

CMI LEGACY OF CONTEXTUAL PRIESTLY FORMATION

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Abstract: Louis Malieckal CMI looks at the legacy of contextual priestly formation in the light of the vision of St Chavara. He compares the vision of Vatican II on priestly formation with that of St Chavara, with the help of the Pre-Vatican form of formation on the one hand, and that prevailed before the time of the saint in Kerala on the other. The pre-Vatican II style of training and education of priests was divided into two types – the *apprenticeship* model and the *bank deposit* model. Priestly training in Kerala before 19th century took place in local centres under priest-teachers, who was given the title Malpan. Many such parish level systems of priestly formation slowly disappeared. Vatican II opting for contextualized theological training, directed local Churches to work out separate programmes of priestly theological education and formation of the students suited to the contexts of their country. More recent official directives on priestly education followed suit and treated priestly formation in the circumstances of the present day. However, going through the religious and priestly education of Chavara, one finds there trends leading towards reform and modernity. This would later, lead to a charism of contextual priestly formation which the community inherited from its founding Fathers including Chavara.

Keywords: Congar, Vatican II, Church, priest, renewal, formation, education, Trent, catechism, theology, malpan, seminary, clergy, Rites, vocations, curriculum, sacrament, educators, professors, doctrine, experience, Eucharist, *magisterium*, directives, priesthood, formative experiments, communion, ministry, inculturation, pluralism, liberation, *malpanates*, Palackal, Syriac, Malayalam, Tamil, Latin, Portuguese, Latin Rite, Chavara, priesthood, Thoppil, Hudra, Mundadan, pastor, reform, modernity, Sanskrit, caste, society, Kerala, Sree Narayana Guru, Pallipuram, Mannanam, printing press, Prelates, customs, traditions, Sankara, Roccas, schism, survey, seminary, Constitutions, animators, Koonammavu, Puthenpally, philosophy, theology, Chethipuzha, Dharmaram, Bangalore.

1. Introduction

Y. Congar, one of the great theologians of the Vatican Council II remarked: "The world will be what the Church is and the Church will be what her priests are."¹ That is why the Decree on Training of Priests (OT) of the Council clearly says that the desired renewal of the whole Church depends on priestly ministry animated by the Spirit of Christ. The Council Fathers, knowing well the Lord's saying, "New wine is poured into fresh wineskins so that both will keep in good condition" (Mt 9:17), took care to revise and update methods of priestly formation to suit the "new wine" of a renewed Church.

As we try to compare the Council's vision of priestly formation with that of St. Chavara, we need to know first, at least in a general manner, the Pre-Vatican form of formation on the one hand, and that before the time of the saint in Kerala on the other.

2. Pre-Vatican II Style of Training and Education of Priests

The period of pre-Vatican II formation can be divided into two types, namely time before the Council of Trent and that between Trent and Vatican II. Type 1 may be suitably called the *apprenticeship* model, to mean that during this time a seminarian would learn what may be called a 'catechism' theology under the sole guidance of the local parish priest in carrying out his priestly duty, understood at that time mostly in terms of cultic performances. In the 13th century, this situation had given rise to the presence of 'ignorant and unformed priests.'² Type 2 may be called *bank deposit* model, in which case theological education would be dumping information and data into the minds of students who have little interest to ponder and assimilate it. Naturally such education would not challenge students nor raise critical questions in them which is necessary to bring about social changes.³ The Thrust of the Council of Trent's Decree on Formation

¹Major Archbishop Antony Padiyara, *Journey in Spirit (Retreat Talk)*, Kochi: Cardinal Publications, 1994, pp. 1-2.

²In 1215, the IV Lateran Council decreed punishments for bishops who ordained such priests. See Tanner N. Ed. *Decree of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. I (Nicaea Lateran V), (Sheed & Ward and Georgetown Uni. Press, 1990), p. 248.

