

SAINT KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHĀVARA AN EXEMPLARY LITURGICAL CATECHIST

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Abstract: As one of the primary tasks of the Church, catechesis has in its heart the paschal mystery. Catechizing is to lead a person to go deep into this mystery with knowledge about its different dimensions. Liturgical catechesis is mystagogy in its strict sense. This study unfolds Chāvara's efforts to make the faithful involve in the living mystery of Christ. Liturgical catechesis strives to lead communities and individuals of the Church to maturity of faith through full and active participation in the liturgy. Catechists not only teach but also share their faith and guide their students to learn how to apply and live their faith. In that logic, Kuriakose Elias Chāvara was a great catechist who taught the Kerala Church about the essence of faith i.e., the paschal mystery of Christ through his activities as well as through his life example. Chāvara's life in the paschal rhythm of dying and rising, the way he spread the divine wisdom he gained through his involvement in the mystery of Christ, how he prepared the faithful of Kerala Church for mystagogical catechesis and how he became an exemplary catechist for the Church of all times are discussed in this paper.

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Introduction

Pope John Paul II indubitably teaches that catechesis is one of the primary tasks of the Church. In his apostolic exhortation, he says that “at the heart of catechesis we find, in *essence*, a Person, the Person of Jesus of Nazareth.”¹ In addition, Pope declares that “the primary and *essential* object of catechesis is ‘the mystery of Christ.’” Catechizing is a way to lead a person to go deep into this mystery with knowledge about its different dimensions: “to make all people see what is the plan of the mystery....” The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but also in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ. In catechesis, Christ, the Incarnate Word and Son of God, is taught as *a communication of the living mystery of God*. The paschal mystery is the heart of all catechesis, the cornerstone of the Christian faith, and the paradigm of the Christian life. Liturgical catechesis is mystagogy in its strict sense. It should help the disciples of Christ to follow him faithfully, imitating him to grow into his likeness. This study unfolds Chāvāra’s efforts to make the faithful involved in the living mystery of Christ.

1. Chāvāra: Liturgical Catechist?

The role of a Catholic catechist is to catechize the faith of the Catholic Church, both by word and example. A catechist is someone who lets the word of God echo through their life. Catechists not only teach but also share their faith and guide their students to learn how to apply and live their faith. In that logic, Kuriakose Elias Chāvāra was a great catechist who taught the Kerala Church about the essence of faith which is the paschal mystery of Christ through his activities as well as through his life example. Thus, he could be rightly called a liturgical catechist. He made concrete efforts for the full, active, and conscious participation of the people of Kerala in the mystery that is celebrated in the liturgy and lived in reality. Orthopraxis cannot be separated from orthodoxy in Christianity. So the life and personality of Chāvāra became a medium to reveal the mystery of Christ. In his life he could undertake an endeavour

¹ *Catechesi Tradendae* (CT) §5. *Catechesi tradendae* (Catechesis in Our Time) is a post-synodal apostolic exhortation of Pope John Paul II, published October 16, 1979. Emphasis added.

to educate the faithful to live as disciples of Christ and to facilitate an in-depth discovery of the mystery of Christ in the history of salvation.

Liturgical catechesis strives to lead the communities and individuals of the Church to maturity of faith through full and active participation in the liturgy. When I call Chāvāra a liturgical catechist, it seems to be necessary to make clear the meaning of the word liturgy. The word 'liturgy,' originated from a word having very similar meaning as a public ministry for the good of society. One may understand the word 'liturgy' in such a way that it includes all those ministries of the chosen ones for the benefit of the folk under their care. It denotes Jesus' ministry and participation in it by living in union with the mystery of Christ. Subsequently, every priestly function, charitable service to the needy, exemplary service to the community, life of sacrifice, missionary endeavours, pastoral care, guidance, and protection as well as works of justice comes under the umbrella of *leitourgia* or the ministry of the mystery. Therefore, I use this broad meaning of the word 'liturgy' to call St. Chāvāra a 'liturgical catechist'. Chāvāra recognised that liturgy is powerful enough to transform both the worshipping community and the culture and society in which one lives.

