (*Colloquies*)
- The cell is the bridal chamber (*Letters*, VII,2)
- Monastery is the little heaven (*Letters*, VI,4)
- The journey of Calvary is the marriage procession (*Colloquies*)
- The cross of Christ is the bridal chamber (*Colloquies*)
- The chapel is the Mount Sinai (*Colloquies*)
- The chapel is the Mount Zion (*Colloquies*)
- The face of Infant Jesus is lotus itself (*CS*, 3:55)
- The members of the community are twins (*kûdapirappukal*, *Letters*, VI,1 (four times); VI,4 (twice))
- Christians are twins (*Letters*, VI,4)
- The religious sisters are children (*Letters*, VII,2; VII,6; VII,7; VII,11)

Although the first person of the Holy Trinity is theologically called 'Father', Chavara uses the term *appan* to address Jesus. Here we find a special mystical and experiential grace granted to Chavara. He personally experienced in Christ the compassionate and affectionate heart of a *nalla* (good) *appan*, who is ever ready to forget and forgive the sins, infidelities and rebellions of his children. It was this way that the Lord revealed himself to Chavara. It is indeed a spiritual, intimate, personal and mystical knowledge and encounter, which transcend the human logic and the dogmatic and academic thinking of theologians. For Chavara, theology meant the art of articulating the personal experiences of man of flesh and blood.

4.3. The Art of Seeing

In his Last Words, Chavara mentions five acts that he was practising: seeing the Holy Family in his heart, remembering Jesus, Mary and Joseph in his heart, venerating them in his heart, living throughout his life in this Holy Trinity and bearing the name of the Holy Family. It was his pious parents who inculcated the devotion to Jesus, Mary and Joseph, while he was a child: "My devout parents made me remember the great family, Jesus, Mary and Joseph."

4.4. The Art of Remembering

The verb 'remember' is used thrice in Chavara's Last Words. His parents made him *remember* the great family – Jesus, Mary and Joseph; he was bearing the name of Holy Family in order to *remember* the Holy Trinity; he has always *remembered* in his heart this Holy Family. The term 'remember/remembrance' (in Hebrew *zkr*) has great significance in the Bible. It does not simply refer to mere re-calling to mind a past incident; rather it denotes an act of re-experiencing, seeing, hearing, touching, tasting and living an event here and now with the whole intensity. Salvation history is the story of God's act of remembering. Because He *remembered* Noah and the living creatures in the ark (Gen 8:1) He saved them. As the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob Yahweh *remembered* his covenant (Ex 2:24). He liberated Israel out of the slavery of Egypt and made them his people. Every year, the people of the covenant celebrated the Passover Feast as an episode of *remembrance* of the liberation. After instituting the Eucharist as the new covenant Jesus asked his disciples to perform it whenever they assembled together in *memory* (*dukrāna*) of Him. In the Syro-Malabar liturgy, *Qurbana* is called *dukrāna* eight times. It enacts the sacred mysteries of Jesus' passion, death, burial and resurrection.

St Chavara, who imbibed the spirit of the Bible and the liturgy, was a man who lived in the world of *dukrāna*. In his works there frequently occurs the term *ōrma* (remembrance). Under the inspiration of his parents he fostered in his life an incessant *dukrāna* practice of the Holy Family and began to see, remember and venerate Jesus, Mary and Joseph in his heart. The I-II cantos of the work CS tell the story of memories, how God remembered him, how he remembered the Lord, and the command of Jesus to him to remember God, as well as how he remembered Mary, and begged her and Joseph to remember him (see I,31-32; I,37-38; II,59-60; II,181-182; II,244; II,247-248; II,249-250; II,205; II,267; IV,197-200). Also in other places the word *ōrma* is often used: CS III, appendix 39-40; IV,201-202; IV,208-210; VII,344-345. This vertical dimension of *dukrāna* had also a horizontal dimension. The work *Chronicles* may be designated as a compendium of *dukrāna* of humans who, one way or other helped him in constructing the *bes rauma*. Chavara reminds his confreres to *remember* with gratitude the favours done by Archbishop Menesis, the Portuguese kings and the Jesuits who protected the ancestors from falling into Nestorian Schism (*Letters*, VII,4). Also he tells them that it is their duty to *remember* in their prayers Archbishop Bernardine, the missionaries Philipose, Merceline and Leopold with gratitude (*Letters*, VI,4). They have to *remember* before God the Beccaro household (the family of Leopold the missionary) who had generously helped the Congregation (*Letters*, VI,4). Chavara exhorts the members of the monasteries of Vazhakulam, Elthuruth and Ambazhakad to become *ōrmakkār* (those who remember) of their benefactors, Parai Tharakan, Kallukkaran and Ittoop respectively (*Letters*, VI,5).

Chavara, the saintly soul who loved his spiritual daughters like an affectionate father, asked them to receive the Holy Communion and *remember* the love of the Lord (*Letters*, VII,6), and to *remember* how sweet is the voice of their beloved Bridegroom (*Letters*, VII,6). They should not remember with gladness the evil acts of others, but rejoice at the *memory* of the virtues of fellow humans and *remembering* with gladness the virtues and acts of penitence of the saints, offer them to the Lord (*Letters*, VII,3). The sisters have to *remember* how the Almighty God thinks about their affairs and provides everything to them (*Letters*, VII,11).

To conclude, the art of *dukrāna*, which has both vertical and horizontal dimensions is the essential element of religious life. The more one delves into the depths of the world of *dukrāna*, the more

he/she becomes a grateful and praising being in his/her relationship with God and fellow humans.