³Paulo Freire distinguishes two types of education - banking type and problem solving type, see Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, New York: Continuum, 2007, pp. 45-50.

was to make sure the availability of a law-abiding and obedient group of clerics to do the bidding of the official Church.⁴

3. Priestly Training in Kerala before 19th Century

As in the case of priestly training in the Church, in Kerala also there was no systematic procedure for it. There were "local centres under priest-teachers, who was given the title Malpan, a Syriac term for a learned man or professor or doctor in theology."⁵ Fr. Bernard CMI lists a number of local seminaries like Kalparamba, Puthotta, Karakkunnam, Pulinkunnu, Mylacombe etc., apart from seven common seminaries that functioned in Kerala from 16th to 19th century.⁶ In these local centres the chief medium of instruction was Malayalam, the local language. But the subjects taught were derived from Latin, Western sources and had only an elementary standard.⁷ In this system, a candidate aspiring for priestly life had to get the *deshakuri* (recommendation of the parish assembly) which had certain responsibilities during the training of the candidate in the seminary, like meeting the expenses of the studies, if necessary.⁸ The newly joined candidate received instruction and spiritual formation from an elderly learned member of the local college of clergy, a malpan in a restricted sense. It can be seen that moulding of the clergy by proper discipline was not maintained perhaps at a standard which is considered very important in our times. Many such parish level systems of priestly formation seem to have slowly disappeared from the 16th century onwards.

4. The Council's Context-Friendly Approach

It is worth considering here the important texts from the documents concerned, accompanied by a running commentary to highlight the question at issue. Taking note of the context of pluralism in the world-

⁴See canon 14 of Trent in Tanner, *Decree of the Ecumenical Councils* vol II, p. 749.

⁵Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2008 p. 15.

⁶Bernard of St. Thomas, CMI, *A Short History of T.O.C.D in Kerala* (Malayalam), Mannanam, 1989, p. 265.

⁷Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, p. 15.

⁸Placid Podipara, *Our Rite* (Malayalam), Mannanam, 1943, p.17, quoted in Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, p. 54. In the case of St. Chavara, this expense was met by Malpan Palackal (see Mundadan *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, p. 54).

vision of the 20th century in general, which was quite different from that of the period between I and II Vatican,⁹ the Council directed local Churches and Rites spread out through different nations to work out separate programmes of priestly theological education and formation suited to their contexts.

4.1. The Council and the Contextualized Theological Training

The following is the instruction of the Council Fathers:

In such a great variety of peoples and regions only general laws can be laid down; so in each nation and rite a special 'programme of priestly formation' is to be initiated and determined by the Episcopal Conferences. The said programme is to be revised at suitable intervals and approved by the Apostolic See; thereby the general rules may be adapted to the special circumstances of time and place; so priestly formation may always match the pastoral needs of those regions in which their ministry is to be exercised. (OT 1).

The Council offers directives and remarks on how to foster priestly vocations, how to make changes in the courses taught in major seminaries, revise the curriculum of ecclesiastical studies, give more care to spiritual formation, and how to pay special care for pastoral training and on-going formation. The document instructs that in major seminaries "training of the students should have as its object to make them true shepherds of souls after the example of Lord Jesus Christ." (OT 4). The document then speaks about the need of training in the threefold ministry of the word, sacrament and shepherding. For this the Council lays stress also on the importance of "competent educators" and "professors" who should be "chosen from the best and should receive a careful preparation in sound doctrine, suitable pastoral experience and special training in spirituality and teaching methods." (OT 5). After emphasizing spiritual and pastoral training, the Council asks that the ecclesiastical studies be revised. However, the Council insists: "Before seminarians commence their specifically ecclesiastical studies, they should already have received that literary

⁹Towards the end of the 19th century, efforts were made to revise Thomism, which was the only accepted category of thinking in the Church. Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Aeterni Patris* (1879) bears witness to this fact. Thomism/Neothomism and its ontology had to deal with a fast-evolving world; its ability to respond adequately to existential questions was limited.

and scientific education which is a prerequisite to higher studies in their country" (OT 13).

