

KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA A TRUE SON OF THE CHURCH Part II

Jossy Maria CMC♦

Abstract: Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara had been 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. This paper, which is the second part of the article, 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 has undergone major transformations by various socio-religious reforms. With the initiatives of Chavara a new awareness had been created among the faithful that the church is a servant at the service of the humankind, irrespective of caste, creed, color, or nationality. His instructions had contributed much to the families to become well-knit units of the society.

Keywords: St Chavara, Social reformation, Kerala society, Education, *jnanakurudanmar*, Caste system, *Vedopadesham*, Mothering experiences, *Koodappirappukal*, Evangelization, *Alochana*, Confraternity for Happy Death, Association for Charities, *Upavishala*

♦ **Jossy Maria CMC** belongs to Pushparam CMC Province, Dehradun. She had her Theology studies at Dharmaram, Bengaluru and her doctorate at Angelicum, Rome. She has authored and published three books on Saint Chavara: 1. *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara the Founder of Women TOCD*, 2. *Fostering Feminine Genius: Saint Chavara's Theology of Women*. Another book on Chavara was co-authored with Fr Thomas Kochumuttom CMI. She has written a book on the Servant of God Mother Mary Celine, and has published the biography of Fr Leopold Beccaro OCD with the title *Malabarinte Manassarinja Mahamissionary*. Currently, she is a missionary in Peru and makes research on Saint Chavara's Contribution as Social Reformer and attempts to bring out the picture of Saint Chavara in the Manuscript sources. Email: jossymaria52@gmail.com

Saint Chavara and Social Awakening of Kerala

7. Social Context of Kerala in the Nineteenth Century

The Kerala society at the time of St Chavara was very much backward in social, cultural and educational levels. St Chavara was a visionary leader of the time who envisaged many plans for the spiritual and social progress of the Church and the society. In the nineteenth century, Kerala was thoroughly caste-ridden; it had the most rigid and elaborate caste structure in India. The low caste people were characterized as the poor and oppressed. They lived below poverty line, lacking even the minimum requirements for their survival in terms of food, clothing and housing.

They were not allowed to enter the Hindu temples, to bathe in temple ponds, and to go to the public markets. Kerala society was not based on the principles of freedom, equality, and social mobility. Neither men nor women of the low castes were allowed to wear clothes above their waist; any woman who wished to cover the upper part of her body was even made to pay special taxes. They were also prohibited from wearing ornaments and to construct houses with roof-tiles.¹ They were denied the right to education, property, development and participation. There prevailed untouchability and social, educational and economic backwardness were considered the criteria for the Scheduled Caste category. The Dalits had to break through the barrier of untouchability, not simply in its formal legal sense but in its wider social application.

Four major groups with strict hierarchical orders existed, namely, the Brahmins, *Kshathrias*, *Vaishyas* and *Shudras*. The lower castes population was numerically quite strong.² The *Pulayas* and the *Parayas* were the most inferior among the untouchables. They were not allowed to walk on the public roads, to go to markets and temples where even the animals might freely stray.³ Untouchability and unapproachability divided and degraded the society into opposing groups. The upper classes believed that not only the touch but even the proximity of certain classes caused pollution to them.⁴ These social groups had to keep some specified distance from each

¹ T. K. VeluPillai, *Travancore State Manual*, vol. 1, Thiruvananthapuram: Government Press, 1940, 825.

² Leela Gulati, Ramalingam, and I. S. Gulati, *Gender Profile, Kerala: Looking Back into History*, New Delhi: Royal Netherlands Embassy, 2000, 1-6.

³ Samuel Mateer, "The *Paraya* Caste in Travancore," *The Journal of the Asiatic Society of Britain and Ireland* (1884), 180.

⁴ Poet Kumaran Asan described them as: The untouchables were also made unseeable, unapproachable and even unhearable.

other according to the position each occupied in the social order.⁵ Those classes were termed non-caste Hindus.

Having visited Kerala in 1897, Swami Vivekananda commented on the ugly type of caste system that existed in the society and pictured Kerala as 'a mad house of religion'. This observation was made 26 years after the death of Chavara and it gives us a clear picture of the pitiable social conditions of Kerala society. In the present article, we shall discuss the role of Saint Chavara in the awakening of Kerala society and culture from the shackles of inhumane caste divisions and unhealthy traditions in the nineteenth century. The academic discussions and writings in Kerala have never represented the reformatory nature and the role of the person of Chavara for the awakening of Kerala society. The scholars who have dealt with the aspects of history, culture, modernization and awakening of Kerala have neglected the social relevance of Chavara's activities and often remained silent or ignored it willfully.⁶ Many scholars attempt to depict the contributions of social reformers, like Sree Narayana Guru, Chattampi Swamikal, Vaikom Mohammed Moulovi, V. T. Bhattathiripad, and so on as the progenitors of renaissance in the Kerala society. In all these discussions, the Christian contributions were ignored; even if they were mentioned, they referred only to the contributions of LMS, CMS, Basel Mission, etc. In these latter instances, historians attempt to depict them as mere agents of colonial modernity.⁷ It is against such a social background, studies on Chavara's organized attempt to modernize the Kerala society becomes relevant; he brought forth reformation and awakening to a great extent in the Kerala society in the nineteenth century. He was well-known for reaching out to the poor and played a major role in educating and uplifting people, especially in the lowest strata of the society. Mannanam was the animating centre from where all the activities in the parishes or villages were monitored.

8. Integral Social Vision of Chavara

Jesus' option for the poor was an important characteristic of the mission of the Catholic community in Malabar. Jesus began his mission by proclaiming the absolute priority of the Gospel for the poor (Lk 4:16-19). The ministry of Jesus was different from that of the leaders of the Old

⁵ C. N. Somarajan, "Foundations of Kerala Society and Politics," *Journal of Kerala Studies* 15 (March-September 1988), 105.