4.5. The Art of Venerating

St Chavara confessed in his deathbed that he had venerated/honoured the Holy Family throughout his life. He asks the members of his congregation to become children of veneration and honouring (*vaṇakam*). In the Syro-Malabar liturgy, we render praise, honour, thanks and adoration to the Holy Trinity. In the same way, Chavara venerated the Holy Family. Like him, his children also have to become the honouring community of the Holy Family in their thoughts, words and actions. The family consisting of Joseph, Mary and Jesus was a community and communion of veneration. Joseph venerated throughout his life Jesus and Mary, and totally dedicated himself for their welfare. The earthly days of Mary were the time of *vaṇakam*. The Holy Virgin venerated Jesus, glorified the Lord and proclaimed the divine acts of salvation (Lk 1:46-55). One may designate Mary as the venerating temple, the abode of the Word and the holy dwelling of the Blessed Trinity. Jesus rendered praise to his heavenly Father (Lk 10:21), glorified his name (Jn 17:4), and prayed that the name of the heavenly Father be glorified on earth as it is in heaven (Mt 6:9). Thus He became a living temple, in which the people praise God in Spirit and truth (Jn 4:21); His body was transformed into the abode of the Father. According to Chavara, the religious are called to continue the honouring acts of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. They do this by practising veneration of the Holy Family. They have to do it individually and collectively, privately and publically. Such devotion belongs to the heart and soul of their religious call. In Chavara's vision, the religious are called to live as the communion and communication of those who as a community, praise, honour, thank and worship the Holy Family, the sublime paradigm of rendering *iqārā* to the Holy Trinity. In this joyful act, they should find their God-realization (*Iswara sākshatkāra*) and self-realization (*atma sākshatkāra*).

4.6. Bearing the Name

"For this remembrance I am bearing my name Kuriakose of the Holy Family (*thōmmā kanthīsā*)" – thus declared St Chavara. He added the name Holy Family with his own name in order to remember it always. The Malayalam verb *dharikkuka* literally means to put on. We put on clothes, and they become a part of our personality. Paul exhorts us to put on Christ, the new man created to be like God in true

righteousness and holiness (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10). Only when the religious interiorize Christ's ideas and ideals, life vision, thought pattern, speaking style and the spirit of action, they will be persons who put on Christ. The name Jesus (in Hebrew *yahōshuwā*, its short form *yoshuwā*) meant "my Saviour is *Yahweh*". The Son of Man proclaimed this absolute truth by his thoughts, words and deeds. He throughout his life attested that it is the Father who alone grants salvation. Jesus became the paradigm of humans in singing the praises of the Father and blessing, exalting and glorifying Him (Lk 10:21; Jn 17:4). The Son prayed for the sanctification of God's name and taught the disciples to do the same (Mt 6:9). Christ became the temple in which God was worshipped in truth and Spirit (Jn 4:21). He spoke of his body as the Holy Temple (Jn 2:21-22).

Mary and Joseph put on or lived the name of Jesus. Mary called herself the handmaid of the Lord and acclaimed His saving deeds (Lk 1:46-55). She was indeed the temple, the house of the Word and of the Spirit in which acts of honour and worship to the Holy Trinity and to the Son of God were rendered. Joseph named the Virgin's child 'Jesus' in accordance with the instruction of the angel that the child would save the people from their sins (Mt 1:21).

The children of Chavara are called to put on the name of Jesus who is the central figure of the Holy Family. For this they have to appropriate this attitude and aptitude of *yahōshuwā*. The Compassionate God provided Chavara this ineffable grace, so that he could claim that he had lived throughout his life this sublime vocation. Chavara did his best to show the nobility, eminence, sublimity and loftiness – the meaning of the name *Miriam*. Like Joseph, he always brought growth, increase and addition even in the life of enemies.

4.7. A Consecrated Community

At his deathbed, Chavara consecrated his religious community and its members to the Holy Family. The elected Israel was destined to become the holy nation and royal priests (Ex 19:5-6). The Lord wanted them to lead a life of consecrated ones. The new covenant people have received the same call. The religious have to live as the loving, pulsating and moving Tents of the divine presence.

The concept of consecration involved two ideas – separation and service. First of all, one has to be totally and radically cut off from everything non-divine. The consecrated people have, so to say, move as a lamp before God (in the Indian ritual this act is known as *uziyuka* and such worshippers as *uzinjuvekkeppettavar*). In Christian vision, the

concept of non-divine includes whatever is inhuman. In Indian thought, one can call them *nivēdidar* (those who have become *nywediyam* - libation), *arppitar* (the poured-out ones), *thadīyar* (those who belong to Him, His), *thanmayar* (those who are full of Him, those who are conformed to Him), and *niyatar* (those who have the determined, decisive, definite, resolute, steadfast, unwavering, steady, keen and devout attitude and aptitude). These consecrated persons dedicate their lives for others and for God. Service (a better religious term is *sushrūsha*) is the inseparable element of separation. One can say separation is for service. In biblical tradition, the ritual of consecration consisted of anointing.

One becomes a consecrated person only when he/she is fully liberated from himself/herself. One has to be free from the fetters of egoistic beingness and havingness and become a destitute (*agathi*). Chavara calls such persons 'worms', who do not comprehend anything, mere babies who are incapable even to tell the mother that they are hungry (*Letters*, VII,10). Attaining this attitude of the destitute, one clings to the Lord in order to attain a *gathi* (safety and security). In Chavara's terminology, God, the mother will awake the sleeping babies and feed them (*Letters*, VII,10).