Presbyterium Ordinis dwells specifically on the ministry of priests as participation in the bishop's office of service (PO 2), which in *Lumen Gentium* has been set forth as comprising threefold action of preaching the word of God, administering the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and governing or shepherding the people of God, the Church (LG 25-27; PO 4-6). In PO 19, focus is on the need of pastoral experience strengthened by sufficient knowledge of secular affairs in order to be animators and facilitators for the people in their daily problems and difficulties. The following are the relevant portions of the document:

Moreover, if priests are to give adequate answers to the problems discussed by people at the present time, they should be well versed in the statements of the Church's *magisterium*... They should also consult the best approved writers on the science of theology. Secular culture and even sacred science are advancing at an unprecedented rate in our time. Priests are therefore urged to adequate and continuous perfection of their knowledge of things divine and human. In this way they will prepare themselves to enter with greater advantage into dialogue with their contemporaries.

To facilitate study and the more effective learning of methods of evangelization and the apostolate, every attention is to be given to providing priests with suitable helps... In addition, bishops, either individually or in collaboration with others should consider more effective ways of arranging that their priests would be able to attend a course of study at certain times, especially for a few years after ordination... Bishops should also be careful to see that some priests devote themselves to deeper study of the sacred sciences. This will ensure that there will never be any lack of suitable teachers for the education of the clerics. (PO 19).

4.2. More Recent Official Directives on Priestly Education

One of the significant Church documents on seminary training and theological education since the Council, issued in 1992 by Pope John Paul II as his apostolic exhortation was *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (PDV), which treated priestly formation in the circumstances of the present

day.¹⁰ This document takes into account what the Council had said about priesthood and priestly training, about other Church documents dealing with formation as well as the results of formative experiments carried out in certain seminaries and institutes of theological formation. While the document dwells on the different areas of priestly formation – human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral – following the Council, special emphasis is laid on human formation, saying that it is the basis of all priestly formation and adds:

So we see that the human formation of the priest shows its special importance when related to the receivers of the mission; in order that his ministry may be humanly as credible and acceptable as possible, it is important that the priest should mould his human personality in such a way *that he becomes a bridge and not an obstacle for others in their meeting with Jesus Christ the Redeemer of man*” (PDV 43 emphasis added).

Speaking about intellectual formation of the seminarian, special mention is made about his theological education. The document observes that the relationship between *magisterium* and theological education should not be one of conflict, but of cooperation because ultimately both “have the same goal: preserving the People of God in the truth which sets free and thereby making them a light to nations” (PDV 55). Besides, PDV considers the seminary as an educational community, built around people involved in formation, and notes that “the unity of the educators not only helps the educational programme to be put into practice properly, but also and above all, it offers candidates for the priesthood a significant example and a practical introduction to that ecclesial communion, which is a fundamental value of Christian living and pastoral ministry” (PDV 66). These and other criteria of priestly formation set down in PDV were matters of scrutiny by Rome during the apostolic visitation of seminaries in India in 1997-99. The results of this visitation may be found in its report: *General Norms and Recommendations*, which were taken note of by the CBCI in its meeting in Jalandhar in February 2002, and decided to revise the CPFI (1988), incorporating these recommendations. The Revised Charter of Priestly Formation (RCPF) was issued in 2004 by Archbishop Peter Fernando on behalf of the CBCI. It is a comprehensive document, covering all aspects of priestly formation at

¹⁰This exhortation is based on the material in preparation for and in the Synod of Bishops on the theme “The Formation of Priests in Circumstances of the Present Day,” held in 1990.

different stages; its concern for formation in the Indian context is spelt out in practical directives.

The Council's thinking on theological education and the response to it expressed by the National Seminar of 1969 gave momentum to a series of research seminars, think-tanks, ashram-living, experiments in liturgical celebrations, seminary training, inculturation of gospel message and so on. In particular the Indian Theological Association was founded in the year 1976, which ever since has been supporting efforts at creating a contextualized theology for India. Besides, the FABC (Federation of Asian Bishops Conference) having taken shape under the inspiration of Vatican II, supported the emergence of a Theology of Religions in the context of the reality of religious pluralism in Asia, after the visit of Pope Paul VI to India in 1970. Similarly, it also has been supportive of the emerging Theology of Liberation in the particular socio-economic context of Asia.

