

Editorial

SAINT KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA A CATECHETICAL SCION

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Catechesis is one of the most significant pastoral activities and responsibilities of the Church, for it is intrinsically and integrally related to all the aspects of the life of the Church. Catechesis is basically a ministry of the Word of God and therefore Sacred Scripture is its soul, source, and inspiration. Sacred Tradition, Sacred Liturgy, and the Magisterium also are the principal sources of catechesis. It has rich resource from the martyrs, blessed and saints who were catechists, the life of the faith formator or the catechist lived in accordance with the Gospel, and the whole creation that manifests God's glory. Catechesis is a gift and a task to build up the Church.

In the early Church, catechesis meant the instruction given to the catechumens who were preparing themselves to receive the sacraments of initiation. In the second and third centuries, the word catechesis became identified with the preparation of the adult candidate for baptism and eucharist and with the post-baptismal instruction of the neophyte in the mysteries of faith. The greatest catechetical homilies and treatises of the prominent Fathers of the Church like Cyril of Jerusalem, Theodore of Mopsuestia, John Chrysostom, Ambrose of Milan and St Augustine are brilliant illustrations of mystagogical reflection on the sacramental experience; and they guided the neophytes to the mystery of Christ and led them to transformation in and through the participation in the Sacred Liturgy, for Liturgy initiates the participants into a living faith and lead them to the maturity of faith through full and actual participation. Experience as its keynote, mystagogy led the newcomer into the experience of the mystery of Christ, especially to the paschal mystery. With the decline of the catechumenate in the fourth and fifth centuries,

the catechetical situation shifted from adult initiation to the baptism of infants, from pre-baptismal to post-baptismal instruction, and from a catechesis out of a biblical and liturgical context to a formation derived primarily from a Christian environment.

Pope Pius X initiated the Modern Catechetical Movement, and he restored catechesis to an important position in the pastoral life of the Church. The Second Vatican Council defined catechesis as a ministry of the Word.¹ Catechesis is understood as instruction in the way of the Lord or oral instruction to hand on the deposit of faith. Pope Paul VI stated that the purpose of catechesis is to develop in believers a living, explicit and active faith enlightened by instruction.² Church's pastoral concern for catechesis has been expressed time and again. There has been catechetical renewal since Vatican II, and they are General Catechetical Directory to systematize the teachings of Vatican II for catechesis (1971), *Catechesi Tradendae* (1979), the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992), General Directory for Catechesis (1997), Directory for Catechesis in response to the New Evangelization, disaffiliation, globalization, digital culture (2020), and the publication of other national, regional and diocesan catechisms.

Pope John Paul II indicates the primary object of catechesis as the 'mystery of Christ' and exhorts all catechists to transmit the teaching and life of Jesus by their instructions, not as a body of abstract truths but the "communication of the living mystery of God."³ The basic objective of catechesis according to *Catechesi Tradendae* (CT) is to initiate the hearers to the fullness of Christian life, and therefore catechesis is life oriented than mere understanding oriented (CT 21). The catechesis must lead the faithful to the fullness of Christian life or must be life-oriented, concerned with the process of growth in faith. Therefore, the catechists must be enchanted by Christ and their mission is to present Christ to others by faith-filled life-witness, for the

¹ *Dei Verbum*, 24. https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html; accessed on 19.09.2023.

² Paul VI, *Christus Dominus*, 14. https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651028_christus-dominus_en.html; accessed on 20.09.2023.

³ John Paul II *Catechesi Tradendae*, 7. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_16101979_catechesi-tradendae.html; accessed on 19.09.2023.

conformity of their lives completely to Christ is their authenticity and authority to transmit the faith.⁴ As Pope Francis affirms, "Every catechist must be a witness to the faith, a teacher and mystagogue, a companion and pedagogue, who teaches for the Church."⁵ The vocation to catechesis springs from the sacrament of Baptism and hence every baptized one is a catechist and has to employ his or her God given gifts to edify the Church, and the task is to proclaim the message of faith, to inspire and to lead to worship and prayer, and to foster community.

As an authentic and responsible catechist, Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara dedicated his entire life as a continuous sacrifice to inspire, motivate and assist the faithful in every way possible to know, love and serve God. He always maintained a childlike relationship with God addressing him *appan*. Chavara kept the memory of God alive in him and was able to revive and revamp it in the people of God. He cherished a burning desire to form Christ (Gal 4:19) in the people of God in general and in the new Christians in particular. His zeal for the Lord enabled him to be passionate to strive better in multifaced ministry and never to give up regardless of how hopeless a situation appeared to be. Chavara as a catechetical scion made sure that the catechesis was based on the Sacred Scripture, Tradition, Liturgy and the Magisterium or the teaching authority and life of the Church. His fidelity to the past and responsibility for the present prompted him to carry out the ministry of catechesis as a mission of the Church in the world. As a genuine catechist, by his creative hard work, Chavara made outstanding and indispensable contribution to the spread of the faith and of the Church in the 19th century.

