

SAINT KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA THE CATECHETIST

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Abstract: Catechetics is a science of instructing the faith and nurturing the discipleship of Jesus Christ. Catechetist is an expert in the science of catechetics, and shares the treasures of faith and involves in the ministry of faith formation in a systematic way. Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara's, inspiring personality, diverse ministries, writings, and his virtues and attitudes revealed that he was an eminent catechetist. Chavara played a key role in imparting and nourishing the faith of the people to transform them. Chavara was a herald in introducing family prayer, forty-hour Adoration, annual retreat for the people of God, and several devotions and pious practices. His priority was the catechetical formation of the Christian faithful. His child like relationship with the Lord and filial love and devotion to the Church strengthened him to dedicate himself to God and His people, and to read the signs of the times and respond to them creatively and prophetically.

Keywords: Catechetist, Catechesis, Baptism, Mystagogical catechesis, Faith formation, Core values, Intimate love with Jesus, Signs of the time, *Nalla Appante Chavarul*, Ministry, Discipleship, Roccas schism, *Pallikoodam*, *Tukasa*.

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1. Introduction

Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara dispensed a new energy and power to the humanity that it might grow in the righteousness of the Gospel of Christ. He was a catechetist, an expert in the science of catechetics, the ministry of faith formation. It is a science of instructing the faith and nurturing the discipleship of Jesus Christ. It is a branch of theology that deals with the instruction given to the Christians prior to the sacraments of initiation. It also deals with the subsequent growth in faith and acquiring Christian living with the Gospel values and virtues. Catechesis is an instruction by word of mouth, and generally 'instruction' is basic Christian religious education of children and adults, often from a catechism book. The Church community has to initiate the new member to get mature in faith through continued catechesis and pastoral care. Saint Chavara knew this truth and he provided the Christian communities different ways and means to get matured in faith. He ministered to his people in varying ways and it resulted in leading the people to reconciliation and harmony as demanded by the Gospel.¹

According to Pope Francis, "The catechist is a Christian who is mindful of God, who is guided by the memory of God in his/her entire life and who is able to awaken that memory in the hearts of others."² Saint Chavara befriended the challenges of the Church, person and society and made available the God-given talents to create a new humanity of love and justice, devotion and worship through catechesis. As the prologue of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states: "God, infinitely perfect and blessed in himself, in a plan of sheer goodness freely created man to make him share in his own blessed life. For this reason, at every time and in every place, God draws close to man. He calls man to seek him, to know him, to love him with all his strength."³ Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara was a glaring example of God's companion who by his life showed the ways of getting closer to the divine so that his fellow human beings would merge into the same river of infinite love. His life was an authentic catechesis, he knew the science

¹ Mathew Maniampra, "Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara: A Reformist with a Pastoral Heart," *Herald of the East* 15, 1 (January-June 2023), 175.

² <https://www.pinterest.com/stlouisreligion/catechists-share-love/>; accessed on 14.06.2023.

³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994, 7, Prologue: no. 1.

of faith formation and its breadth and width, he could elevate the people of God to the pinnacle of spiritual treasures of Christian Faith.

2. Catechesis and Saint Chavara

Pope John Paul II exhorts: "Catechesis is an education of children, young people, and adults in the faith, which includes especially the teaching of Christian doctrine imparted, generally speaking, in an organic and systematic way, with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life."⁴ Catechesis is the process of teaching the principles of Christian faith, often in preparation for the sacraments of initiation. It involves instruction in the doctrines of the faith, as well as guidance on how to live a Christian life. The word catechesis comes from the Greek word "*katēchein*" which means "to echo the teaching."

Catechetics is the science of religious instruction and its methods to transform the human minds. It seeks to achieve its aim through the religious instruction and various spiritual activities. The postmodern interpretation of catechetics is that it is a way of understanding religious instruction that is not based on a single, objective truth but rather on multiple perspectives and experiences. Postmodern catechetics emphasizes the importance of dialogue and conversation in the learning process. The Catholic Church in Kerala learned various ways and means of faith formation from Chavara's person and mission of writings, devotional practices and social uplift programmes. He had to face the underdeveloped cultural realities and painful poverty ridden contexts of the society. Though his zeal and enthusiasm to spread the Gospel values and the Kingdom of God paved the way to the development of Christian spirituality and welfare projects. Chavara took every effort to translate the religious insights to the spiritual nourishment and physical wellbeing of the people in the society.