If liturgy is the celebration of the paschal mystery in a common understanding, Chāvāra celebrated the mystery not only on the altar but throughout his life. Consequently, his entire life became liturgical in the broadest sense of the word. We have heard about the axiom *lex orandi, lex credendi*.² But this will be complete only by adding *lex vivendi*.³ The law of prayer is the law of belief. However, the law of one's belief is

² This prominent formula appears to have originated with Prosper of Aquitaine (d. after 455), a fifth-century Church father who engaged in a controversy on grace in a treatise formerly attributed to Pope Celestine I, *the Capitula or Praeteritorum Sedis Apostolicae episcoporum auctoritates, de gratia Dei et libero voluntatis arbitrio*: Let the rule of prayer lay down the rule of faith, *lex supplicandi statuat legem credendi*. Paul De Clerck, "'Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi': The Original Sense and Historical Avatars of an Equivocal Adage," *Studia Liturgica* 24, no. 2 (1994), 181.

³ The third term *lex vivendi* was added to this relationship by Kevin Irwin in his book *Models of the Eucharist*. Kevin W. Irwin, *Models of the Eucharist* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 29-30, 294. This term points to the connection between the practices of prayer, belief, and the ethical actions of a person. This means that Christian liturgical practice is not only oriented toward Christian belief but also toward the lives of Christian persons and communities in and with the world. See also E. Byron Anderson and Bruce T. Morrill, eds., *Liturgy and the Moral Self: Humanity at Full Stretch before God: Essays in Honor of Don E. Saliers* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998), 4-5.

reflected in one's law of living or ethical life. The law of living includes both the law of being and the law of doing (*lex entis et lex agendi*) for a person. Let us examine how Chāvāra could live out the tension and rhythm inherent in the paschal mystery.

2. A Man of Pascha – Dying and Rising

Chāvāra's encounter with the saving mystery in meditation led him to intense involvement in the mystery. To be a Christian implies that one participates in the death of Christ to rise with Him into eternal life.⁴ Personal and internal death is necessary to live the paschal mystery. Chāvāra meditated on the divine mystery and lived the gospel values in the paschal rhythm of dying and rising. He could accomplish the paschal mystery in his life by practising the heroic virtues in an exemplary way.

The Church unremittently invites its members to live this mystery in their earthly lives by following the example of the saints. Chāvāra grew in divine wisdom through his contemplation of this mystery and acquired experiential wisdom of the same mystery by delving into the passion of Christ and carrying the cross with him for the Church. The contemplative and pastoral involvement of Chāvāra in the paschal mystery may be seen as two dimensions of the catechesis of the mystery. The divine wisdom attained by Chāvāra through his meditative life educates the Church. At the same time, the participatory wisdom displayed in his active life and services edifies the Church. Let us briefly examine the nature of that wisdom.

2.1. Living in Peace and Unity with Humility

To live in peace and harmony with one's fellow beings demands occasions of dying to self through forgiving and forgetting other's faults. This is the genuine participation in the paschal mystery. Forgiving Chāvāra is found in the case of Kudackachira Antony, bishop Roccas, and Mattan Manjooran.⁵ Chāvāra instructed all to forgive each other,

⁴ Alexander Schmemmann, "The Mystery of Easter" *St. Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly* 2/ 3 (1954), 17.

⁵ On several occasions, Kudackachira had created troubles for Chāvāra. Still, Chāvāra writes very carefully about him in the *Chronicles* so as not to affect his reputation. Kuriakose Elias Chāvāra, *Complete Works of Blessed Chāvāra (CWC)*, Vol. I: *Chronicles*, Trans. P. J. Thomas (Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Blessed Chāvāra, 1990), 154-159. Chāvāra behaved very kindly and politely with Bishop Roccas and negotiated his return to Bagdad from Kochi. Chāvāra, *CWC vol. I: Chronicles*, 91-92. In his testament to his religious community, Chāvāra asked to help Manjoor Kalapurackal Mathan (who filed a fraud case in the court of Alapuzha

reminding them "Otherwise what is the difference between you and the Gentiles".⁶ In his Testament, he says: "Even animals retaliate against those who resent them. The ability to overlook faults in others and to forgive them is possible only for those who are strong, prudent, and honourable."⁷