⁶ See P. K. Gopalakrishnan, *Keralathinte Samskarika Charitham* (Malayalam), Thiruvananthapuram: Kerala State Bhasha Institute, 2010.

⁷ K. N. Ganesh, *Reflections on Pre-Modern Kerala*, Thrissur: Cosmo Books, 2016, 263.

Testament by the fact that it was directed to the lost sheep of Israel (Lk 19:10). Pope John Paul II observed that Asia is a “continent of plentiful resources and great civilizations, but where some of the poorest nations on earth are to be found, and where more than half the population suffers deprivation, poverty and exploitation.”⁸ The church in India has to show a preferential love for the poor, the voiceless. The early church translated the Gospel of love into life making themselves a sharing community.

The vision that guided and motivated Chavara to introduce the social uplift programs was his love for the people whom he called *Koodappirappukal* (siblings). For Chavara, God was his *appan*, merciful father, and all His children were his brothers and sisters. He translated this faith into charity to have a community of fraternal love and sharing. His compassionate heart could recognize all the troubles of his neighbors as the troubles of his own. He accepted every human being as his brother or sister, for he dreamed of a casteless society.

The steps taken by Chavara for the social development were mainly comprised of educational reforms, uplift of the *dalit*, formation of leaders, renewal of the families, women empowerment, literary contributions and charity works. His approach towards those who were in the periphery was fourfold: welcoming, protecting, promoting, and integrating them into the mainstream of the society. For Chavara, as a Christian, it was a natural expression of his faith commitment to be involved in the movement for *dalit* liberation. The motive force behind all these activities was the transformation of the society.

9. Social Sensitivity and Peace

For Chavara, his social sensitivity meant to feel with the needs of the less privileged, the poor and the marginalized and share with them his resources without calculating the rewards. He was compassionate towards the needy. He was engaged in the dynamics of liberation and empowerment of the oppressed in order to attain liberation in view of universal harmony. He felt that the economic and social uplift of the semi-starved millions was essential to their welfare and freedom.

Chavara expressed his solidarity with the neglected and the abandoned. He gave up all types of luxurious ways of life and lived with the minimum facilities because he knew that any hint of luxury will

⁸ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, 34. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_06111999_ecclesia-in-asia.html; accessed on 18.09.2023.

counteract the credibility of his social commitment as a priest and a Christian leader. Pope John XXIII in the Encyclical *Pacem in Terris* highlighted human rights as the foundation of peace in the human society⁹ and it can be firmly established only if the order laid down by God be dutifully observed.¹⁰ It emphasizes the importance of the cooperation of all men and women of good will in establishing peace. It speaks the language of universal brotherhood and solidarity of human beings. Since peace means absolute respect for the order lay down by God,¹¹ Chavara believed that unless and until the social discrimination had been removed from the minds and lives of the people peace would not reign in the society. Peace results from that harmony built into the human society by its divine Founder and actualized by the human beings as they thirst for ever greater justice.

With the initiatives of Chavara a new awareness had been created among the members of the church that the church is a servant at the service of the humankind, irrespective of caste, creed, color, or nationality. He brought an attitudinal change in the mindset of the official church and brought the church into a new relationship with the contemporary world. His vision represented a new concept of the society. The social vision of Chavara was an integral part of the evangelizing ministry of the Church and his social vision sought to proclaim the Gospel and make it present in the complex network of social relations. Chavara attempted to interpret the social realities in the light of the Gospel values.

Chavara's social consciousness enabled him to work for the integration of social reformation with his spiritual and apostolic visions. As he felt that he was called to a more direct social mission, all his activities had an essential dimension of social justice and liberation, for the Christians, on those days, were not an exception from the evil practices of untouchability and other caste discriminations.¹² They

⁹ John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, 126. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem.html; accessed on 18.09.2023.

¹⁰ John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, 1.

¹¹ John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, 1.

¹² See Scaria Zacharia, ed., *The Acts and Decrees of the Synod of Diamper 1599*, Hosanna Mount: Indian Institute of Christian Studies, 1994, 31-32.

practiced caste system and followed the rules of purity and of pollution, and the Synod of Diamper prohibited such practices by the Christians.¹³

10. Care for the Servants

Kerala witnessed different kinds of social discriminations against the low caste people in the nineteenth century. They were considered slaves even at the time of Chavara, and their human dignity was not recognized. Chavara's spiritual vision led him to be an innovator of many socio-pastoral, cultural, educational and social reforms. While he most conscientiously lived the life of a Religious, dedicated to the love and service of God, the same divine love in him inspired him to devote himself, as much as he could, to the love and service of fellow human beings. As a man of contemplation, Chavara conversed with God and sought His presence in the deepest realm of his heart. At the same time, he was an altruist – a man for others.

Chavara's counsels to the Christian families given in the form of the "Testament of a Loving Father" is universally applicable and are relevant to this day. In it Chavara had instructed the families to take care of the spiritual needs of their servants: "Masters should know that they are responsible for caring for the needs of their servants and in assisting them in their spiritual welfare."¹⁴ He also instructed them to limit the number of domestic workers in the families and spoke about the just wages to be paid to them regularly. Chavara had insisted that the domestic workers must be sent for the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist.¹⁵ His instruction about just wages and honoring the dignity of workers was something very unique and it was unheard of in Kerala. He specified: "Never withhold just wages from laborers or make undue delay in paying them, because it is an offence that cries out to God for justice. Do not insult the poor; neither should you vex them because if God sees them weeping, he will surely wreak vengeance on you."¹⁶ By insisting on paying decent wages to the workers at the right time without having them to wait for long, Chavara respected the dignity of human person, who has been created in the image of God.

11. House of Charity

Chavara expressed his love for the needy in a concrete manner by instituting a 'House of Charity' for the less privileged in the society. It is

¹³ Zacharia, ed., *The Acts and Decrees of the Synod of Diamper 1599*, 49; 202-203.

¹⁴ Chavara, *Chavarul*, I: 23. CWC., vol. 4, *Letters*, IX:10.