3. Baptism - Call to be a Catechist

It was after the Baptism, Jesus became a vagabond of catechesis. He had the Good News to communicate to the whole world. The Baptism and the subsequent 'Desert Experience' totally transformed Jesus and his style of life. Thus catechesis was the result of Jesus' baptismal experience (Mk 1:9-12; Lk 4:1-21), for Baptism was the most decisive mystery in the life of Jesus. So also Baptism is the most significant mystery in the life of

⁴ John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, no. 18. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_16101979_catechesi-tradendae.html; accessed on 16.09.2023.

every Christian, as it guarantees Christian identity and spirituality. Baptism makes a person completely absorbed in the person and mission of Jesus Christ. It is similar to the experience of St Paul: "Now, it is not I who live but Jesus lives in me" (Gal 2:20). Hence, there was a prolonged period of catechumenate in the ancient times. There were two to three years of faith formation for the adults who wanted to become Christians. The Baptism at the eve of Easter was a great event in the life of the Church as well as in the lives of the neophytes who had undergone such a tough training to make Jesus their own Lord and God. But the days of preparations at the catechumenate made the would-be Christians very strong and spiritually courageous persons to live the precepts of Christ and witness their faith in the world in spite of frightening persecutions and threat of life.

Baptism remains as the most unique experience for Jesus as well as for his followers. Jesus identified himself with the sinful humans and he took upon himself all the sins, and in fact, with the entire creation he plunged himself into the water to wash and clean all the sins and evil of the cosmos. The moment of his Baptism with the entire creation was amazingly divine and unique and it made the history of salvation so conspicuous in Christ. When at the beginning God created everything, there was the purity and sanctity in the whole creation. When the humans lost this pure state, it was in Jesus' Baptism that the Son of God allowed them once again to attain the original purity. Then the doors of heaven were opened, and God's Spirit descended not only upon Jesus but through him upon the entire creation. Thus, at the moment of Jesus' Baptism at Jorden, the whole universe was baptized. Everything in the universe was reborn in Jesus Christ and the entire creation obtained new life in him.

During the Baptism at Jorden, Jesus went down to the water, denoted a new birth of entire cosmos. The presence of the Holy Spirit testified that the entire creation is anointed by the Spirit and the Father. Thus, in the Baptism of Jesus the human beings are made the heirs of Christ's divine inheritance. So too, the entire creation was soaked into the being of Jesus, and all were invited to become completely 'original beings' in new creation. Therefore, the Good News becomes the inherent content of every being. Hence, there is the law of love and justice in the conscience of human beings and commitment towards their Creator, each other and the entire creation. The divine whisper within the conscience of every human being is the result of the presence of Good News within Jesus who had dipped himself in the river Jordan as a sign

of a powerful new humanity. Jesus' Baptism is very significant for the created nature, to the extent that the whole cosmos also had to be reborn through the same *Logos* who was made flesh. Now, the economy of salvation is not only the concern of the holy Trinity, but it is also the right of the entire creation whose essence is nothing but God Himself. The creation reverberates the original design and vision of God as the result of Baptism. Thus, the Baptism becomes a pilgrimage towards our original righteousness and grace in Christ. Chavara considered baptism the most sublime event in his entire life. He said: "The grace I received during my Baptism has never been spoiled in my life and this I can say with conviction."⁵