The present issue of the *Herald of the East* examines the various dimensions of Catechesis and Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara as a Catechetical Scion. The volume has six articles and five of them are directly related to the theme.

Jacob Marangatt in his article observes that the world of catechesis has undergone much change in the understanding of its content and

⁴ Merlin R. Ambrose, "Lay Ministry of Catechist in Light of the Apostolic Letter *Antiquum Ministerium*," *VJTR* 87, 6 (June 2023), 448.

⁵ Francis, *Antiquum Ministerium*, 6. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio-20210510_antiquum-ministerium.html; accessed on 19.09.2023.

method. Delineating various catechetical methods, he affirms the aim of catechesis as to reach the people to the maturity of faith. Presenting Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara as a catechist who lived ahead of his time, Marangatt remarks that at the time of Chavara, the World Catechetical Movement had not taken birth, but we see Chavara adopting catechetical methods which will be endorsed much later by the World Catechetical Movement. It shows his prophetic vision and catechetical wisdom. The article attempts to highlight how Chavara proposed a catechetical pedagogy that comprises all the essential elements of Catechetics.

Maryann Madhavathu in her article underscores catechesis as one of the primary tasks of the Church and liturgical catechesis as mystagogy. The article unfolds Chavara's efforts to make the faithful involve in the living mystery of Christ. Liturgical catechesis strives to lead the people of God to maturity of faith through full and active participation in the liturgy. Catechists not only teach but also share their faith and guide the students to live their faith. Chavara was a great catechist who taught the Church in Kerala the essence of faith, the paschal mystery of Christ through his life and ministry. Maryann discusses Chavara's life in the paschal rhythm of dying and rising, the way he spread the divine wisdom he had obtained from the mystery of Christ, how he prepared the faithful for mystagogical catechesis and how he became an exemplary catechist.

Anto Amarnad presents Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara as a catechetist, an expert in Catechetics. Saint Chavara's inspiring personality, various ministries, writings, and the virtues and values he practiced introduce him as an eminent catechetist. He played a key role in transmitting the faith that transforms the persons and community. Saint Chavara introduced family prayer, forty-hour adoration, annual retreat for the lay people, and propagated popular devotions and pious practices to nourish the faith of the people of God and wrote volumes for their catechetical formation. According to Amarnad, his fidelity and devotion to the Church enabled him to be committed to God and His people, and to read the signs of the times and respond to them creatively and prophetically.

Ann Mary in her article delineates the Family Catechesis as a dynamic and transformative approach to religious education that places the family at the centre of faith formation. As the family is the cradle of the formation of children and the best catechesis is done in

the family ambience, Family Catechesis recognizes the vital role the parents and guardians play as the primary educators of their children in matters of faith. According to Ann Mary, the *Chavarul* of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara is one of the significant catechetical tools, for it assists the families to lead a Theo-centric life following a love-centred ethics. The present article explores the various dimensions of the definition of family given in the *Chavarul* which embraces all the aspects required for a harmonious family life.

Paulachan Kochappilly in the article explores the sense of Mystery and the divine experience of Kuriakose Elias Chavara of the Holy Family, who treaded the path of the Fathers of the Church. As excellent catechists with a strong base of liturgical texts, the Fathers had imbibed the sense of Mystery and were imbued with the divine experience. Chavara's writings attest to his outstanding reach of the Mystery in his spiritual experience. The experience of the ineffable Mystery of the Eucharist shaped the vision and mission of Chavara. Devotion to the Eucharistic Lord springing from the celebration of the Holy Eucharist was unparalleled in his life. According to Kochappilly, Chavara's writing, *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, is flecked with the incredible experience of the Mystery and his unworthiness to approach the Eucharistic Lord. In the present article, he discusses the sense of Mystery and the divine experience of Chavara under three headings mutually interrelated: Sense of Mystery and Sense of Ministry; Experience of the Divine and Empowering of the Human, and Sense of Mercy and the Pastoral Ministry.

Jossy Maria in the present article, which is the second part of the same, depicts Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara as a true son of the mother Church, for his love and ministries revealed his genuine love to the Church that he had cherished in his heart. She discusses the role of St Chavara as a social reformer of Kerala and his various contributions for the transformation of the society, especially in the field of education. In the nineteenth century, Kerala society had undergone major transformations by various socio-religious reforms. According to Jossy Maria, Chavara by his initiatives could create an awareness among the faithful that the Church is a servant of the humankind, irrespective of caste, creed, color, or nationality; and his instructions had contributed much to the families to become well-knit units of the society.

In the footsteps of the Fathers of the Church who were excellent catechists, Saint Chavara, a versatile genius and catechist of great merit, made remarkable contribution in the field of catechesis to build up the Church and to proclaim and transmit the faith keeping it inviolate. Now that Saint Chavara invites and inspires us to continue the work, it entails a profound personal experience of Christ, attentiveness to the voice of the Spirit and growth in faith-relation to God to share the experience to others, which in turn demands the incessant nurturing of the aptitude and ability to communicate the Gospel in the most effective way by credible life witness.