¹⁵ Chavara, *Chavarul*, 1:23. CWC., vol. 4, *Letters*, IX: 10

¹⁶ Chavara, *Chavarul*, 1:18. CWC., vol. 4, *Letters*, IX: 10.

heart-warming to see the way he encouraged or motivated his parishioners to open a house of charity in Kainakary. He presented before them many examples of people who were engaged in nursing the sick, helping the poor from European countries and also persons known to them, such as Father Ouseph Chavara from their own parish. The letter he had written to his parishioners motivating them to open a house of charity was inspiring.¹⁷ He knew very well that the worst discrimination, the poor had to undergo was the denial of spiritual care to them. Therefore, he made books available for those who live there and even arranged a library for them.¹⁸ In his 'Testament', he requested the members of his congregation to offer to the house of charity some of the relics from his collections as a sign of protection and salvation to them.¹⁹

12. Chavara, an Apostle of the Families

Chavara's act of writing of the 'Family Code' which he named 'The Testament of a Loving Father,' (*Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul*) was socially a responsible act that positively influenced the community, the society, and the world at large. He prepared this insightful and practical document on 13 February 1868, and it has reached millions of families all over the world because it has been translated into various Indian and foreign languages which has facilitated the renewal of families. Saju Chackalackal observed that this insightful and down-to-earth document, surprisingly, the first of its kind in the known history of the Church, offers practical direction to families in leading a God-fearing as well as socially commendable life. It emphasizes the role of parents and family members regarding the training of their children in religious, moral, and social values. He bequeathed to his beloved family members and relatives in his native village Kainakary and through them to the entire human family, this Testament, which, he believed, would keep him united with them by the regular reading of the text and following the instructions contained therein. While the biblical insights and inspiring anecdotes contained in the Testament attest to the fact that Saint Chavara had a deep sense of Christian foundations for leading a genuine family life, his insightful practical directives indicate how thoroughly he understood the dynamics of a family, especially on grooming children and nurturing discipline within the family. Family is the heaven on earth. It is with the intention of transforming all the families into heaven

¹⁷ Chavara, CWC., vol. 4, *Letters* IX: 11.

¹⁸ Chavara, CWC., vol. 4, *Letters* V:15.

¹⁹ Chavara, CWC., vol. 4, *Letters* VI:4, para 4.

on earth, that he, in a spirit of prayer and discernment and yearning for “God’s light and peace,” invited the family members to cultivate love, order, and peace, even if that would call for sacrificing personal convenience and comfort.

Being convinced that family is the “image of heaven”,²⁰ and the foundation of the Church, Chavara had great concern for the well-being of Christian families. He defined family:

A family is the community of a few people joined together in blood relation and bound together by a bond of love, where the members exhibit mutual respect and practice obedience to parents and walk in peace before the Lord and the people; and each one according to this proper state of life seeks to attain eternal salvation and lives peacefully.²¹

The family is the most precious human institution, and every couple has the important responsibility to safeguard it against the numerous forces that seek to destroy or weaken it. Chavara was a champion of families and his Testament to his parish community was a great treatise for effective family life. He gave importance to ‘family-centred spirituality’. He instructed his parishioners on the significance of family prayer, family timetable or time management, Sunday observance, relationship with their servants, etc. He inculcated in the family members their solidarity with the poor and sick and instructed them to visit and serve them on Sundays.²²

Chavara, being a devotee of the Holy Family, instructed the parents to guide their children in devotion to the Holy Family of Nazareth.²³ Chavara’s meditative eyes rested on the tender love of this unique couple for each other and for their child²⁴; on their fidelity to religious duties of prayer and worship; on their dedication to work as a means of earning their livelihood.²⁵ In his *Atmanuthapam* there are many lines in which Chavara praises the mutual commitment and subjection of Joseph and Mary.²⁶

²⁰ Chavara, *Chavarul* (Introduction), CWC., vol. 4, *Letters* IX: 10.

²¹ Chavara, *Chavarul* (Introduction), CWC., vol 4, *Letters* IX: 10.

²² Chavara, *Chavarul*, I: 22. CWC., vol. 4, *Letters*, IX:10.

²³ Chavara, *Chavarul*, II: 2. CWC., vol. 4, *Letters*, IX:10.

²⁴ Chavara, *Atmanuthapam*, cantos V: 110-114.

²⁵ Chavara, *Atmanuthapam*, cantos V: 158-174.

²⁶ Chavara, *Atmanuthapam*, cantos V: 118-126.

Chavara's instruction on mutual respect of husband and wife is considered very unique and original. He said: "By seeing the respect of the father towards mother, children respect her; in the same way mother's respect to the father is the model for children to respect their father."²⁷ In *Mulieris Dignitatem*, Pope John Paul II brought forth a new interpretation for the mutual subjection of husband and wife, which he called "the Gospel innovation" based on the Letter to the Ephesians 5:21-33.²⁸ The text reads: "All the reasons in favor of the 'subjection' of woman to man in marriage must be understood in the sense of a 'mutual subjection' of both 'out of reverence for Christ'."²⁹ At that time, in many circles, woman's subordination to her husband was often described as her punishment because of Eve's sin. But Chavara propagated the idea of 'mutual subjection' and mutual respect in view of developing healthy and holistic relationships within the families.

Once Chavara said, "I left my home and parents for the sake of God. Now I am writing this from Elthuruth. I have my brethren here who love me more than my own brothers and sisters. Tomorrow if I go to Koonammavu, I will have the same experience there as well; so also, if I go to Mannanam or to Vazhakulam."³⁰ In fact, he did not leave his family, instead it was widened, or expanded in order to embrace all the families as his own. Thus, the whole world became his own family.