Chāvara always stood for unity and peace in his life and maintained these virtues in his personal life, by dying to his egotistic inclinations. Also, we know that only a truly humble person can acknowledge the favours they received. Chāvara praises and gives thanks to God and his other benefactors for all the gifts he received throughout his life in his writings.⁸ Chāvara says:

For is it because of my power and skill that I did things whatsoever? How is it that you came hither? Who called me from home? How did I become a priest? How could I join the community and become a member of the congregation? Why should anyone address me as Prior? How did I become so come by the present status? Do you think I deserve any one of these favours? Not at all, to be sure. If so, remember that it is God's will that is being accomplished.⁹

The whole Eucharist is an *anamnesis* of and *Eucharistia* for the salvation mystery. Following the Eucharistic liturgy, Chāvara's thoughts were filled with *anamnesis* and *Eucharistia* in the real meaning of the words. He remembered and rendered gratitude for the endless mercy and providential love of God in each event during his early life. Chāvara

against Chāvara) if he was in financial strain. The Hindu judge, who dismissed the case, was greatly impressed by Chāvara's noble and forgiving personality. Kuriakose Elias Chāvara, *Complete Works of Blessed Chāvara* (CWC), vol. IV: *The Letters*, Trans. Mary Leo, (Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Blessed Chāvara, 1990), 73.

⁶ Chāvara, CWC vol. IV: *The Letters* X/6, 104. Mt 6:14-15; Mt 5:46-47.

⁷ Kuriakose Elias Chāvara, *Chavarul: Testament of a Loving Father*, Trans. Saju Chackalackal. 150th Year Revised and Updated Edition, (Kochi: Chāvara Central Secretariat Chāvara Hills, 2018), 12-13.

⁸ His gratitude for God's gift of human vocation, parents, childhood, family, protection from epidemics, and call to priesthood are seen in the first two parts of the *Ātmānutāpam*. Kuriakose Elias Chāvara, *Complete Works of Blessed Chāvara* (CWC) Vol. II, *Compunction of the Soul, Dirge, Anasthasia's Martyrdom*, Trans. Mary Leo (Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Blessed Chāvara, 1989), 1 and 2, pages 1-16.

⁹ Kuriakose Elias Chāvara, *Complete Works of Blessed Chāvara* (CWC) vol. III: *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 1.

had a gratitude-filled mind and was aware that all that he had belonged to God. Whatever he received from God, he offered to God so that He could use it for the service of others. Thus Chāvāra could live the paschal mystery.

2.2. With Complete Obedience and Humility

Chāvāra surrendered to the will of God without any compromise. In his opinion, “the significant mark of a true religious is a total negation of their self-will and perfect obedience as though he had no eyes or ears of his own.”¹⁰ We see this kind of obedience manifested in his life, even when the Vicar-Apostolic transferred him contrary to his cherished desires.¹¹ Chāvāra could graciously accept adverse situations as paternal corrections. Conforming one’s will to God’s will, as made known through the superiors, was very much part of his consecrated and priestly life.¹²

Chāvāra wrote: “A devotee used to say: ‘In this world, everything happens according to my wish; for, I wish only that which is willed by God.’”¹³ It is not difficult to identify this devotee as Chāvāra, who said when asked about his wish on his sickbed:

Do I have a will of my own? I do not desire either to go and stay there or to stay here. I am ready to do as I am told. I do not wish to do anything according to my own will. I am ready to do only what I am asked to do.¹⁴

He could set a good example to the other religious as he wanted to give up his will completely. This is a perfect example of the mediation of the mystery of Christ, who “humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross” (Phil 2:8). During his illness and when he lost his eyesight, he expressed exemplary patience and perseverance.¹⁵ Chāvāra had the great conviction that everything he has

¹⁰ Chāvāra, CWC vol. IV: *The Letters* (Testaments), 70.

¹¹ Chāvāra, CWC vol. I: *Chronicles*, 24.

¹² In his colloquies with the heavenly Father, Chāvāra says; “remember it is God’s will that is being accomplished” and “O my Lord, from now on, I resolve to die to my own will and submit myself always to your holy will. I seek not to follow anybody’s will except your own.” Chāvāra, CWC vol. III: *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 1 and 7.

¹³ Chāvāra, *Chavarul*, 27.

¹⁴ *Chronicles of Koonammavu Convent*, vol. II, 10.