5. Priestly Formation in Kerala from the Time of St Chavara

The system of local/parish level training of candidates to priesthood continued for a long time as we noticed above, until about 1854, when Bernadine Baccinelli, the Vicar Apostolic suppressed the local/parish level *malpanates* and established four seminaries at Mannanam, Vazhakulam, Pulincunnu and Elthuruth, all attached to monasteries, and later also at Puthenpally.¹¹ At the time when Chavara was being trained for priesthood, the *malpanate* system was much in vogue and Fr Thomas Palackal was his malpan. He began teaching since 1818 at Pallipuram with six students, and young Kuriakose was one among them.

5.1. Fr Thomas Palackal: Malpan, Professor and Preacher

Fr Thomas Palackal was fortunate to study under the famous malpan Abraham Thachil of Kuthiathode, and soon after his ordination in 1807, he was appointed the secretary to the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly from 1808 to 1816 and ever since functioned as the consulter to the Vicars Apostolic. In both these capacities he gained the esteem

¹¹Cf. Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, p. 55. It may be seen that in 1890, the Holy See declared the Puthenpally seminary, as 'Central Apostolic Seminary', an inter-ritual institution of the whole Kerala Church. Since 1931/33 it was shifted to Aluva/Mangalapuzha cf. Mundadan, "CMI Legacy of Theological Education", in Kollamparampil *et al* (ed). *Christian Leadership and Integration*, Bangalore, Dharmaram, 2007, pp. 39-44.

and love of his superiors and associates alike. Later, as malpan of Pallipuram seminary, he commanded the respect and affection as well as admiration of his disciples. St Chavara reports that there in the seminary, not only did Fr Palackal teach the students but lived a community life, living with them, joining them in their spiritual exercises, and sitting with them long hours for study, until very late in the night.¹²

In the seminary, they followed a kind of Dominican way of life, which consisted in the dictum *contemplata praedicare* (to teach and proclaim what is learnt through contemplation), which inspired his seminary formation. With great zest he collected manuscripts and printed books in Syriac and Malayalam and other Indian, especially Tamil and foreign languages. He would read them, pray over them and convey their content to his disciples. Besides, he encouraged Chavara and a few other select students to learn languages like Latin and Portuguese. It was with such thirst for knowledge and with an open universal outlook that he formed the priest candidates, studying under his care. Moreover, as a well-known preacher, he had access to the Latin Rite churches as well.¹³

5.2. St Chavara's Upbringing in the 'School of Palackal'

Very early on, Fr Thomas Palackal, the visionary Malpan invited Kuriakose Chavara to priesthood. At the age of 13, Chavara joined the seminary at Pallipuram in 1818. Fr Palackal recognized the genius in the young boy and provided him with every opportunity for learning and nourishment for body, mind and spirit. The boy on his part, set his mind and heart on gaining knowledge.

At the untimely and sudden demise of the most dear ones of Kuriakose – father, mother and only elder brother – due to a small pox epidemic in the village, he was heartbroken. On hearing this news he was tempted from all sides to return home and take up the family responsibility, because he was the only surviving male member in the family. One of his uncles who did not favour Kuriakose going back to the seminary locked him up in a room. God sent Fr Thoppil, his maternal uncle whom nobody in the family dared to oppose. He claimed on behalf of Kuriakose: "Kuriakose has the prudence to make the right decisions, perhaps even more than we elders. He is not the little boy of eleven years who left for the seminary, but someone older

¹²Cf. Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, pp. 68f.

¹³Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, p. 70.

and wiser now. If he feels that he is called to the service of the Church, it is our duty to give him all support."¹⁴ Kuriakose was back in the seminary.