13. Marital Spirituality or Family Spirituality

Despite its importance and relevance, marital spirituality is seldom talked about. According to Pope Francis' *Amoris Laetitia*, marital spirituality is the spirituality of the bond in which divine love dwells.³¹ The couples must strive for this spirituality during their daily household activities, troubles and struggles, joys and hopes. The Pope says: "The spirituality of family love is made up of thousands of small but real gestures."³² It is not so much by doing extraordinary things, but by

²⁷ Chavara, *Chavarul*, II: 9. CWC., vol. 4, *Letters*, IX:10.

²⁸ John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 24. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1988/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19880815_mulieris-dignitatem.html; accessed on 18.09.2023.

²⁹ John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 24.

³⁰ Chavara, CWC., vol. 4: *Letters*, IX:7

³¹ Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 315. https://www.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf; accessed on 18.09.2023.

³² Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 315.

paying attention to small and seemingly insignificant things with love. Such actions of love are the ingredients of true marital spiritual life. God dwells deep within the marital love that gives him glory.

In the third canto of Chavara's *Atmanuthapam*, a meditation on the deep mystery of Incarnation, he pondered deeply on mothering experiences of Mother Mary such as conception³³, pregnancy,³⁴ childbirth,³⁵ kissing and embracing of the newborn baby,³⁶ breast-feeding,³⁷ and so on, and presented these as spiritual practices. Those events are women's God experience and should be cherished, appreciated, celebrated and valued as such. In the Old Testament, priests were asked to make atonement and to offer sin offering for the woman who gave birth to her child (Lev 12:6-8). Whereas here is a priest who contemplates the great gift of giving birth and breast-feeding etc., and presents them as spiritual exercises and not as acts meant for atonement and sin offering. These events are to be celebrated and no more considered taboo for women. Here is an example of his contemplation on the experience of mother and child while breast-feeding:

With tender love, the mother breast-fed
the babe in joy, I long to see.
The holy awe, the mother enjoyed,
While feeding him, I long to see.³⁸

Chavara could be seen as a champion of restoring dignity to women's body and their mothering experiences.

To maintain true love and strong bond of communion in the families and the communities, Chavara had instructed to have real concern for those who are sick in them. His biographers have it recorded that he practiced it in his own life. Highlighting the example of Father Chacko Valliara, his nephew, he narrated his parishioners how persons were transformed by serving the sick.³⁹ He shared his own life experience with

³³ Chavara, *Atmanuthapam*, Cantos III: 8-10.

³⁴ Chavara, *Atmanuthapam*, Cantos III: 11-12.

³⁵ Chavara, *Atmanuthapam*, Cantos III: 23-24.

³⁶ Chavara, *Atmanuthapam*, Cantos V: 83-90.

³⁷ Chavara, *Atmanuthapam*, Cantos V: 37-40.

³⁸ Chavara, *Atmanuthapam*, Cantos III: 37-40.

³⁹ Letter to his parishioners encouraging them to open a house of charity in Kainakary, Chavara, CWC., vol. 4, *Letters* IX:11.

his parishioners of having strong family bond that prevailed in the monasteries where he lived.⁴⁰

14. Parents as Saints

In the Apostolic Letter *Gaudete et exultate*, Pope Francis says: "I like to contemplate the holiness present in the patience of God's people: in those parents who raise their children with immense love and sacrifices... This is the holiness which we often find in our 'next door neighbors' who live amidst us and 'reflect God's presence'."⁴¹ Again, the Pope tells: "Our very parents become *living saints* with all their self-emptying concern and care for us."⁴² "Are you a parent or grandparent? Be holy by patiently teaching the little ones how to follow Jesus."⁴³ Meditating on the birth of Jesus, Chavara conveyed the message that the birth of every child is a holy and joyful event, and it unites the couples and the family members. The sleepless nights of nursing the children at their sick bed, postponing of so many activities, career sacrifices, etc., are some of the sacrifices of the parents. The prize of parenting comes at a heavy price.

Much before Pope Francis instructed the people of God to consider their parents as saints, Saint Chavara admired his mother as a saint. The life she lived in the family caring for her children and husband was enough for him to consider her a saint. Before receiving the Holy Communion or in preparation to welcome Jesus into his heart, Chavara first invited Mother Mary and his other favorite 'mother saints', including his own mother,⁴⁴ to be present with him when Jesus would enter his heart. He believed that he was not worthy to welcome Jesus into his heart, and therefore, he requested the presence and the virtues of these saints in his heart. It was his strong belief that his mother was deeply loved by God in the heavenly abode and that she would continue to support him in his faith journey.

15. Love for Nature and Eco-Spirituality

Saint Chavara's love for the nature or his eco-spiritual vision was evident in the process of searching and purchasing the land for the monasteries and other institutions. While planning to buy a new plot of

⁴⁰ Chavara, CWC., vol. 4, *Letters*, IX: 11.

⁴¹ Francis, *Gaudete et exultate*, 7. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20180319_gaudete-et-exultate.html; accessed on 18.09.2023.

⁴² Francis, *Gaudete et exultate*, 6, 14.

⁴³ Francis, *Gaudete et exultate*, 14.

⁴⁴ Chavara, CWC., vol. 3, *Dhyanasallapangal*, 49.

land for a monastery at Chanaganassery, Chavara instructed the concerned person: "The place should be sufficiently distant from the marketplace so that the noise of the market may not disturb the life in the monastery. There should be water. There should be a river close by so that we can conveniently reach the place by boat. The place should be sufficiently large with big trees around to moderate the heat. Besides the space for the construction of the monastery, there should be place also for gardens, etc."⁴⁵ Chavara was a hard-working person, lived a simple life and he loved animals, too. Mannanam Chronicle records his love for animal husbandry:

The *Valia Priorachan* Father Chavara bought a she-buffalo for Rs. 5/- and kept it where the monastery had a marshy paddy field (*kary*) near the place called Vennathottiyil. Father Prior tended the buffalo with special care. In the course of time she gave birth to many calves – so many that some of them did not survive. Finally, the remaining twelve were sold in the *kary* itself for more than Rs. 300/- by auction. Mannanam Monastery bought one of them named, Manappara for Rs. 45/- and kept it in the same field as a memento of the past.⁴⁶

16. Pooling of Local Resources

Chavara's leadership qualities included pooling of resources for the projects he initiated for the welfare of the community. He did it by motivating the people of the locality. In 1860 when the convent for women was getting ready at Puthenpally Monsignor Bernardine Baccinelli wrote letters to the Priors of Carmelite monasteries and Carmelite cloistered nuns for financial help. The letter reads: "The building is still incomplete for lack of funds and I do not know when we would be able to accomplish this task. ..." ⁴⁷ But the approach of Chavara was to depend on local resources, not to look for foreign help. Even for the construction of seminary and center for higher education he did not look for finance from the abroad. He was a motivator, facilitator, and an

⁴⁵ Letter to Father Cherian, Parish Priest of Changanasserry, on 7 April 1868, Chavara, CWC., vol. 4, *Letters*, VIII:4.