The members of the Holy Family serve as the best models of consecrated people. Coming to the world, Jesus proclaimed "Behold I have come to do your will, O God" (Heb 10:5-7) and consecrated himself to the Father. He began his public life by getting anointed by water and Spirit (Jn 1:29-34). In the inaugural speech of the public ministry, Jesus quoted the text of Is 61:1-3 about the Anointed One of the Lord (Lk 4:18-19). The Son of Man consecrated his disciples in the Word, which is truth (Jn 17:17-19). He lived the life of true *agathi*, and clung for everything to the Father. Hence, he could thus assert: "All I have is yours, and all you have is mine; and I have been glorified in them (Jn 17:10). He became a *nivēditan*, *arppitan*, *tadīyan*, *tanmayan* and *niyatan*. Before the Passion, He renewed his consecration to the Father: "For their sake I sanctify myself so that they also may be sanctified in truth" (Jn 17:19). And finally, on the cross, he was anointed in blood.

Mary offered herself completely to Jesus led a life of consecration. The Mother enjoyed the bliss (*nirvriti*) beholding the face of Jesus and hearing his voice. Her *fiat* ("Here I am, the handmaid of the Lord; may it be to me as you have said" Lk 1:38) was the articulation of the fact that she was nothing and she had nothing. The *Magnificat* (Lk 1:46-55) may be called the hymn of the consecrated ones.

Joseph, the protector of both Jesus and Mary was a paradigm of the consecrated persons. He spent his whole life for their welfare; he incessantly kept them in his mind, spoke for their sake, laboured for them, and suffered for their sake. His cherished yearning was to look at Jesus. To make Jesus joyful, nourish him, protect him and defend him. Joseph committed himself for these things. No words uttered by Joseph are recorded in the Gospels. In the presence of the Son of God he remained ever silent. That is why he is called *mamunīndran* (The Great Silent One). This *nivāditan*, *arpitan*, *tadiyan*, *tanmayan* and *niyatan* could hear the sound of the divine silence, which enabled him to dedicate himself for the service of Jesus and Mary.

Chavara consecrated himself for Jesus, Mary and Joseph. He lived the meaning of the name *yahōshuwā* (*Yahweh* is the saviour). God bestowed on him the blessing of keeping untarnished the grace granted to him in baptism (his Last Words). Still he called himself a great sinner and shed bitter tears of compunction. Always he confessed his unworthiness. "How could I claim the credit for what God had done through me? How did I come here? Who called me from my house? How did I get the grace of ordination to the priesthood? How could I join in the monastery? How did I get the Religious Congregation? Who designated me as the prior? How did I come here? Am I worthy of these graces? No, not at all. Yes, the divine will will be done, and it will be accomplished" (*Colloquies* p.13). He had a single desire throughout his life, to look at the most beautiful lotus-face of Jesus in loving solitude (CS: III:55-56). In *Canto V:157-158* he sings: "I yearn to gaze at you, and crave to hear your voice; but alas O Lord, my eyes are not worthy to contemplate your figure". Chavara has given verbal articulation to the Song of the Consecrated Person:

You are my Father, you my treasure
 You my blessing, without you what good have I?
 You are my love, my fortune
 How could I live without you?
 You are my breath, you my food and drink
 Ah, where would I get solace unless in you?

(CS, II:142-146)

Chavara dedicated himself to Jesus by chanting the following prayer: "My beloved God ... I offer you whatever I do and suffer this day and my whole lifetime, as attestation of my love for you. I offer myself to you together with the good deeds of Jesus Christ, of the Virgin Mary and of St Joseph. I offer you today and forever my thoughts, words,

actions, my predilections and all things, for your glory" (*Colloquies*, p. 68).

Chavara, who consecrated himself to Jesus, dedicated his life for the sanctification of others. All of his apostolate in the spiritual, pastoral, liturgical, ecclesial, educational, social and cultural field was meant for it. For this reason, during the Roccas Schism, he volunteered to embrace martyrdom.

Chavara, who consecrated himself to Mother Mary, thus sings her praises:

You are the Mother of Carmel, the most significant factor,
My chaste Mother, I got the status of your slave,
As I think of it today, how fortunate am I!
How unworthy and base am I! (CS, VII:173-176)

This devout Son offered himself to the Lady of Carmel:

Unto you this body and soul of mine
I offer, I entrust to you alone. (CS, IV:211-212)

Chavara took refuge in Mary:

O Virgin, my Mother, my sole hope...

Always I cherish your memory in my heart. (CS, II:245, 248)

Chavara yearned to gaze in love at the Mother who gave birth to the Son of God, who fed the child with celestial devotion, who knelt down before the Infant, who attended to the child's needs. Chavara sought the intercession of Mary for obtaining a happy death. It was he who brought to Kerala the Holy Scapular, devotion to the Immaculate Conception, devotion to the Mother of Dolours, Sodality, Rosary Association and Our Lady's Association for a happy death. The Saintly Father wanted to turn his heart into the blessed lap of Mary so that Jesus could joyfully occupy his seat there.

Chavara consecrated himself to St Joseph and called himself his servant (CS, IV:201-202). He prayed to the foster father of Jesus: "My beloved St Joseph... I prostrate at your holy feet with the hope that you, my father, will grant me the grace to conquer my evil habits and victory over enemies of my soul (*Colloquies*). In his needs he approached St Joseph. When he had no money to pay the daily labourers, he prayed to St Joseph for help. In answer, a man came to him with the money (*Chronicles*, p. 45). When he was disturbed at the thought of death, he turned for strength to St Joseph for comfort.