¹⁵ The sisters wrote: “He suffered all the above mentioned diseases with great patience and resignation for three months. But one thing that surprised people was

is given or a free gift from God and this marks a sure sign of humility. Humbly, he acknowledged that every favour he received in his life was from the infinite mercy of God, who poured gifts on an ungrateful soul.¹⁶

There is a special rhythm to the paschal mystery. It is the rhythm of nature, like the setting and rising of the sun, dying and rising with Jesus Christ. One dies to one's self by forgiving, accepting faults, tolerating humiliation, and surrendering one's plan to God's will. It includes trusting God in each step of one's life, showing faith in the providing God. Like the grain of wheat (Jn 12:24), Chāvāra died to his own will and so could bear much fruit for the Church.

3. Chāvāra Spread the Divine Wisdom through Liturgy

Chāvāra was a man who integrated the paschal mystery into his life, gained deep experiential knowledge of it and became a model for the people of his Church to accomplish this salvation mystery in their own lives. Liturgy could also be seen as the ascending action of the Church with praise and thanks or an answer to the saving action of God, who descended mercifully to her. Liturgy is a meeting between God and humankind, and the meeting point is Christ. Still, it is not a face-to-face meeting with the Father, but a meeting under the veil of signs.¹⁷ The Eucharist is the sacramental re-enactment of Christ's all-sufficient atoning sacrifice. However, its perennial efficacy is independent of the dispositions of the faithful, but its full impact on the persons and its power to transform lives depends on the degree of personal involvement. That necessitates liturgical catechesis.

3.1. Liturgy as the Space for Pedagogy of faith

In Chauvet's words, liturgy is the "symbolic space" par excellence, which fulfils a powerful and indispensable role in developing "a pedagogy of the faith."¹⁸ For lively liturgies, burning faith is necessary.

this. When people lose their eye-sight normally people become irritated and very sorrowful. But this was not seen in our *Priorachan*. He was always pleasant with a smile on his face. Looking at his face, no one would understand that he was suffering much. On the other hand, he looked joyful." *Chronicles of Koonammavu Convent*, vol. II, 11.

¹⁶ Chāvāra, CWC vol. II: *Ātmānutāpam*, II, 60.

¹⁷ Ambrosius Verheul, *Introduction to Liturgy: Towards a Theology of Worship*, (Liturgical Press: Collegeville, 1968), 19.

¹⁸ Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence*, trans. Patrick Madigan and Madeleine Beaumont, (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995), 189.

It is the word of God that makes hearts burn with the love of God. Liturgical catechesis takes place within a celebration of the word.¹⁹ Chāvara longed to bring renewal in the Christian life of the faithful and, soon after his ordination, started to preach homilies during liturgical celebrations.²⁰ Fr. Leopold writes,

The young priest preached sermons in many churches, at a time when preaching was very rare and performed many other pastoral services with great zeal. During his time he preached a retreat in the parish of Pulinkunnu at the request of the parishioners. Those who participated in the retreat were moved by it, and derived great spiritual benefit, as is testified by many who still retain fresh memories about it.²¹

Chāvara's enthusiasm for the salvation of souls is clear in his conducting a retreat at Thekke Angadi, which is the filial church of Pulinkunnu.²² Chāvara also initiated retreat preaching in parishes on an annual basis, which was later followed by the members of his congregation. Chāvara was aware of the power of the living and dynamic word of God which animates and activates the Church as a worshipping community.²³ Preaching the word of God in the liturgy as homilies helped Chāvara to lead the people to the truth of the gospel and it was a pioneering step in the history of the Church of Kerala. Chāvara could proclaim the bible from the pulpit with vigour and guide the Christian life of the faithful. Being a powerful and effective preacher known as the "lion of the pulpit," he could instruct the faithful during liturgical celebrations. Slowly, the Sunday liturgical gatherings became the ideal places for religious and social instruction.

¹⁹ International Commission on English in the Liturgy, *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1988), Nos. 85–89.

²⁰ In the chronicles of Mannanam monastery we see, "In the new chapel, here at Mannanam, Mass had to be said on Sundays, and High Masses with preaching on feast days and this could not be let off." Chāvara, *CWC vol. 1: The Chronicles*, 22.