⁴⁶ ASJM, Mannanam, *Mannanam Chronicle* (MSS), vol. 4, 61.

⁴⁷ AGOCD., *Plut.*35e. Letter of Monsignor Baccinelli to the Provincials, Priors and Religious of the Carmelite Order, dated 29 June 1860; APF., see also *Indie Orientali* 1859-1861, Vol.17, ff. 1420-1421. The letters written on the same date to both men and women religious have the same content with a slight difference.

inspiring leader. Through the circular letter written to the parish priests in 1850, he motivated the priests to raise fund for the same.⁴⁸

The following testimonies loudly speak that within seven or eight months a two-storied convent building was ready at Koonammavu, that too, with the generous contribution of the local people. The sisters, too, knew the source of money for the construction of the convent. They wrote: "Our Fathers by their efforts and their letters, inspire some persons, to give us donations... Once or twice loans were taken from the monastery and some others and works were continued."⁴⁹ They have recorded the name of the persons who contributed the wood and other materials for the construction work.⁵⁰ The sisters continued, "Towards the end of the work, too, once it happened like this. Seeing that the money was over they said, "Let us send a letter to Kaduthuruthy, Muttuchira and see whether we get some money or not."⁵¹ It was a real wonder. They collected Rs. 600/- in cash and sent it, through the Father Superior of Mannanam monastery.⁵² Chavara wrote the details of the donations he received, especially from the parishes of Kuttanadu, in his dairy.⁵³ Regarding the money collected for the construction of the convent, on 20 February 1867 when the construction was just completed, Monsignor Baccinelli reported it to Propaganda Fide: "Their house is constructed with the alms given for this purpose by the faithful of some churches and priests; in the meantime they live, it can be said, in a hut miserable in everything."⁵⁴ Not only for the construction of the convent but their daily life expenses are met with their own money not with any contribution from the bishop, he testified: "They sustain themselves with the dowry (patrimony) that they must bring with; for three poor I provide for the food at the rate of about 14 coins a month for each one."⁵⁵

Other contemporary documents testify to the fact of local contributions for the construction of the convent. *Alochanapusthakam* clearly bear witness to the fact that even bishop did not donate anything for the same. "When there was no hope at all, still they hoped against

⁴⁸ Chavara, CWC., vol. 4, *Letters*, IX:2.

⁴⁹ CKC, vol. 1: 46.

⁵⁰ CKC, vol. 1: 47-48.

⁵¹ CKC, vol. 1: 48.

⁵² CKC, vol. 1: 48.

⁵³ Chavara, CWC., vol. 1: *Chronicles*, 174-175.

⁵⁴ Baccinelli Report 1867, Q. 72, p. 76.

⁵⁵ Baccinelli Report 1867, Q. 72, p. 76.

hope. Without anything from the Very Reverend Archbishop and from the *Pidiyary*, in a miraculous way, so to say, from the local churches, from the faithful and in a manner unheard of (as a new news) from the parish priests, obtained about Rs. 8,000/- most of which were collected through letters. Thus within a short span of time, the convent was built in a fine model...."⁵⁶ *The Chronicle of Mannanam Monastery* adds to the reason why they could not receive any thing from Baccinelli or from *Pidiyary* system: "But it would take time for the collections of *Pidiyary* to come and funds were needed now for the seminary and other beneficial activities undertaken by the archbishop."⁵⁷ Bishop's main interest at that time was the opening of the seminary at Puthenpally⁵⁸ and to buy a land and construct a monastery for Latins at Manjummal for which two boys were studying by staying with the novices at Koonammavu monastery.⁵⁹ This has been corroborated by the report of Baccinelli to Rome in 1867. He says, "Another one [monastery] emerges now, the foundations of which have been completed, and this will be the first one for the Latins."⁶⁰

The story of the construction of the Koonammavu convent gives evidence to the influence of Chavara, the recognized leader of the people. The people were ready to support generously whenever he approached them for help and thus the convent was built in seven or eight months with the generous help of the local people.

17. Imparting Education for Social Empowerment

The following section deals with the educational vision of St Chavara against the socio-economic and educational background of Kerala in nineteenth century. Chavara a man of unique vision realized education as the best means of human uplift and social mobility. His contributions laid a strong foundation for the educational, social, and financial development of Kerala.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the state government of Travancore began to take interest in the field of education in line with

⁵⁶ ASJM, *Alochana*, 139. (Book of Consultation of the Monastery at Mannanam), 1864-1871. It is the record of the discussions and deliberations of the monthly council meeting of the TOCD Superiors of all the monasteries with Chavara and Father Leopold, the Delegate Provincial, held at Mannanam Monastery (1864-1871).

⁵⁷ Chavara, CWC., vol. 1 *Chronicles*, 130.

⁵⁸ The seminary at Puthenpally was opened on 15 August 1866.

⁵⁹ Chavara, CWC., vol. 1 *Chronicles*, 132.

⁶⁰ Cf. Baccinelli Report, 1867, Q. 63, p. 73.

the Protestant missionaries. Political leaders, for example, Gouri Parvathi Bai, with the assistance of Diwan Colonel Munro, introduced a system of free education under state control in 1817.⁶¹ But this was only the privilege of upper caste males of the time. Both the Hindus and the Protestants profited out of this.