4. Mystagogical Catechesis and Chavara's Writings

The mystagogical catechesis is a form of religious teaching that seeks to lead the individuals into a deeper understanding and experience of the mysteries of the Christian faith. This type of catechesis is not only for just imparting knowledge, but also helping the individuals to encounter, experience, and participate in the life of Christ and the Church. One of the key elements of mystagogical catechesis is the use of symbols and rituals. These symbols and rituals are not simply empty gestures, rather they are powerful means of communicating the mysteries of the faith. By participating in these symbols and rituals, individuals are able to enter deeply into the mysteries of faith and to experience the grace of Christ in a profound way. Chavara used many imageries and symbols to expound and elaborate his teachings on faith so that even the ordinary people could grasp the depth of faith and grow in spiritual perfection. Mystagogical catechesis is about helping the individuals to enter into the sacramental life of the Church. This involves not only learning about the sacraments, but also experiencing them in a profound and transformative way. Through the sacraments, individuals are able to encounter Christ in a real and tangible way, and to be transformed by his grace. Chavara introduced various devotional practices to nurture the faith of the people so that the faith they profess and the way they live might be interrelated. Chavara was a herald of introducing family prayer, forty-hour Adoration, retreat preaching for the laity, popularised devotions and pious exercises such as rosary, way of the cross and

⁵ Leopold Beccaro, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Mannanam: St Joseph's Monastery, 2003, 17; Biju Tharaniyil, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Kakkanad: Chavara Central Secretariat, 2004, 33.

eucharistic adoration.⁶ Experience of faith transports the believer into a close encounter with Christ and propels necessary transformation in the personal life, applying the pure love and charity as an expression of witnessing one's faith.

It was during the time span of 1829 to 1870, all the literary works⁷ of Chavara were written: *Chronicles and Historical Writings; Spiritual Writings; Letters; Prayers; and Writings on Liturgy*. These writings are much related to the wholistic worldview of a catechetist. In the catechetical writings of Chavara, we find two unique categories: They reflect the religious spirituality of Christianity⁸ in Kerala and they show the way of salvation to the Christian believers.

4.1. Nalagamangal - The Chronicles

The *Chronicles* written by Saint Chavara narrate the daily events not only of the monastery but also of the society. Together with various events of the CMI Congregation, the *Chronicles* depicted the events associated with the Society and the Church of the time.⁹ These writings were originally found in Malayalam, in Kuriakose Elias Chavara's own handwriting.¹⁰ There are two manuscripts under the title *Mannanam Nalagamangal*.

4.2. Atmanuthapam - The Lamentations of a Repentant Soul

Spiritual writings like *Atmanuthapam* is an autobiographical poem written in an epic style – *Mahakavyam*. The poem narrates the life of Jesus from his birth to the ascension into heaven and the life of Mother Mary from the ascension of Jesus to her assumption into heaven. As Chavara meditated these mysteries in the life of Jesus and Mary, he examined his

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kuriakose_Elias_Chavara; accessed on 14.06.2023.

⁷ For an exploration of Chavara's writings see, Sophy Rose, *A Pillar and Guiding Light: Kuriakose Elias Chavara, A Theologian of the Church*, (Theological Studies on Saint Chavara -4), Kochi: Chavara Central Secretariat & Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2020, 21-38.

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kuriakose_Elias_Chavara; accessed on 14.06.2023.

⁹ *Complete Works of Chavara* Vol. 1 published in 1990 contains five Chronicles, Mannanam.

¹⁰ K.P. Molly, *Blessed Chavara: Life and Mission: Religious Philosophy of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara* – A PhD Study Thesis in the Department of Philosophy, Calicut: University of Calicut, 2004. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kuriakose_Elias_Chavara; accessed on 15.07.2023.

own life experiences right from the childhood in the light of these mysteries. According to Dr K.M. Tharakan *Atmanuthapam* reflects Chavara's philosophy of life which in turn exemplifies a Christian religious life. Dr Tharakan states: "...Humility, which is not self-contempt, and repentance are the foundation stones of the philosophy of his life. Thus, the first step is faith in God. The second is the belief that one can reach God through Jesus Christ. The third is the conviction that without repenting and accepting Jesus, one cannot reach Christ... what a Christian obtains is the awareness of the noble qualities. These qualities are 'faith', 'hope' and 'love'. Only through these triple qualities, a Christian can attain Christ."¹¹

4.3. *Maranaveetil Cholvanulla Parvam - A Poem to be Sung in the Bereaved House*

It is a poem intended to be sung when the dead-body of a person is placed in the coffin for public homage.¹² It contains 1162 verses. The underlying message is that one should lead a virtuous and God-fearing life in order to overcome the painful experience of death. Chavara described in it the articles of faith related to the death of a man and beautifully illustrated them with stories or incidents, the poet heard or read.¹³