To conclude, Chavara wanted the members of his religious community to become a communion and communication of those who live a consecrated life.

4.8. A Relying Community

According to Chavara, the religious should be formed as a fellowship of those who entrust themselves to the Holy Family. He began the *Letters*, and *Circulars* in the name of JMJ (Jesus Mary and Joseph). The biblical concept of "relying upon" comprises of the ideas of clinging to and ensuing certainty. To rely fully upon others one has to get rid of the mentality that makes one assume, "I am something, I have something." When the crafty Jacob became crippled, he clung to God for his survival (Gen 32:22-29). The Psalmist who was the model of *agathi* proclaims: "In God, I trust; I will not be afraid. What can humans do to me?" (Ps 56:11). Psalm 91 may be called the song of those who trust in the Lord. Only those who are childlike can cling to God, the Mother and remain calm in the midst of troubles (Ps 131:22). Jesus, the central figure of the Holy Family is the perfect paradigm of relying persons. In Him there was no attitude of duality. Everything was in Him - love, truth, joy, auspiciousness and transparency. Hence, he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and blessed the Father who had hidden the mysteries of heaven from the wise and revealed them to little children, whose proto-type He was (Lk 10:21-24). He proclaimed the children as the greatest in the kingdom of heaven (Mt 18:1-5). The Son of Man who trusted the Father and entrusted everything to Him, enjoyed total confidence (Jn 11:42); He lived in His Father (Jn 6:57; 10:38).

Mary is the perfect human model of trusting and confident persons. To the angel she said: "I am the Lord's handmaid; may it be to me as you have said" (Lk 1:38). Although what was announced to her was beyond human comprehension, she totally committed herself to the Lord. She became blessed, since she has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished (Lk 1:45). The inner soul of her joyful, sorrowful and glorious mysteries was this kind of the clinging to God and the resulting confidence.

Joseph lived a life of total commitment to God. This gave him the grace not to be disturbed and grieved at the vicissitudes of life. Confiding in the words of the angel he received Mary as his wife (Mt 1:18-24). This silent soul remained unperturbed when he could not find a home for Mary at Bethlehem, during the flight to Egypt, and when the boy Jesus could not be found during the return journey to Nazareth. With the attitude of a true *agathi* Joseph clung to God, and because of which he enjoyed serenity and inner peace. The story of

Holy Family is the story of those who entrust themselves into the hands of God and live in security and divine peace.

Chavara, who was fully conscious of his nothingness, clung to the Holy Family for his existence and subsistence. This mentality of a true *agathi* enabled him to do great things in his life. He knew that it was not he, but Christ thought, spoke and worked in him (Gal 2:20). He considered himself the least one (*kurayappettavan*, *Chronicles*, p. 15), the petty one (*alpan*, CS III: appendix 40), imprudent one (*vakathirivillathavan*, *Chronicles*: p. 70), non-illuminated one (*thelivillathavan*, *Colloquies*), incapable one (*praptihinan*, CS II:277), unworthy one (*yogyathayillatavan*, *Chronicles*), good for nothing (*onninum kollathavan*, *Chronicles*), *agathi* (*Chronicles*), fool (*bhoshan*, *Chronicles*, pp. 71-75), great blockhead (*mahamudan*, CS II:350), block head (*mudhan*, CS IX.31), blind one (*andhan*) deaf one (*bhadhiran*), dumb one (*mukan*, *Colloquies*), worm (*krimi*, CS 1:6,17), earth worm (*pushu*, CS), pitiful worm (*kashta pushu*, *Colloquies*) and wretched worm (*akratha puzhu*, *Colloquies*). *Compunction of the Soul* is a poem of Chavara where he acknowledges that he a great sinner and sheds tears of contrition (see for example, CS I:129; II:31-34, 163-164, 349-350, 361-364; III appendix 63-64). Chavara begins his *Colloquies*: "I deem not myself worthy to reach high degrees of prayer and sanctity, as I am a great sinner with an impure heart, and opaque without virtues of purity and modesty. I realize that I am not worthy to receive the spirit of contemplation and attain perfection."

On the one hand, Chavara considered himself as the most depraved of human beings. On the other hand, he did not want to call himself a human being. He downgraded himself to the world of the meanest worms. As Jesus, his Master, Chavara lamented, "I am a worm and not a man" (Ps 22:6). What he claimed to have had was sins. For survival he clung to God. He begged Jesus to look at him with eyes of pity (CS II: 242). The saintly soul dared to address Jesus "as my Father" (*ente appan*), "my noble Father" (*ente manogunamulla appan*), "dear Father" (*priyamulla appan*) and "my graceful Father" (*ente anugrahamulla appan*). When he felt that Jesus was angry, he turned to Mother Mary: "My Lady my Mother, you alone are my hope" (CS VI:206); "my Mother please pray, opening your mouth (CS VI:210); "let me hide myself in your bosom" (CS VI:219-220); "when the Lord turns his glance into cruel sternness, let me hide my timid eyes beneath your throne" (CS VI:222-224).

When Chavara was filled with the sense of his unworthiness he ran to St Joseph (CS IV:201-204). "My kind Father, as I am greatly afraid, I get strength from the thought of you, my Father and mediator"

(*Colloquies*, 35). He found the devotion to St Joseph as the rope to cross over the deep ocean of death (*Letters*, IX,7). Such recourse to the Holy Family gave Chavara security and assurance to undertake great works for the growth of the Church and society. He ventured to construct the Koonammavu Convent when he had with him only 18 rupees. Lack of money was not a problem when he launched the press apostolate, seminary and school. When he had no means to pay the wages to the labourers, he prayed and the Holy Family came to his aid.