²¹ Leopold Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chāvara*, Original Malayalam in 1871. Trans. Lucas Vithuvattical, (Mannanam: Saint Joseph's Monastery, 2003), 6.

²² Chāvara, *CWC vol. 1: The Chronicles*, 22.

²³ "Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb 4:12).

St. Chāvara was a visionary who recognized the power of homilies in catechesis and introduced it in the Church of Kerala. CT 48 elucidates that the homily takes up the journey of faith put forward by catechesis, and brings it to its natural fulfilment. Pope John Paul teaches that,

The catechetical teaching finds its source and its fulfilment in the Eucharist, within the whole circle of the liturgical year. Preaching, centred upon the Bible texts, must then in its own way make it possible to familiarize the faithful with the whole of the mysteries of the faith and with the norms of Christian living.²⁴

3.2. Cultivating Holiness

Chāvara participated in the mystery of salvation by dying to himself and to self-will and by glorifying God in his body with holiness. He paved the way for others and prepared them for this participation by setting an example through his life and heroic apostolic works. The Second Vatican Council teaches that the Church is the body of Christ (LG §7).

Liturgy is defined by Pope Pius XII as "whole public worship of the mystical Body of Jesus Christ, Head, and members."²⁵ It is in Christ that the Church offers praise and worship to God. He is the meeting point of God and humanity. It is his incarnated and risen body that mediates temporality and eternity. The body of Christ provides the context for true and real worship. He has united all in his body.²⁶ The most acceptable sacrifice to God is the sacrifice of His only begotten Son, and the whole Church joins in this once and forever sacrifice in each liturgical celebration. Chāvara held this wisdom about the mystery of the Church in his mind, which was later taught explicitly in the constitution of Vatican II.²⁷

St. Paul urges us to offer our bodies as a true living sacrifice, which is pure and pleasing to God (Rom 12:1-2). Elsewhere, the apostle clarifies that human bodies are the temple of God where the Holy Spirit dwells

²⁴ CT §48.

²⁵ Pope Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis Christi* (25 June 1943), § 20.

²⁶ "But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive *together with Christ* – by grace you have been saved – and raised us up *with him* and seated us *with him* in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us *in Christ Jesus*" (Eph 2:4-7) [emphasis added].

²⁷ LG §32 and §7.

(1 Cor 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16). Consequently, we may conclude that holiness in the body and mind of human beings is the most perfect worship presented to God. In this way, Chāvāra offered his own body and life as a fragrant oblation pleasing to God as he testified on his deathbed.²⁸ Chāvāra also taught families to respect our human body, which is the temple of God. He wrote: “Be exceedingly careful to be chaste and modest in all your postures, whether sitting or walking, lying or playing. Immodesty is reprehensible both before God and the world.”²⁹ He was very diligent in keeping and growing in the holiness of mind and body. He worshipped God not only in his body with holiness but also in the community of believers, which is the mystical body of Christ.

3.3. Building up the Church

Liturgical celebration is ecclesial in nature and it is the celebration of relationships: relationship to God and to one another in Christ through the Spirit. The liturgy celebrated by the Church community here on earth is a prophetic sign and image of the heavenly Church. The liturgy constitutes the Church and the Eucharist has a community-forming power.³⁰ It is the word of God that calls all people together and keeps them together in the *ecclesia*. Thus, they grow together in the unity of faith and build up the Church. In the liturgy, the Church realises the fullness of her inner being and becomes intensely conscious of her calling.

Chāvāra wanted to glorify God and build up the Church by cultivating virtuous lives. In order to remind the people of God about holiness and help them to grow in it, Chāvāra dreamt of and later established abodes of holiness for men and women in the form of religious orders. The aim of founding a women’s religious congregation was threefold – personal sanctification, the salvation of souls, which means holiness of others, and the integral growth of women and children. To offer true worship through holy lives, Chāvāra urged the

²⁸ “By the Grace of God and help of the Holy Family baptismal grace I could preserve the purity throughout my life.” Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Blessed Chāvāra*, 17; C. D. Valerian, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chāvāra* (Cochin: K.C.M. Press, 1986), 37-38.

²⁹ Chāvāra, *Chavarul*, 26. He also asked parents: “Don’t let your children move around naked even inside the house.” Chāvāra, *Chavarul*, 35.