4.4. *Nalla Appante Chavarul - Testament of a Loving Father*

The *Testament of a Loving Father* is a magna carta written by Chavara in 1868 for the ordinary lay people but it is filled with profound Gospel values and Christian virtues. It could be one of the best catechetical texts he wrote for the Christian families and a sure guide for Christian morality. Another important aspect of mystagogical catechesis is the emphasis on community. This type of catechesis recognizes that the Christian life is not meant to be lived in isolation, but rather is meant to be lived in community. Through participation in the liturgical life of the Church, individuals are able to experience the love and support of their fellow Christians, and to grow in their understanding and experience of the mysteries of faith. *Nalla Appante Chavarul* is the counsel to the Christian families of Kainakari parish but its relevance resonates till date. Chavara wrote: "I bequeath to you this document in my own

¹¹ Z. M. Moozhoor, ed., *Chavarayachan: Vividha Veekshanangalil*, Cochin: Janatha Services Publishers, 1989, 68.

¹² "St. Kuriakose Elias Archives and Research Centre," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kuriakose_Elias_Chavara; accessed on 15.07.2023.

¹³ K.P. Molly, *Blessed Chavara: Life and Mission*.

handwriting. This script will not perish even when I am dead and gone.”¹⁴ This insightful and down-to-earth document is the first of its kind in the known history of the Church, and it offers practical direction and guidelines to the families in leading a God-fearing as well as socially commendable life.¹⁵

4.5. *Anastasiayude Rakthasakshyam - The Martyrdom of Anastacia*

It was written in 1861 and it contains 232 verses.¹⁶ This descriptive poetry is the first among the works of the same style. Anastasia was depicted as a very beautiful and pious candidate of a convent run by Mother Sophia in the third century. Propho, the minister of Emperor Valerian was very much impressed by her beauty and wanted to meet her. He asked her to denounce Christian faith and embrace the faith of the Emperor. She declined the suggestion and so she was made to undergo cruel punishment and torture. But nothing altered her faith and conviction and finally she embraced martyrdom. Courage and grace are the major themes of this poem, and they are written in beautiful lines of popular poetry with rhyming words and figures of speech.¹⁷

4.6. *Dhyana Sallapangal - Colloquies in Meditation*

It is an inspiring writing of Saint Chavara and it highlights him as a man of deep contemplation and prayer. His meditations are written in the form of a dialogue between a son and a Father, and Chavara as the son and God as the Father. It is amazing to see Chavara always addressing or invoking God as *Abba*- father. For him, meditation meant a loving conversation with God the Father, becoming one with and speaking to Him as if to an intimate friend. In the *Dhyana Sallapangal*, we come across Chavara as a true mystic.

4.7. *Eclogues - Shepherd Plays*

Eclogues were the first dramatic plays in Malayalam in the pastoral (shepherd) genre or *Eclogues* of Italy.¹⁸ They were plays written for the performance during the Christmas season. Chavara wrote them between

¹⁴ St Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Chavarul, Testament of a loving Father*, Kakkanad: Chavara Central Secretariat, 2020, 7.

¹⁵ “Saint Chavara – Champion of Families – Light of Truth.” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kuriakose_Elias_Chavara; accessed on 15.07.2023.

¹⁶ K.P. Molly, *Blessed Chavara: Life and Mission*.

¹⁷ Biju Tharaniyil, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 26.

¹⁸ St Kuriakose Elias Chavara Chair in the Mahatma Gandhi University. www.saintchavara.org. Archived from the original on 4 August 2017, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kuriakose_Elias_Chavara; accessed on 15.07.2023.