Chavara was concerned not only for the people in Kerala. He collected Rs 32,000/- for the expenses of the First Vatican Council. When the Roccas schism threatened the very existence of Kerala Church and out of 155 parishes, 86 had completely and 30 partially followed Roccas, Chavara, entrusting the Church into the hands of the Holy Family, courageously fought against the schism, at the risk of his life. When he was the parish priest of Southern Pallippuram, he ventured to give Holy Communion to a small pox patient, saying, "This is my duty; the Lord will help me." The formators of the candidates to the religious life should follow the example and exhortation of Chavara in order to form religious community with an entrusting and trust.

4.9. A Community Reigned by the Holy Family

Chavara requests his confreres to permit the Holy Family to exercise authority in their hearts. Jesus, Mary and Joseph allowed Yahweh (One who be-comes) to become Yahweh in their hearts. They gave total freedom to God to live, to think, to speak and to act in them. Thus the Lord could guide, direct and rule over the members of the Holy Family. Because of it God could become the overlord, leader, guide and everything in their life.

Jesus gave complete freedom to his Father to rule over Him. He always said Amen to the desires of his Father. Also it was the longing of Jesus to reign in human hearts. For this he thirsts: "If anyone is thirsty, let him/her come to me and drink" (Jn 7:37). He wants to make streams of living water (Holy Spirit) flow from within them, so that, through the Spirit, he wants to live in them, for the purpose of saving them. He cried out from the cross: "I am thirsty" (Jn 19:28). He yearns to continue his hour of glory in humans, by showing them the way of cross, and to pour into their hearts the Holy Spirit. Whatever He said and did in His life time had this single intention. He continues His mission of becoming poor in spirit, beings of mourning, of meekness, of suffering hunger and thirst for righteousness, of mercy, of

unblemished heart, of peace and of suffering persecution of righteousness (Mt 5:3-10). He begs them to lend Him their hands, legs, tongues and hearts. The whole gospel may be called the story of Christ's inner thirst. This gets a vivid articulation in His narration on the last judgement, where He speaks of a time when he had appeared as the hungry, thirsty, naked, homeless, sick and imprisoned person (Mt 25:31-40).

Mary and Joseph allowed God to exercise authority in them. Their entire life can be summarized as a wholehearted *fiat* to God's will. Chavara lived this ideal, and exhorted his confreres to allow the Holy Family to reign in their hearts. He exclaimed with Paul: "It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20). Like the Baptist he allowed Jesus to increase in him, by making himself decrease (Jn 3:30). Chavara made a vow to offer up to God every pulse beat of his veins, every winking of his eyes, every breath of his, each little chirping of birds (*Letters*, VII,3). Those who live up to the ideals of St Chavara are his true children.

5. A Vowed Community

Chavara had his own vision about the religious vows. They help the religious to allow God to live as a becoming being in him/her, and give God complete freedom to exercise His authority over the person. The vows make the religious, members of the Holy Family, consecrated persons to Jesus, Mary and Joseph and transform the religious into abiding ones, sitting ones, walking ones and conversing ones. He calls poverty *agathitham*, celibacy *manavattitham*, and obedience *cholvili*.

5.1. Agatitham

By poverty one embraces the status of the destitute, who has nothing, and who is nothing. God, calling Abraham, asked him to become an *agati*, who had to cling to Him for survival. Jesus, the Son of Abraham lived the concept of *agati* in its total sense. He, being the richest one (2 Cor 8:9), did not stick to the equality with God, but emptied himself and took the form of a servant (Phil 2:6-7). The Son of Man became the greatest *agati*. He had no place to be born. As a child, this Son of Abraham had to flee for life to Egypt. He was condemned to live in the land of the gentiles, without a proper identity or address. During the public ministry Jesus had no place to lay his head (Lk 9:58). The holiest one was crucified as the most cursed sinner, abandoned even by God, which forced Him to cry out "my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mk 15:34). Even then He confessed his trust in the

Lord with the utterance, "Father into your hands I commit my spirit" (Lk 23:46). After the death He descended into Sheol. Then God exalted this *agati* to the highest place, and gave Him the name that is above every name, at the sound of which every knee will bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God, the Father (Phil 2:9-11).

Jesus, the Son of Abraham shows us how to use the blessings, which God bestows upon us. He had no single minute for himself, for rest (Mk 6:31-34). As Jesus proclaimed, He had come not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mt 20:28). During the day, He served of others (Lk 6:38) and returned to the Father as an *agati*, raising His hands towards the Lord (Mt 14:23; Lk 6:12; 9:28), as slaves look to the hand of their master (Ps 123:1-2). Jesus practised what He had told his disciples: "Freely you have received, freely give" (Mt 10:8). Following the example of the Master, the religious, taking the vow of *agatitham*, are called to make others rich.

Mary was given the grace to live as an *agati* on earth, since she was called to become the Mother of the Son of Man, the perfect *agati*. In her, we see the soul of the sublime grace of Immaculate Conception. From the very beginning of the conception, God granted her the grace to be like Him, one who has everything and yet, as the one who has nothing and is nothing, clinging to God every moment for survival. Mary's *Magnificat* (Lk 1:46-55) is indeed the song of the *agati*. She sings: "He has looked with favour on the lowliness of His servant (the old Malayalam term *adiyāti* is a better word, which means one who is positioned beneath the master). The humble virgin always found her life-realization in living 'under' the Lord.