In the seminary, Fr Palackal asked young Kuriakose to compile the canonical prayers from various Syriac books like Hudra (prayers for all Sundays and movable feast days), Gazza (prayers for all immovable feasts) and Kaskul (prayers for week days), which he did at a pace that astounded the malpan himself. This prayer book compiled by him was being used by all Syrian Catholic priests for decades until its Malayalam version was published in the wake of the Council.¹⁵

5.3. Spirit-Filled Prophetic Character of St Chavara

When we look at the life of the saint closely we find that he was not only blessed with a noble birth and early family upbringing at the hands of ideal Christian parents, but also later with saintly and wise gurus like Malpan Palackal. God was preparing him to become a path-breaker in many areas of the socio-religious life of the Church in Kerala at that time. Z. M. Moozhur, CMI who has written extensively on the saint has indeed given a very significant title to one such important book as *Arupiyude Meloppulla Manushyan* (A Man on whom the Spirit has put his Seal), to mean that whatever plan or project the saint put forward, had on it the approval of the Holy Spirit; they had been undertaken under the inspiration and vision of the Spirit. They were relevant, timely and prophetic for both the Church and the society alike.

Mathias Mundadan, in his illustrious volume on St Chavara, makes the following telling remark: "What Dr Johnson said about Oliver Goldsmith, 'He touched nothing that he did not adorn', may be said about Chavara too."¹⁶ This appreciation can be seen verified in all the major undertakings of the saint. In the following lines, we take a look at some of them closely.

¹⁴Benoy P. Jacob, "Multi-faceted Life of St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara," in John Mannarathara (ed.) *The Life and Legacy of St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, New Delhi, Viva Books Pvt Ltd, 2015, 5-30, p. 8.

¹⁵Jacob, "Multi-faceted Life of St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara," p. 9.

¹⁶Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, pp. 345-346.

5.3.1. Perseverance in Priestly Vocation

St Chavara's vocation was seriously tested after he had received the order of tonsure, when both his parents and his only brother fell victims to the epidemic, leaving behind his sister-in-law and her only daughter. His uncles and relatives advised him to return to the family and look after the family and maintain the lineage unbroken. However, he stood firm in his decision and made arrangements to take care of the orphan family.¹⁷

5.3.2. Diligence in Study and Knowledge-Acquisition

Chavara was fortunate to enter the Malpanate at Pallipuram when Fr Palackal was its Rector. Most probably he entered there in 1818 when he was only 13 years old. Even at this tender age he showed rare level of maturity, which was evident in the event of the untimely death of his dear ones, as we have noted earlier. Fr Palackal quickly discerned the genius and studious nature of young Kuriakose and provided him with every opportunity for learning and becoming an erudite priest. Chavara, being well aware of the importance of the knowledge of sacred sciences for the ministry of a good pastor made good use of the golden opportunity. Fr Leopold writes: "After this [reception of the tonsure], our young cleric understood that priests lacking learning are not only useless for others, but also can be the cause of their eternal death. Therefore from the reception of the tonsure on, he tried to become a minister of God through diligent and intense study."¹⁸

5.3.2. Chavara as Malpan and Rector

Chavara played an important role in the formation of the seminarians as Professor even before the demise of Fr Palackal. Even as a Deacon in the Pallipuram seminary, Chavara had some experience of teaching and managing the seminary, because Fr Palackal (Rector) used to entrust the charge of the seminary in his absence to young Kuriakose, including the task of giving some lessons to his classmates, as attested by Fr Philip Koyipallil.¹⁹ And after the death of Malpan Palackal, Msgr Francis Xavier, Vicar Apostolic of Varapuzha, gave Chavara in 1844 the patent letter constituting him as Malpan, and as Examiner of the

¹⁷Cf. Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, p. 62, referring to *Positio* 57.

¹⁸Leopold Beccaro, *A Short Biography of the Venerable Person who Wrote this Pious Colloquy* (Mal.), Koonammavu, 1871, p. ii.