1856–1858. He wrote 10 Eclogues or Shepherd Plays and introduced them in the novitiate at Koonammavu.¹⁹

4.8. Letters

The letters were written on different occasions to various persons or groups. There are 67 original copies of these letters. They are published in the *Complete Works of Chavara* Vol. IV. The Chronicle in Koonammavu records three letters written to them by Kuriakose Elias Chavara. Though the Chronicle states that many letters and notes were written by Chavara, only three are recorded.²⁰

4.9. Prayers

Though Chavara wrote many prayers, only six of them have been preserved. They are: i) Meditation: Method of beginning – It is an intercessory prayer to Mother Mary seeking her help to be with him during the meditation. ii) Prayer to the Blessed Virgin Mary – It is a thanksgiving prayer for the blessings received from Mother Mary. iii) Morning Prayer to the Most Holy Trinity – It is a thanksgiving prayer for the favours received. iv) Evening prayer to Most Holy Trinity – It is a thanksgiving prayer for the favours received. v) Prayer for the custody of eyes – It is a prayer to be recited by priests to remain rooted in their fidelity to Jesus Christ. vi) Prayer to be recited by priests – Prayers to be recited by priests to remain rooted in their fidelity to Jesus Christ.²¹

4.10. Writings on Liturgy

Chavara wrote a number of liturgical texts that played an important role in the renewal of the liturgy.²² They include the Divine Office for the priests, Divine Office for the dead, Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Prayers of various blessings, the Order of Holy mass – *Tukasa*, Liturgical Calendar, Forty Hours Adoration, Novenas and Prayer books for lay people.²³

¹⁹ "Chavara Portrait." www.chavaraculturalcentre.org, in https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kuriakose_Elias_Chavara, accessed on 15.07.2023.

²⁰ "Religion / Community and People / Chavara A Saintly Person / Prof: Dr Fr Thomas Kadankavil CMI". dhruwadeepti.blogspot.de. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kuriakose_Elias_Chavara; accessed on 15.07.2023.

²¹ K.P. Molly, *Blessed Chavara: Life and Mission*.

²² "Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara, Mar Thoma Sleeha Cathedral," smchicago.org. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kuriakose_Elias_Chavara; accessed on 15.07.2023.

²³ Francis Thonippara, "Criteria for Declaring a Saint 'Father of the Syro-Malabar Church *Sui Iuris*' and 'Doctor of the Universal Church' and Their

4.11. Writings on Administration

In this category, 16 writings have been preserved. Some of them were written on palm leaves and others on paper. They dealt with administrative matters pertaining to the time of Chavara.²⁴ All these writings were filled with catechetical formation of Christian faithful. Chavara lived for Christ and for the cause of Christian faith. His enthusiasm for the propagation of faith could be seen very well in all his writings.

5. Catechesis and Practice of Faith

Faith is lifeless when it is not translated into actions. Life witness is essential for the authenticity of faith. Chavara had proved the authenticity of his faith with life witness. As a renowned social reformer Chavara initiated public education and thus opened opportunities for decent employment and spiritual growth. He was an innovator of many socio-pastoral, cultural, educational, and social reforms for the well-being of everyone and attempted to establish equality and justice in the society. He was a champion for the cause of women, the downtrodden, the sick, the poor and the dalits. Chavara initiated Jesus' style catechesis that reached out to all the essential aspects of the humanity. His spirituality found its expression in preaching the Word of God, renewal programme for priests and laity, press apostolate, catechumenates, home for the destitute, strengthening the liturgical life, preventing schism, fostering loyalty to the Catholic Church, establishing religious Congregations for men and women, etc.²⁵

As a spiritual leader Chavara had a great vision concerning the progress of the people and strived hard for the uplift of the whole society. He loved the humanity and firmly believed in the providential love of the Father and in the strength of the fraternity of his fellow human beings. He took a keen interest in uplifting the underprivileged classes, the orphans and the poor. He introduced *Pallikoodam* providing free education for all at the schools attached to every parish church in Kerala. Chavara's success in all his undertakings was due to his spiritual

Application on Saint Chavara," *Herald of the East* 15, 1 (January-June 2023), 34; K.P. Molly, *Blessed Chavara: Life and Mission*.

²⁴ "Kuriakose Elias Chavara: Ahead of His Time," saintchavara.blogspot.de in https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kuriakose_Elias_Chavara; accessed on 15.07.2023.