³⁰ Pope John Paul II asserts that “the Eucharist builds the Church and the Church makes the Eucharist.” Encyclical Letter (17 April 2003) “*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*,” §26. Available at https://www.vatican.va/holy_father_special_features/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_20030417_ecclesia_eucharistia_en.html [accessed 22 June 2020].

members of the Church to attain perfection of love in their lives. He shared the pioneering inspiration of his teachers in setting up a religious community for men. He could give shape to the life and activities of a religious community, its identity, and charism.³¹ His motive behind the foundation of the religious community is clear in the following statement: "It is necessary that in this territory, there are persons who are continuously engaged in prayer and good works for the greater glory of God and the edification of the Church."³² His greatest pain was the absence of canonised saints among the Malabar Church Christians, who had been following Christ from the very first century. 1 Pet 2:5 mentions pleasing sacrifices offered to God through Christ Jesus by the holy priestly people. This is done by building up the Church as a spiritual home using the living stones, which are the members of the Church. The respect for human beings in the image and likeness of God made Chāvāra restore the dignity of the marginalised and the poor in the society of his time.

3.4. Orienting the Faithful to Heaven

Worship of God is not confined to a space or a few regulations. The Church participates in the heavenly worship, where angels and saints join the earthly beings in the worship of God, the Father, with Christ, the Son. Chāvāra had a profound belief about this dimension of the Church's worship. For example, he advised the members of the first convent about the recitation of the canonical prayers (the Liturgy of the Hours) as follows:

When you go to recite canon prayers, you have to keep in mind that all the angels and saints of heaven, all the holy souls on earth, and all the guardian angels of the sisters in the prayer room praise the Lord. You should join your voices with theirs and praise Him.³³

On the earth, we have a foretaste of the eschaton during the liturgical celebration. Chāvāra had a profound eschatological vision about life and wanted to join the wedding banquet of the lamb of God. He recalls the

³¹ Kuriakose Elias Chāvāra, a Carmelite religious priest founded the indigenous religious congregation for men, namely CMI (Carmelites of Mary Immaculate), in collaboration with Thomas Palackal and Thomas Porukara in 1831.

³² Mathias A Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chāvāra*, 2nd Edition, (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2020), 72.

³³ The convent mentioned here is the Koonammavu convent of TOCD Sisters (now CMC) founded by Chāvāra and Leopold Beccaro. More about its establishment is found in later chapters. *Chronicles of Koonammavu Convent*, vol. I, 77.

parable in the gospel where the king's invitee was found without a wedding garment. Chāvāra was always very vigilant in keeping the robe of holiness received in baptism very clean with him. Chāvāra says that the "gift of contemplation is the wedding cloth," which Jesus refers to in the parable of the wedding banquet of the king and it is given freely to all who ask for it.³⁴ Chāvāra kept his white robe of holiness washed in pure tears of deep contrition. He exhorted his fellow beings to protect this white robe of the holy life. Chāvāra was sure that good examples and zealous leaders could guide a large group on the right path toward the participation of the heavenly banquet. Participation in the earthly liturgy, being the foretaste of the heavenly liturgy, nurtures the hope of the faithful in life after death.

4. Preparation Towards Mystagogical Catechesis

Liturgical catechesis is mystagogical³⁵ and so it is sacramental. It aims to initiate people into the mystery of Christ "by proceeding from the visible to the invisible, from the sign to the signified, from the sacrament to the mysteries."³⁶ The salvation of humanity achieved by the paschal mystery of Christ is received through the sacraments and liturgical celebrations of the Church. This demands full, active, and conscious participation (SC §14) in the mystery of salvation.³⁷ Full, that is complete, and perfect worship happens only in the totality of the mystical body of Christ. It occurs when the body of Christ is whole. It must be dynamic with each member free enough to grow and enjoy equal status. Participation leads to mediation and it requires correct knowledge of what is happening in the liturgy. It necessitates a freedom that comes from the knowledge of the truth.

4.1. United, Complete and Inclusive

A prerequisite condition for one's participation in the salvation mystery is one's incorporation into the body of Christ. Liturgy produces the desired fruits only when the whole body worships God in Spirit and Truth. Also, there should be unity among the members of the body. It is

³⁴ Mt 22:1-14; Chāvāra, CWC vol. III: Colloquies with the Heavenly Father, 1.