¹⁹Cf. Philip Koyipallil, *Short Biography of Rev. Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Pulincunnu, 1929, p. 6.

priests of the Syrian rite of the Vicariate to give them approval for hearing confession and for preaching in the churches.²⁰

5.3.2. Towards Reform and Modernity

As Chavara was on the van guard of forward-looking movements of the 19th century Kerala,²¹ he played a role similar to that of Herman Gundert through his contributions to the advent of modernity in Kerala. Chavara started popularizing Sanskrit education in 1846, at a time when even people who had learned the Vedas and the Upanishads in Sanskrit had forsaken the language, perhaps under the false propaganda of the British Raj that Sanskrit was a dead language.²² By doing so the saint on the one hand took the first step towards Indianizing the Christian community, bringing it to the mainstream of India, and at the same time opened the door for upward social mobility of the low caste people, who had hardly any access to the portals of education in the caste-ridden society of Kerala. Chavara's plan of indigenizing Christianity included adoption of several practices in vogue among the Hindu brethren, like chanting twilight prayers (*sandhya namam*), use of rosary (*japamala*), lighting oil lamp at dusk (*nilavilakku*), encouraging learning of performing arts like *Bharatanatyam* or *Kathakali*, house-construction in the *nalukettu*-model, all of which in popular belief were restricted only to a particular community.²³

Chavara's unique initiative to bring about the uplift of the poorest and the lowliest was set in motion much earlier than similar endeavours by Gandhiji and Ambedkar. He also established orphanages, rescue homes and destitute homes. While women's

²⁰Cf. *Collected Works of Chavara* (CWC), Vol. I, p. 46.

²¹19th century in the history of India ushered in many progressive movements: The liberation struggle in India took some concrete shape for the first time in the middle of the 19th century. This period also witnessed the emergence of religious reformation movements, such as Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj, which were primarily aimed at bringing about changes in the orthodox Hindu society of North India in states like Bengal, Rajasthan and Punjab. Later in Kerala emerged Sree Narayana Guru with his social mission that was backed by Chattampi Swamikal, Ayyankali, Sahodaran Ayyappan and others.

²²Cf. M. G. S. Narayan, "Precursor of Reformist Movements," in John Mannarathara (ed.) *The Life and Legacy of St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, New Delhi: Viva Books Pvt Ltd, 2015, 37-41.

²³Narayan, *Precursor of Reformist Movements*, p. 40.

empowerment continues to be elusive even today, he established the Carmelite convent, with training schemes in handicrafts and rosary making, which were meant to create in them a sense of self-reliance. Besides, his unique practice of diary-keeping known as *Nalagamangal* proved to be highly useful for the future guidance of institutions.

Such novel yet revolutionary measures introduced by Chavara for the progress of the Christian community and people of Kerala make him a person who walked ahead of his time. When he began such reform measures, Sree Narayana Guru was only a boy of 9 or 10 years (1855-1928). Therefore it may be argued that Chavara's reform measures at least indirectly played a role in showing the path and doing the ground work for the social reforms of Sree Narayana Guru.²⁴

6. CMI Charism of Contextual Priestly Formation

When the almost 200 year-long²⁵ history of priestly formation in the CMI congregation is carefully considered, it can be seen that at all stages of its onward movement, it has always been context-friendly and culture-imbibing. The malpanate style of training the candidates under the well-known Malpan Fr Palackal at Pallipuram (1818) was according to the general *gurukula* pattern of training the seekers (*sadhakas*) in the whole gamut of Vedic Hindu tradition. The first Syro-Malabar common seminary established in 1833 at the monastery at Mannanam inherited this style of formation and carried it forward through Frs Porukara and Chavara. Both of them were raised to the honour of Malpan and Examiners, after the death of Malpan Palackal by Francis Xavier Pescetto, the Vicar Apostolic in the year 1844.²⁶ But soon followed the sad event of the death of Malpan Porukara in 1846, and then Chavara was left alone to bear the huge responsibility of carrying forward several unfinished dream-projects and programmes.