Mary was fully conscious of the truth that without God she was a nobody, an utter destitute. Indeed such awareness is the essence of humility. In such a light the Mother of God lived, moved and had her being (Acts 17:28). At the same time, she became the *epiphany* of the celestial truth that everything of God belongs to her. Thus Mary became the most blessed human being. Her life was an incessant chanting of the mystery that the Almighty has done great things for her (Lk 1:49). The Lord has exalted the lowly handmaid. The compassionate God filled this hungry person with best things. He extended His helping hand to the beloved of the Holy Spirit and made her the symbol of the new Israel.

The invitation to adorn the status of the Mother of God, was in fact a call to become the living mirror of *agatitham*, namely to live the life of a nobody, who has to cling to God for her existence. How could one

believe that a virgin would conceive a child? According to the Jewish Law Mary has to be stoned to death. An ordinary girl under the circumstances would be drowned in deep waters of despair and distress, whereas the handmaid of the Lord clung to God for survival. God miraculously saved her from disgrace. It was not the end of the story of desolation and destitution. Further on, Mary could not provide a home for the Son of God to be born. Simeon uttered a prophecy that the child was destined to cause the falling of many, and to be a sign of contradiction; a sword would pierce her very soul (Lk 2:34-35). This annunciation made her the Mother of Sorrows. Mary had to flee to Egypt to save the life of the Son of God. The life in Egypt, in the land of the worshippers of pagan deities, and among the people who spoke a different language brought mental and spiritual distress to Mary and Joseph. During these days of suffering, she clung to God. The return journey brought misery to the Holy Family. When the boy Jesus was lost for three days, Mary and Joseph spent day and night in search of him, without food and rest.

As Jesus left Mary for public ministry, she had to bear loneliness and isolation. Her heart was broken as the furious people of Nazareth tried to throw Jesus down the cliff (Lk 4:28-29). When Mary intervened at the wedding of Cana for the hosts, the reaction of Jesus ("Woman what concern is that to you and to me?") was apparently harsh, which would have humiliated her. When Jesus became renowned teacher, Mary went to the place where He was proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom and received a seemingly cold welcome (To the crowd who informed that His mother has come, Jesus said: "Who are my mother and my brothers?" He gave the title of Mother to all those who do God's will. Mk 3:31-34). This incident helped Mary to grow deeper into the status of an *agati*.

At the news that Jesus was condemned to death, she felt unbearable anguish. At the insults and torture during His way of the cross, Mary suffered greatly. At the crucifixion on Calvary, the Mother of Sorrows practically died in spirit. Nobody could console her (Lam 1:12, 16). Through all these bitter experiences, God helped Mary to become the living paradigm of *agatitham*. More and more she learned to trust in the Lord and entrust herself into his hands. The Almighty rewarded her most generously and crowned her the queen of heaven and earth.

Joseph embraced a life of an *agati*. He understood that he was practically a nobody in the presence of Jesus and Mary, and he lived, moved and had his being in this attitude. At all the instances of his life, he blindly clung to God. Throughout his life, Joseph remained a silent

being, *māmuni*. God rewarded him by elevating him to the most sublime status of the foster father of God's only Son.

St Chavara imitated the Holy Family whose name he bore. He liked the word *agati* and used it frequently in his writings (e.g., *Colloquies*, pp. 14, 15, 16, 34; CS VII:162). Often he addressed himself in negative terms (see the subtitle 3.8. "A Relying Community"). He called himself the greatest sinner (CS VI:205). In his *Last Testament* he called himself the servant of priests, novices and lay people. Chavara confessed to the sisters that he had no capacity to practise virtues (*Letters*, VII,3). As he was fully convinced of his *agatitham*, he clung to Lord Jesus, Mary, Joseph and St Teresa of Avila to obtain *gathi*. Like a little child, he adamantly pleaded with St Teresa to teach him by reciting in his heart her deep reflections on the art of contemplation (*Colloquies*, p. 15). Chavara practised the demand of Christ: "Ask and it will be given to you" (Mt 7:7). Indeed, he received "a good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over"; it was poured into his lap (Lk 6:38). Chavara knew the ultimate meaning of the vow of *agatitham*. It was a call to be filled with the riches of God. With this sense of security he dared to undertake new ventures, as he had been liberated from the worries like the birds of the air and lilies of the field (Mt 6:25-34).

5.2. *Manavattitham*

Chavara was blessed with the mystical vision inherent in the vow of chastity. The vision is truly biblical. In the Old Testament Yahweh revealed himself as the bridegroom of Israel (Jer 2:2; Ezek 23; Hos 2:14-16). The covenant people were destined to sit in the shadow of her Beloved and to attain life realization (Hos 14:5-7). In the New Testament, Jesus is presented as the divine bridegroom who loves the Church, the new Israel. He gives himself up for her, to make her holy, cleansing her by washing with water through the word, in order to make her radiant without stain or wrinkle (Eph 5:25-27). Jesus compared the heavenly kingdom to a wedding feast. The text of Rev 19:5-9 describes the nuptial celebration of the Lamb, the bridegroom. By embracing religious life, a person becomes one with the Lord. He/she is called to live in the loving intimacy of the divine bridegroom. Thus the consecrated persons are given the grace to enjoy the pre-taste of the eschatological life.