Catholics were not allowed to step into these institutions. Monsignor Baccinelli cleared his position in these words: "I do not allow anyone to go to them, as even to those of the gentiles, and if anyone goes there, I punish him until he leaves. I tolerate only for prudential reasons, and for not being able to do otherwise, that some goes to schools, that a little ago the government has erected. However, there too the teacher is a catholic and errors against the faith are not taught."⁶²

Realizing that the catholic community would even remain subjugated if they did not move with the times, Chavara decided that the religious congregation should concentrate on educational work. He knew that education is the key to development. He opened schools where apart from Christian doctrines, Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic in vernacular were taught. Monsignor Baccinelli reported to Rome that in all the schools in the diocese, "it is taught to read, write, calculate, compose well in good Malabar language, etc. ... In these schools the English language, history of India, geography, etc, are taught."⁶³

18. Popularization of Education

Chavara marked the beginning of the popularization and reformation of education in the Catholic Church in Kerala by practically executing the motto, "A school for a Church." Fr Kuriakose Elias Chavara established the first school for the dalits at Arpoocara in 1864,⁶⁴ and initiated the popularization and reformation of education in Kerala.

Numerous documents testify that under the leadership of Chavara several schools were established attached to the churches and monasteries from 1864. Till then, the Catholics had no opportunity to educate their children because Monsignor Baccinelli was very much against the Catholics going to the schools run by the schismatics and

⁶¹ V. NagamAiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, vol. I, Thiruvananthapuram: Gazetteers Department, Kerala Council for Historical research, 1999, 475.

⁶² Baccinelli Report 1867: Q. 51, pp. 70-71.

⁶³ Baccinelli Report 1867: Q. 51, pp. 70-71.

⁶⁴ *Alochana*, Archives of St Joseph's Monastery, Mannanam, (ASJM), The Book of Consultation of the Monastery at Mannanam, 1864-1871, p. 139.

heretics. He allowed them in certain cases to go to the schools run by the government.⁶⁵ i) Historical documents show that there is a steady increase of the number of Catholic schools after the appointment of Fr Chavara as the Vicar General. It deserves our attention that the number of schools which was only one in 1864 rose to 42 by the year 1866 and became 191 by the year 1867. This highlights the efforts of the TOCD priests under the leadership of Chavara, the Prior and the Vicar General. After 1861, when Chavara was appointed the Vicar General of the Syrian Christians, there was a surge in the number of schools because of his tireless efforts of Chavara and the TOCD priests.

In the official report submitted to the Propaganda Fide in Rome on the state of the Christians of the Eastern Church in the Vicariate apostolic of Verapoly in 1867, Archbishop Bernardino Baccinelli mentioned the number of schools as 191 attached to 104 Suriani Parishes and the subjects taught to the students: Besides Catechism on Sundays, they were taught to read, write, calculate, compose well in Malayalam, etc., on weekdays.⁶⁶ It marked the beginning of reformation of education in Kerala. Chavara efficiently executed the idea 'a school for a church', (*Pallikkoru pallikkoodam*) and inaugurated a social awakening.

Chavara established a Sanskrit School, attached to St Joseph's Monastery at Mannanam in 1846. Inspired by St Ephrem Chavara explained to the priests that education brings sight to the blind, the blind of spirit as well as the blind of sight.⁶⁷ He envisaged different stages of learning, language study, study of other subjects, etc., for he was convinced that those who are not educated are spiritually blind (*jnanakurudanmar*). According to him, it was due to this blindness that the Christians in Kerala lacked the seed and sapling of sanctity. On 25 March 1850, he had sent a circular to the parish priests to motivate them for a centre of education, where Malayalam, Tamil, Latin, Syriac, etc., could be taught and to collect from the parishioners a contribution of ten percent of the income for the running of the centre.

Chavara instilled in the parish priests the significance of education and made them realize that the knowledge alone could uplift a

⁶⁵ Baccinelli Report, 1867, Q. 53, p. 70.

⁶⁶ ACO., Archivi Congregazioni Orientali 1862-1877. Scritture referrite Congressi Malabarensi, ff. 150-172.

⁶⁷ Chavara, CWC, vol. 4 *Letters*, IX:2. Circular Letter to parish priests written on 25 March 1850.

community.⁶⁸ He reminded them of the grave responsibility in sustaining and spreading education: "The priests are duty-bound to teach the faithful,"⁶⁹ he maintained; he also insisted the necessity of an integral education as well as the religious foundation of educational action.⁷⁰ "One school for one church" was the rule. His educational contributions laid a strong foundation for a just society in which all human beings were considered worthy of erudition, justice, respect and dignity. Since October 1864, under the direct guidance of Chavara, the TOCD community was committed to uplift the people of God, especially the marginalized. Their main concern was to support the church - at the local and regional level - in assisting people at every stage of their development and growth. Responding to their right to education of the *Dalits*, we see twenty points of pastoral action, introducing practical guidelines to help plan and assess pastoral care of people on the periphery.

When Fr Kuriakose Elias Chavara was the Vicar General of the archdiocese of Verapoly, the idea "a school for a church" was executed among the churches in Kerala. 'By implementing the idea', he marked the beginning of a popularization and reformation of education. Monsignor Leonard Mellano's circular letter on 7 November 1872 stated the crisis the schools in the vicariate faced due to a lack of interest from the part of the parents to send the children to the school, some schools were without students, and without teachers. ... The remedy he suggested was to open a Sanskrit school in every parish. He offered to provide textbooks for the said schools.

Education for the marginalized was a solid step against the caste-dominated and privatized form of education prevalent in Kerala. Although the new schools were attached to churches and supervised by the priests of the monasteries, education was meant for the general public; access to education was open to all without the caste or color-based discriminations: he aimed at inclusive and integral education of all. Chavara desired that the kingdom of God of all-pervading love,

⁶⁸ Chavara, CWC, vol. 4 *Letters*, IX:2. Circular Letter to parish priests written on 25 March 1850.