The tradition established at Pallipuram by Fr Palackal, the great Malpan, which was continued at Mannanam and other seminaries attached to the monasteries by his colleagues and trusted disciples like Chavara, marked a new paradigm-shift in the theological education among the St Thomas Christians. These centres of sacred learning

²⁴Narayan, *Precursor of Reformist Movements*, pp. 40-41.

²⁵The time-span is calculated from the foundation of Pallipuram seminary (1818) by Malpan Fr. Palackal to the present day (2016).

²⁶CWC (Malayalam Vol. I, p. 44)

were accepted by the authorities as competent to produce excellent results, replacing the many local seminaries.²⁷

An indigenous printing press, an indigenous monastery (religious community life) and an indigenous Church were three parts of the holistic learning/training process that Chavara was aiming at. The first one he got established; the second one he tried in his repeated attempts (though not fully successful during his time) to revise and contextualize the Carmelite rule of life imposed on the young religious community, including the title T.O.C.D instead of the name "Servants of Mary Immaculate", proposed by the community; and the third can be seen in his efforts to apprise Rome of the condition of the Church in Kerala, in the wake of the Roccas schism, and intimating to the authorities the genuine need of the Kerala Church to have its own Prelates who could guide her in the local language, customs and traditions.

Chavara saw that, in order to deeply influence and win the respect of the people, the priests must have good knowledge and spiritual insight. Only then would they be able to integrate Christian theology into the Indian context. He must have been aware that in Kerala, the proud inheritor of Adi Sankara's footprints, timid preaching by untrained priests would not create a social, cultural and spiritual synergy. Rather, he thought of a set of trained scholarly priests, who were competent in blending Christian theology with the traditional Indian spiritual outlook. Hence, the priests who were trained in the Mannanam seminary were Chavara's trusted lieutenants in fighting against the Roccas schism which almost eclipsed the Church in 1861.²⁸

7. Contextual Priestly Formation: Stages of Its Evolution

An honest survey of historical facts would show how the community inherited from its founding Fathers the charism of seminary training and how it was engaged from its very early beginnings in the

²⁷Many of the future prelates and prominent priests had at least their early training in these CMI seminaries. For example, Mar Aloysius Pazheparampil, Mar Augustine Kandathil, Servant of God Joseph Vithayathil and so on. See Mundadan, "The CMI Legacy of Theological Education," in Thomas Kollamparampil *et al* Eds. *Christian Leadership and Integration* (Festschrift in Honour of Prof. Dr. Thomas Aykara CMI), Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2007, 31-51.

²⁸Cf. M. Gopinath, "The Saintly Entrepreneur," in John Mannarathara (ed.) *The Life and Legacy of St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, New Delhi: Viva Books, 2015, 198-208.

apostolate of theological education of both religious and diocesan clergy. Hence, the CMI Constitutions could rightly claim: "The theological training and formation of candidates to priesthood was an important field of our apostolate from the beginning of the Congregation. We shall preserve this heritage by making use of every opportunity for the ministry of forming spiritual animators of the people of God."²⁹

In the course of time and probably when CMI formation centre was shifted from Mannanam to Koonammavu in 1857, there took place a separation between the diocesan and religious students. Further, when in 1886 the seminary of Puthenpally became the central institute for the training of the diocesan clergy, CMIs needed only to take care of their own religious candidates. Besides, the inter-ritual focus in training also came to an end when the separation of the community into Oriental and Latin Rites congregations after 1887.³⁰

For some time after 1887, the CMIs made use of one or another monastery to cater to the educational requirements of its candidates,³¹ but finally both philosophy and theology courses were given at Chethipuzha until in 1957, the scholasticate was transplanted to Dharmaram Bangalore.

²⁹*CMI Constitutions & Directory* 2014, no. 74.

³⁰Cf. Mundadan, *The CMI Legacy of Theological Education*, pp. 46f.

³¹Philosophy was taught at Mutholi, theology was taught at Chethipuzha, and the pre-philosophical studies were done at Koonammavu.