Mary stands out as the sublime paradigm of *manavattitham*. She became the bride of the Holy Spirit. The Fathers of the Church find a mystical meaning in the wedding at Cana: Jesus was the real

bridegroom, while Mary enjoyed the position of bride. She was always, in the mystical sense, sitting in front of Jesus, walking together with Him, conversing with Him and abiding with Him in love.

In St Joseph the mystical vision of *manavattitham* found its realization. Every soul is called to become the spouse of Christ. The communion with the Mother of God led St Joseph to the sublime milieu of celibacy. He totally consecrated himself to Jesus. Thereby he became a *nivēditan*, *arpitan*, *tadiyan*, *tanmayan* and *niyatan*. The foster father lived in the same world of Jesus, enjoying *sālôkkyam*, and attained *sāyujyam*.

For Chavara, his room was the nuptial chamber (*Letters*, VII,2). He abided in love with Jesus, sat always in the divine presence and conversed with Him always. This made him an illumined person (*buddha*). Chavara frequently uses the term *thelivu*, which has a celestial sense. God is the one who enjoys *thelivu* always. His face is ever beaming with exultation and delight. By the intimate communication with the Son of God, Mary and Joseph became the children of *thelivu*.

Chavara thus wrote to sisters, his spiritual daughters: "How sweet is the voice of your loving Bridegroom! He is watching to find out whether you have any other love. He is constantly taking care to meet your needs (*Letters*, VII,7). Here he was giving articulation to his own loving relationship with Christ. During meditation, he shed loving tears. He exhorts the sisters to meditate deeply on the love of Jesus for them and after receiving Holy Communion remember his love (*Letters*, VII,6), to strive hard to attain high degree of union with God, of which St Teresa of Avila describes in her work *Interior Castle*.

Chavara holds that all the Carmelites, both men and women, should develop the reading habit.

When they find joy in reading spiritual books, they will naturally cherish solitude. When a soul embraces solitude, Jesus Christ will come to converse with it in solitude and begin communing with it. At first one may not understand well His language and words. Then He will lead his bride to the wine-cellar and pour out some wine for her – a little at first. As she enjoys the wine, she could slowly understand the language of the Bridegroom. When He sees it He will speak more and more distinctly and show her the magnitude of His love. Then the bride will love more, and the Bridegroom will rejoice over it, and adorn her with ornaments. Thus commences the divine union. Henceforth there will be nothing to fear. 1. Reading, 2. Solitude, 3. Meditative prayer

(prostration) (*namaskāram*), 4. Contemplation. For us it is enough to attain up to this fourth degree of prayer. Our Mother Teresa attained the seventh stage. Some of her sisters reached up to the fifth and the sixth. We must reach at least the fourth. (*Letters*, VII,8). Chavara was speaking from his personal experience of prayer. For him "the religious state is the one in which a person ascends the stages of virtue and becomes united with Jesus, the Lord" (*Letters*, VII,10). He marvels at the state of life: "How sublime and praiseworthy is the religious state, which you have embraced!" (*Letters*, VII,2). They enjoy both material and spiritual comforts (*Letters*, VII/2). Since the heavenly Bridegroom cares for them, there is no need for worry in their life. The mystical vision of *manavattitham* is part of the works of Chavara. According to him, the journey to Calvary is the solemn procession to the marriage pavilion (CS VII:70-105; *Colloquies*, pp. 22-23). The Bridegroom was yearning for that event throughout his life (CS VII:13-34). The religious profession is the means to accompany the divine Spouse to the wedding festival. On Calvary, a religious is invited to enter the bridal chamber, which is the cross. There one can spend time in loving conversation with the Bridegroom.

5.3. *Cholvili*

St Chavara prefers to entitle the vow of obedience *cholvili*, which has profound biblical meaning. *Cholvili* literally means calling one by name. Christ the good shepherd calls us, his sheep (Jn 10:3) by name. The religious have to be all ears for the voice of the Lord, immediately recognize Him, promptly say 'amen' and follow Him. They should not give ear to any other voice (Jn 10:5). This is the essence of the vow of obedience.

Abraham is the OT paradigm of *cholvili*. His life can be summarized as saying 'amen' or "here I am" (in Hebrew *hinnēni*) to God's calling him by name (Gen 12:4; 13:18; 15:2-21; 17:1-27; 21:33; 22:1-19). Jesus, his Son lived this call in its perfect sense. God, the Father was always calling him by name, and the Son responded each time by saying *hinnēni*. He began His earthly life by proclaiming, "Here I am, I have come to do your will" (Heb 10:7-9).

The meaning of the term Word is voice. The Son of God is the voice of the Father. Hence, He claimed: "My food was to do the will of Him who sent me and do finish His work" (Jn 4:34). When the hour to drink the bitter chalice came, He could say: "Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say, 'Father, save me from this hour?' No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!" (Jn 12:27-

28). At Gethsemane Jesus was deeply distressed: "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death... Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will but what you will" (Mk 14:33-36). Luke depicts the scene more poignantly: "And being in anguish, He prayed more earnestly, and His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground" (Lk 22:44). When the Son of God felt that even His Father had forsaken Him, He turned to the Father crying out in a loud voice: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mk 15:34). According to Lk 23:46, Jesus died uttering the words: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." The Son of Man came to the world, lived, moved and died as the living and loving *hinnēni* of *cholvili*.

Mary was the best human model for *cholvili*. When she was addressed by name by the envoy of God (Lk 1:28, 30), she heard in the message the very voice of the heavenly Father and responded: "I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be to me (*fiat*) as you have said" (Lk 1:38). In the life of Mary, we see the continuation of the act of *fiat*. She stands firm in her trust in the Lord in the face of all the challenging circumstances that we saw above. On all such occasions, Mary continued to utter *hinnēni* to the divine *cholvili*.