²⁵ Cf. The Committee for the Cause of Blessed Chavara, *Compunction of the Soul, Dirge, Anasthasia's Martyrdom*, Vol. II, Ernakulam, 1989, vi.

vision. His deep prayer life was the source of his various apostolates. His life in the Lord inspired him to be an innovator and as a fervent religious he dedicated himself to the love and service of God and the humanity.

6. Core Values in Catechesis

Core values are a set of fundamental beliefs, ideals or practices that reflect and reveal how one's life is. They serve as guiding principles and help us to differentiate between the right and the wrong. They also reflect what is important to one person and what makes one happy.²⁶ Some of the core values are: Honesty, Integrity, Compassion, Creativity, Excellence, and Diversity. Core values may vary from person to person and from organization to organization. They may also change in the course of time as one grows and learns from one's experiences. Identifying one's core values may help us to achieve the goals, build relationships, and creatively solve problems in a way that aligns with one's own true self. Chavara's core values made him an exceptional leader and prophet of his time, and we find the following core values in his life.

6.1. Intimate Love with Jesus

Love of Jesus was the most fundamental characteristic that led Chavara throughout his life. In *Atmanuthapam* we read:

You are my Love, my joy and all my good fortune
If not with you, how could I live my life
My very breath, my food, my drink
What solace have I save in you ²⁷

These lines underscore an intimate love relationship Chavara had with Jesus. The love of Jesus was the very source of all his ministries. His love for Jesus enabled him to respond to his priestly vocation during the critical moments of the death of his parents and brother due to the epidemic. He always cherished a strong desire to live for Jesus. Fr Leopold Beccaro wrote: "Those who came to know him were convinced of his unusual humility, extraordinary charity, unqualified obedience and submissiveness to the Ordinary. As a result, all loved and respected

²⁶ <https://sg.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/what-are-core-values>; accessed on 17.07.2023.

²⁷ The Committee for the Cause of Blessed Chavara, *Compunction of the Soul*, Vol. II, Ernakulam, 1989, 10, Stanza no. 144.

him; and they put their trust in his words.”²⁸ These unique virtues were the results of his intimate love with Jesus. As *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states: “Those who with God’s help have welcomed Christ’s call and freely responded to it are urged by love of Christ to proclaim Good News everywhere in the world ... All Christ’s faithful are called to hand it on from generation to generation by professing the faith, by living it in fraternal sharing, and by celebrating it in liturgy and prayer.”²⁹ In short, Chavara’s love of Jesus urged him to live for Jesus and spread the Gospel values through diverse ministries.

6.2. Total Dedication to the Church

Chavara’s love and devotion to the mother Church inspired everyone. He was an ardent lover of the authorities of the Church and he always obeyed their instructions wholeheartedly even in difficult times. Unconditional obedience to the superiors and authorities in the Church was an outstanding virtue of Saint Chavara. His love for the Church, urged him to do everything for the development and growth of the Church. During the devastating Roccas schism, he wrote to the Holy Father in Rome for guidance and instructions.³⁰ The Holy Father then ordered the Babylon Patriarch to call back Roccas.³¹ Chavara’s mature and prudent interactions in the critical moments helped to maintain the unity of the Church in Kerala.³² He made timely interventions that prevented the division of his mother Church.³³ “Chavara with his apostolic zeal and pastoral vision was vigilant and prudent to nurture the faith and traditions of the Church.”³⁴ His varying ministries and undertakings in the Church contributed to the growth of the Church both spiritually and temporally.

²⁸ Leopold Beccaro, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Mannanam: St Joseph Monastery, 2003, 12.

²⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 8, Prologue: no. 3.

³⁰ Alex Sebastian Kollamkalam, “Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara: A Saintly Father and an Orthodox Teacher,” *Herald of the East* 15, 1 (January-June 2023), 169.

³¹ Cf. Biju Tharaniyil, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 17.

³² Biju Tharaniyil, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 21.

³³ Jossy Maria, “Kuriakose Elias Chavara: A True Son of the Church,” *Herald of the East* 15, 1 (January-June 2023), 88.