⁶⁹ Chavara, CWC, vol. 4, *Letters*, IX:2. Circular Letter to parish priests written on 25 March 1850.

⁷⁰ Chavara, CWC., vol.4, *Letters* IX:2 Circular Letter to parish priests on 25 March 1850.

should reach all people, all minds, the rich as well as the poor, the oppressor as well as the oppressed.

19. Evangelization and Integral Human Welfare

Instilling new vigor and enthusiasm for evangelization in the priests, Pope Francis pointed out that many of our brothers and sisters live without the strength, light and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ, without a community of faith to support them, without meaning and a goal in life.⁷¹ In his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* he instructed that more than by fear of going astray, my hope is that we will be moved by the fear of remaining shut up within structures which give us a false sense of security, within rules which make us harsh judges, within habits which make us feel safe, while at our door people are starving and Jesus does not tire of saying to us: "Give them something to eat" (Mk 6:37).⁷² The Pope wants us to rediscover mission as the priority. Narrating the sad plight of the vicariate of Varapuzha, Leopold Beccaro wrote to Rome on 23 November 1873 regarding the evangelization kept in a low key.⁷³

Chavara took initiatives to amplify the evangelization of the downtrodden (Mt 28:18). He instructed all the monasteries to get involved in the evangelization by taking the good news of Jesus to the periphery and he made them realize that it cannot be left to the professional ministers, missionaries, and evangelists. Chavara had genuine love towards the marginalized and the less privileged of the society, especially the *pulayas* of his time. In 1860s, on the part of Chavara, we see an urgency to bring them to the mainstream of the society. The document called *Alochana* and the *Chronicle of Mannanam Monastery* vol.3, many pages of the *Chronicle of Varkey Parappuram*, and other contemporary documents speak of the fresh enthusiasm of Chavara and the TOCD monasteries towards the evangelization of the people of the suppressed classes. Baccinelli appreciated their ministry of evangelization among the *Pulayas* and the celebration of sacraments for them.⁷⁴

⁷¹ The Congregation for the Clergy, Instruction "The pastoral conversion of the Parish community in the service of the evangelising mission of the Church", on 20 July 2020, 3.

⁷² Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), n. 49: AAS 105 (2013), 1040.

⁷³ Leopold, *Leopold Missionariyude Kathukal*, I:1.

⁷⁴ Baccinelli Report 1867, Q. 68, p. 75.

Till the nineteenth century Syrian Christians were not willing to preach the Gospel to the lower castes. As we see in the canons of the Synod of Diamper, Christians also enjoyed the privileges of the upper caste and practiced untouchability, apparently sharing the value system of the then Kerala society that was divided into different classes and castes.

According to Pope John Paul II, "Solidarity is not a feeling of vague compassion or superficial tenderness for the misfortunes of so many people near and far. On the contrary, it is firm and constant determination to cooperate for the common good."⁷⁵ Saint Chavara believed that the service of faith and the promotion of justice could not be separated, because they are radically united. Fr Leopold Beccaro reported to his superiors in Rome regarding the process of welcoming the *Pulayas* to the church. According to his letters, 30 persons were given baptism in the month of July 1860 and 300 people were preparing themselves to be admitted to the Church. He also noted that when baptism was administered to *Pulayas* there was strong criticism from various sections of the society, including Christians. Their comments were like this: the church in which they were given baptism was polluted; even the sacrament of baptism was contaminated.⁷⁶ Fr Mathew Palakunnel also had mentioned the objection and reactions against welcoming the low caste people to the Church.⁷⁷ They were admitted to the church only after making proper preparation by way of retreats, catechism classes, etc. Fr Leopold Beccaro reported that the neophytes learned by heart the 'Catechism of Saint Bellarmine', which was taught by lay persons. It was conducted in some rooms of the TOCD novitiate house and some other houses in Koonammavu.⁷⁸ Such classes were conducted also in some other districts under the inspection of TOCD Fathers. Chavara prepared a text for the 'rite of baptism of adults',⁷⁹ which he translated from Latin to Syriac. Chavara made clear that the

⁷⁵ John Paul II, *Sollicitudine Socialis*, 38. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html; accessed on 18.09.2023.

⁷⁶ Mathew Thundathil, trans., *Father Leopold Beccaro OCD, Theresian Missionary (1837-1914)*, Trivandrum: CIPH, 2014, 83.

⁷⁷ Palakunnel Velliachante Nalagamam [Malayalam], p. 14.

⁷⁸ Leopold Beccaro, *Leopoldu Missionaryude Kathukal* [Malayalam], ed. Jossy, Aluva: CMC Publications, 2010, II:1, pp. 29-32.

⁷⁹ ASJM, *Chronicle of Mannanam Monastery*, vol. 3 [MSS], 1864-1871; see also Palakunnel Velliachante Nalagamam [Malayalam], p. 14.

celebrations of the sacraments are the moments of encounter between Christ and the faithful, an encounter that deepens the faith.

The efforts taken by Chavara to bring up those at the periphery calls for a pastoral conversion inspiring us to be authentic missionaries. Chavara's mission of evangelization was Kingdom-oriented. He gave sufficient importance to conversion and transformation of the members through the power of the Gospel, which could be seen in his continued efforts to make them grow in faith and assimilate and incorporate them to the mainstream of the community. It also indicated that the admission of the *dalits* to Christianity was not only an addition of members by way of baptism, but also this resulted in a change of their identity, improved social status, dignity and better social and cultural progress through education which was denied for them for centuries.