Joseph stands out as the ideal biblical person of the divine *cholvili*. He practised *cholvili* in all the vicissitudes and challenges of life. As he was very much distressed in finding Mary with child, the angel of the Lord called him by name and instructed him to undertake the role of the foster father of the Son of God. Promptly he obeyed it (Mt 1:20-21, 24-25). Joseph said 'amen' to the divine command to flee to Egypt (Mt 2:13-15). As he was slowly accommodating himself there, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and commanded him to return to the land of Israel. Without uttering a word of protest Joseph went to the land of Israel (Mt 2:19-21). Once more, he heard the divine instruction, and accordingly went and lived in Nazareth (Mt 2:22-23). As the boy Jesus disappeared during the return journey from Jerusalem, the dismayed Joseph searched for Him three days, uttering repeatedly in his heart *hinnēni*.

Chavara excelled himself in practising *cholvili*. He felt the voice of the divine Bridegroom sweet (*Letters*, VII,7). He held that the total negation self-will and the practice of blind and deaf *cholvili* is the single mark of a religious (*Letters*, VI,4). In his letter to the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of Faith, he called himself "your most humble and loyal son" (*Letters*, II,5). Again, he wrote to Bishop Ludovic: "I now wait for your gracious command." Chavara

addressed himself in the letters to the Ecclesiastical authorities: "I, the one prepared for the service of *cholvili*" (*Letters*, III,1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9). Here he looked at *cholvili* as a holy service. Some of the words of his letter to the Procurator General of the Order of the Discalced Carmelites of Rome are worth citing: "We promise to obey with love all the commands which you give us" (*Letter*, IV,2). Obedience has to be given in love.

The contemporaries attest to Chavara's love for the Church and his obedience to the Church authorities. According to Fr Louis Manjummel, he loved the Church as his Mother and looked at the Church as the earthly paradise given to us; he tried his best to engrave this conviction in the members of the congregation. Leopold Missionary wrote in this regard: "His works during his life time attest to his foremost and earnest desire to conduct the rituals of the Holy Church in a proper and dignified way..., motivated by *cholvili* towards the Bishops and for benefit of the souls, he never refrained from exertions and troubles for the uplift of the Church... All were convinced of his special virtues of humility, modesty, charity and the total obedience and *cholvili* towards the Bishops." In a letter Archbishop Bernardine wrote to Rome on 8 June 1861, he calls Chavara "a priest ... a true Christian who maintains close relationship to the Catholic Church and to the Holy See."

During the Roccas schism he appealed to Pope Pius IX: "Holy Father, we, in all humility, with tear-filled eyes entreat Your Holiness to let us know whom we should obey... kneeling before your august throne and kissing your sacred feet, we pray, bestow on us your paternal blessing in abundance, so that we can obey you and conduct ourselves as faithful sons." (*Letters*, I,1). In *Letters*, V,16 Chavara wrote: "I am at present in Koonammavu under the order of our Archbishop, and in obedience to his wish I reside here now." In the same letter he asserted that "the religious have the obligation and necessity to obey the will of the superiors." These words stress three aspects: a religious is obliged to obey; he should make it his need; one has to practise obedience without making any excuse. As the stay at Koonammavu was negatively affecting his health, when his confreres compelled him to come to Mannanam, Chavara replied: "My conscience does not allow me to come to Mannanam, since the Archbishop and the Fr Leopold had asked me to stay here." When he became very tired and was exhausted because of sickness, he walked with great difficulty to the room of Fr Leopold and asked for his permission to go to bed!

Chavara never ceased reminding both men and women religious to strive hard to practise *cholvili*, humility and charity (*Letters*, VII,5). "One has to consider the superior as Jesus Christ and accept his voice as the holy word of Jesus Christ" (*Letters*, VI,1) because the "one who practises *cholvili*, will certainly enjoy the peace of heaven in the monastery, which is the little heaven." (*Letters*, VI,4).

The special charism of the religious community of Mannanam was their love for the Church. When Msgr Stabilini requested the Malpans Palackal and Porukkara to found a monastery, they promptly subscribed to that suggestion, as they were convinced of the need of the Church in Kerala. All the pastoral, liturgical, educational, social and press apostolate were undertaken by the religious community for the uplift of the people of Kerala. It was the love for the Church that prompted Chavara to approach the Pope at a time when the Rocco Schism rocked the Church (*Letters*, I,1, 2; II,1, 3). His motto was: "Be in the sanctuary of the Church of Rome; that is our blessed and beloved mother" (*Chronicles*, pp. 183-184). He wrote to Fr Kuriakose Eliseus, Vicar of the Monastery at Mannanam: "pray for the Holy Church." (*Letters*, V,8). In the Circular to the members of the Congregation Chavara asked them to pray fervently in a special way so that the persecution of the Catholic Church may cease, and joy and peace may prevail all over the world. He asked them to recite the following prayer: "Eternal Father, in reparation for my sins and through the merits of the holy Catholic Church, I offer up to you the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ" (*Letters*, VI,3). His contemporaries attest that Chavara rejoiced greatly at the success of the Church and wept at her difficulties and persecutions. It is the ecclesial vision of Chavara that prompted him to find refuge in the *tapasbhavanam* and *darsanavîdu* and subsequently, hundreds found refuge there and served the Mother Church.