³⁵ The Greek word has the meaning 'to lead through the mysteries.'

³⁶ Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Revised ed. (London: Chapman, 1999), no 1075.

³⁷ SC repeats its call for active and full participation and there are twenty instances in the document where the call for quality participation in the liturgy is explicitly mentioned. See SC §§ 11, 14, 17, 18, 19, 21, 27, 30, 41, 48, 49, 50, 59, 79, 90, 113, 114, 118, and 121.

to this unity, with Jesus as the head of the body, that all Christians are invited. To achieve the goal of perfect and real worship, Chāvāra wanted to make the Malabar Church integral, inclusive, and comprehensive in nature. To this end, he fought to eradicate the different strata that existed in his community. He endeavoured to make each member of the Church full and complete with the integration of body, mind, and soul ready for the worship of God.

The long-cherished dream of Chāvāra, who dedicated his whole life to the service of the Church, was to bring unity and prosperity to the Church of Kerala. He believed that the people of God form a single body of Christ and so everyone should join in His mystical body to offer real worship to God. Since every part of this body is significant, he respected even the least ones among his fellow beings and strived to make them recognise their own dignity as the children of God and an integral part of Christ's body. In Galatians, we read: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). This unity or communion with Jesus forms a very delightful oblation for God, the Father. With this unifying vision of humanity, as a family or one sheepfold or one body, Chāvāra toiled to uplift and emancipate the marginalised members of his Church community and secular society at large. This is clear from his efforts for the education and edification of low-caste people and women.

Chāvāra struggled to bring all his siblings home, who were still running after the pods of pig's food. He tried to remind them of the festivity and richness in the Father's house by enlightening their minds. In the Testament of Chāvāra to his parishioners, he writes about his vision of family as a miniature of heaven. He quotes Mark 3:24-25: "If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand." God calls for reconciliation (Is 1:18), and, as a sacrament of unity on earth, the Church is struggling to attain unity within and communion with God through perfect worship.

4.2. Dynamic and Living

If the members of the body are slaves of evil and live in sinful conditions, the active worship of the Church is not possible. True worship happens in the mystical body of Christ and it brings salvation to humanity. To achieve freedom in worship, liberation from Egypt, the land of slavery, is necessary. The people of Kerala were slaves to the ignorance and injustice of the caste system at the time of Chāvāra. As a new Moses for

the people of Kerala, Chāvara led them out of slavery to the mountain of divine presence for the true worship of the real God. To ensure dynamic participation in the paschal mystery, which affects the identity of the community, Chāvara took daring steps.

CT 54 says about popular devotions that “Underlying most of these prayers and practices in popular devotion, there are other elements which could serve very well to help people advance towards knowledge of the mystery of Christ and of His message.” St. Chāvara promoted some special devotions in order to help the faithful grow in the knowledge and experience of the mystery of Christ. He popularised the forty hours of adoration of the Eucharist in Kerala.³⁸ Later, it quickly spread to other parishes. He promoted daily participation in the holy *Qurbana* among families and among the faithful. He advises in his testament of a good father:

As much as possible, participate daily in the holy Mass. If it is difficult, take part in the Masses on Mondays for the souls in purgatory, on Fridays in commemoration of the passion and death of the Lord, and on Saturdays in devotion to our Lady of Sorrows. If all members of a family cannot attend daily Mass together, let them take turns, ensuring that one or two attend Mass every day.³⁹

He also gave due attention to the sacrament of reconciliation. He had a contrite heart that is clear in his ‘Act of Contrition’⁴⁰, ‘Reflections on Mortal Sin’⁴¹ and ‘The Work of Two Priests’.⁴² He advised families to prepare children for confession at the age of seven⁴³ and insisted that they receive the sacrament of reconciliation at least once per month.⁴⁴

³⁸ It was Pope Clement VIII who issued a historic document named *Quarant’ Ore* (forty hours) on the forty hours continual prayer before the exposed Blessed Sacrament in 1592. For a history of this devotion, John A Hardon, *The History of Eucharistic Adoration: Development of Doctrine in the Catholic Church*, (Oak Lawn: CMJ Publishers, 1997), 10. Though introduced by Bishop Roz after the Synod of Diamper, Chāvara popularised this devotion in the Malabar Church. John Moolan, *The Period of Annunciation-Nativity in the East Syrian Calendar: Its Background and Place in the Liturgical Year* (Kottayam: OIRSI, 1985), 4.