³⁴ Naiju Jose Kalambukattu, “Editorial: Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara, Father or Doctor of the Church?,” *Herald of the East* 15, 1 (January-June 2023), 4.

6.3. Commitment to and Concern for the Poor

Chavara had a special love towards the poor and the marginalized in the society. His sense of justice was so great that he worked for the equality and harmony in the society. During his time, people had not heard of old age homes in Kerala but Chavara opened a home for the orphans. He believed that the service done to the poor, the downtrodden, the sick, the elderly and the orphans was a service to Jesus (Mt 25:40). He took collections from the wealthy public for this noble cause, and arranged for a special pot in all the Christian families and suggested to offer a handful of rice as they cook food for the family. According to him, the day we don't do any good for others, then that day will not be counted in the Book of life. He encouraged the people of God to take care of the poor and the orphans.

6.4. Great Longing for the Salvation of his own Soul

Chavara always longed for sanctity and salvation. He was convinced of the need to be vigilant for one's own salvation. Leaving aside this world and going for asceticism was one of the dreams of Fr Thomas Palackal and Fr Thomas Porukara. Along with them, Chavara worked intensely for its realization. During his First Eucharistic celebration, he ardently prayed for this great intention. Along with Thomas Palackal and Thomas Porukara, as the founder of the first indigenous Congregation, his priority was the salvation of souls. Thus, we find him as a great visionary of his time who initiated a monastic way of life. His preaching and writings contained a longing to see the Lord and to have the experience of salvation. The introduction of various devotional practices for the spiritual growth of the priests and the lay people shed light on his zeal for the salvation and sanctity of human persons.

6.5. Ability to Read the Signs of the Times and Creative Responses

Reading the signs of the times was a special gift of Chavara. He knew the conditions of his people and the problems they faced, and he creatively responded to solve those problems in the best way possible. He initiated many reforms in the socio-cultural and religious realms of the society. He had realized that the integral growth of a generation could be materialized only through good education,³⁵ and therefore, he established schools attached to every parish church. It was a timely revolution to bring in a bright future to Kerala society. The ministries he initiated in the society underscore that he was an extraordinary person

³⁵ George Thanchan, "Foreword," in Biju Tharaniyil, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Kakkanad: Chavara Central Secretariat, 2004, 5.

with multifaceted talents and gifts, for he could tirelessly work for the holistic development of his fellow beings. He was a great visionary who worked for the realization of his dreams to transform the society and the Church.

7. Conclusion

Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara helped the Kerala Church to become spiritually matured and productive by his catechetical ministry. He was a catechetical genius who knew the power of the faith formation in transforming the individuals and the society. He helped the faithful to understand and respond to the guidance of the Holy Spirit in life and thus strengthened them to witness the faith in Christ. He emphasised the spiritual dimension of the mystery of the Church and urged the faithful to have a personal intimacy with Christ.³⁶

Chavara resembled the sun rising on the face of the earth: The sun revolves around the earth and dispels the darkness and thus causes the growth of all living beings. Being the source of light, it assists in the creation of jewels, diamonds and agates in the land, and pearls and corals in the sea and contributes to the metals like gold and silver, and with such an accomplishment it comes to its setting.³⁷ Chavara was a glaring catechetist who could generate faithful disciples of Jesus through his life, teaching, preaching and writings. The innovations he made in the horizons of the society and the Church are countless. They testify that he was a gifted catechetist who could bring the Gospel rays everywhere and make people see the virtues of faith, hope and love. A good Christian is formed and sustained in faith by true catechesis. Chavara realized it and made remarkable contributions as a catechetist to form the Christians with firm foundation on the Gospel values. He was able to touch the hearts of the children, adult, elderly, men and women and make everyone to walk on the Way (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22) as genuine disciples of the Lord. He brought in renewal and reformation in every realm, and he became an authentic prophet of the day.

³⁶ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 242, no. 921.

³⁷ Kuriakose Elisius Porukara, the second CMI Prior General in the Biography of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara, quoted in Paul Kalluveetil & Paulachan Kochappilly, ed., *The Lord of Heaven and Earth: Chavara Studies in Honour of Fr Lucas Vithuvattickal CMI*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2004, 3.