³⁹ Chāvara, *Chavarul*, 25.

⁴⁰ Chāvara, *CWC vol. III*, 18.

⁴¹ Chāvara, *CWC vol. III*, 57.

⁴² Chāvara, *CWC vol. III*, 60.

⁴³ Chāvara, *Chavarul*, 25.

⁴⁴ Chāvara, *Chavarul*, 36.

Chāvara and the religious priests of *Koventā* were known as retreat preachers and confessors. Catechesis, which is growth in faith and the maturing of Christian life towards its fullness, was the objective of all these efforts of Chāvara.

4.3. Freed by True Knowledge

Worship is not a mere collection of liturgical actions or ceremonies but is, at its core, perfect love from a heart directed by the Spirit and illuminated by the true knowledge of God. Worship must be properly informed, otherwise, it will be reduced to emotional exercise and superficial acts. Chāvara realised that "the lack of monasteries and convents cause the failure of many virtues and so, there should be a house of vision at least for the ordained."⁴⁵ Fr. Leopold underscores that Chāvara had a zealous mind "which directed all of his existence to the one thing which is essential, the salvation of souls"⁴⁶ Chāvara's great wish was the formation of saints in the Kerala Church, and he was ready to co-operate with anyone for the good of human beings. Chāvara was a true disciple of Jesus and one taught by the Father and Holy Spirit to perform true and real worship. No doubt, he was known as one with the signature of the Holy Spirit in his heart, as witnessed by his contemporaries.⁴⁷ He desired to impart real wisdom, which he received directly from God, to his fellow beings and to bring them to the true worship of God. Worship of God without actual knowledge will end up in sensitive experience alone and, without spirit, can result in a form of mere legalism. After gaining genuine knowledge of God, one can render true worship to Him and glorify Him through a life of worship. An in-depth understanding of truth alone can direct the emotions and hearts of humans and thus lead them to actual and worthy worship.

5. Being and Becoming the Mystery

Liturgy is experiential and liturgical catechesis opens up and brings to awareness what is known intuitively. The most prominent way of participating in the mystery of salvation is the liturgy of the Church. In liturgy, the redemption of humanity is celebrated. To experience and

⁴⁵ Chāvara, CWC vol I: The Chronicles, 1.

⁴⁶ Lucas Vittuvattical CMI, *Perspectives of a heroic Christian life* (Mannanam: K.E.C. Publications, 1988), 28 and 18.

⁴⁷ We see this expression 'one filled by the Holy Spirit' for the first time in a comment of Mathew Kurian Madathikunnel from Muttuchira. See, in this regard, John Romeo Pattassery CMI, *Vazhthappetta Chāvarayachan Vyakthiyum Veeshanavum* (Malayalam). vol. 1 (Alwaye: Chāvara books and Publications, 1989), 146-147.

engage with the mysteries, a deep conviction of faith in Christ's mystery and in the mystery of the Church is essential. Unless one is aware of the mystery of Christ and the economy of salvation through Christ, it would be impossible to meet God in the liturgy. Chāvara was a man of prayer. He lived the faith that is celebrated and explained in the liturgy of the Malabar Church. Thus he could impart the right teaching for the Church. His holy being was the end product of his liturgical life. He could live out what he believed and celebrated in the liturgy. Thus, he displayed the right living, which is *lex vivendi*, the third operational principle of the liturgy.⁴⁸ He tried to bring all his fellow beings into that fulfilment through his ministries of diverse nature. In his writings, he expressed what he experienced and believed. He lived what he experienced and believed in the liturgy. He shared his wisdom through his acts for the good of others, especially for developing their faith. All saints are lived models of the paschal mystery. The exemplary imitation of Christ by Chāvara motivates believers to practise the virtues of this saint and live according to gospel values. Thus he could be aptly called an exemplary liturgical catechist.

⁴⁸ Kevin W. Irwin, *Context and Text: A Method for Liturgical Theology*, (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1994 & 2018), 81.