Chavara wanted to inculcate in the low-caste a healthy awareness of self-worth. He wished that they would not be ostracized from the society; but for this they must develop self-confidence and live a sound moral life. With these objectives he opened schools at Mannanam and Arpookara, and later at Edathua, Pulinkunnu and Kainakari, which were all accessible to the deprived classes. Introducing 'noon feeding' in the schools he assured their regular attendance. He insisted on decent wages to workers at the completion of the work.⁸⁰ The two pious associations, namely Confraternity for Happy Death and Association for Charities (*upavishala*) were meant to help, especially those of the lowest in the society to have a peaceful and happy death. Chavara, in his circular letter to his confreres and in his *Chavarul*, stressed the right of everyone to live a decent life and the duty to support it.

20. Vedopadesham for the Downtrodden

The *Alochana* records the thorough planning and preparations of the TOCD Fathers to commence the classes for the *dalit* children and people in the peripheries. It was decided to encourage the people of the locality to build a small structure to house the school for the *pulayas*. Since it was assessed that it may take longer, they decided to spend the money from Mannanam Monastery and to begin the school on 9 October 1864 itself. On that day, at 10 am, 75 people both men and women gathered at the Monastery, and they were taught, and the Good News was preached to them.⁸¹ During the following months more members were added to the

⁸⁰ Chavara, *Chavarul*, I:18. CWC., vol. 4, *Letters*, IX:10.

⁸¹ ASJM, *Alochana*, September 1864, *Alochana*, p. 26.

group. Father Ephrem of Mannanam Monastery prepared the group by preaching retreat to them; out of them nineteen men and women received baptism in a solemn celebration in the Mannanam Monastery Chapel. The new Christians were instructed to join for the Eucharistic celebration daily at 5.00 am, which was offered specially for them.⁸² *Alochana* gives the picture of how they were cared for and how the whole community of Mannanam and other institutions were involved in their upbringing and further development in faith by raising their social status. Besides the pre-baptismal catechumentate, the post-baptismal catechism was arranged. 'Vedopadesham'⁸³ was the common term used for instructing and incorporating them into faith. Similar type of instruction was continued for their children and the adults.

TOCD Fathers took care of 42 schools in the central Travancore in 1866.⁸⁴ Schools were opened in Elthuruth and Ambazhakadu as well. When all the parish priests gathered for their annual retreats, the Prior of Mannanam Monastery reminded them of their greater responsibility to educate the children of their locality.⁸⁵

21. The Table of the Lord

Gathering around the Eucharistic table, eating from the same bread, and drinking from the same cup together constituted a new culture of uniting the newly baptized members. The 'Altar of the Lord' or the sacrifice of the Holy Mass remained the unifying factor of the newly formed Christian community. They were brought to a new freedom because until then they were not allowed to enter any place of worship; they had no right to worship. They were encouraged to worship, to enjoy, and experience their communion with the Lord and with one another. The Fathers took keen interest to gather the new Christians on Sundays to care for their pastoral needs; and their number was 100 in 1866,⁸⁶ and 250 in 1870 in different places of Kuttanad (Pulincunnu, Edathua, Changanassery, Kallorkadu, etc.).⁸⁷ They were all well-mannered, devout, and of good character, the priests observed.⁸⁸ The first Holy

⁸² ASJM, *Alochana*, p. 105.

⁸³ 'Veda' stands for religion as well as sacred Scripture. 'Upadesam' is instruction. They were instructed on both the Bible and the Christian religion.

⁸⁴ ASJM, *Alochana*, p. 111.

⁸⁵ ASJM, CMM, vol. 3, p. 122.

⁸⁶ ASJM, *Alochana*, p. 129.

⁸⁷ ASJM, *Alochana*, p. 269.

⁸⁸ ASJM, *Alochana*, p. 111.

Communion of the children was celebrated on the feast day of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Histroy testifies that at Mannanam, there were two communities of Christians; the Holy Mass was celebrated for the new group of Christians separately; and to this day this division is perpetuated.⁸⁹

22. Midday Meal

Introducing midday meal, Chavara brought about a change in their food habits and food pattern. The children began dining together having the same food for all, which was never heard of in their life. This also brought about tremendous transformation in their attitude towards others: as they all ate together, a sense of oneness, unity, and togetherness began to emerge among students. As we see it recorded in the *Alochana*, it was the compassion of Jesus (Mk 8:2-3) that inspired the TOCD Fathers in planning for the distribution of midday meal at the beginning of November 1864. Their concerns were listed in the following manner: "On Sundays many children come for catechism; some are very poor; some of them come a long way; and the classes are till evening."⁹⁰ Hence they arranged free lunch for the children.

A good number of the *pulayas* and the *parayas* were agricultural labourers; they produced every grain of rice, but the irony was that the rice they produced went to the barns of their high caste masters and the wages they received were not sufficient to fill their hungry stomach.⁹¹ The wage for one week, for example, was just two measures of rice. Rice was a luxury for them. Since they were landless agricultural labourers or mere farm slaves, rice was available to them only for a few weeks of the year; as what they earned through their labour was too little, their rice stock would get over very soon. Hence, they used to eat radish,

⁸⁹ Although Chavara wanted to enable the new Christians from the Dalit community, come up in terms of social status, practically, the then traditional Catholic community was not mature enough to welcome them and to support them as their fellow Christians with equality. Given the fact that it would take longer to correct the mentality of the traditional Christians, Chavara and other TOCD Fathers made room for these new Christians by way of arranging for their separate Holy Mass, catechism classes, and other ecclesial provisions, which are continued even today, in the form of a personal parish, which is headquartered at Mannanam. Interestingly, and pitifully, when a new parish community was created at Mannanam, taking away all traditional Catholics, the Archeparchy of Changanacherry continues the same old strategy!

⁹⁰ ASJM, *Alochana*, in November 1864 (Entry on 1 December 1864).

⁹¹ K. L. Bernard, *Flashes of Kerala History*, Cochin: Victory Press, 1970, 120.

grains, chameleon, rats, or anything edible that they could gather. Naturally, *dalit* children were undernourished, illiterate, and were denied access to water resources in their villages and public roads or institutions due to the widespread social segregation. In the schools run by the TOCD Fathers, the children were led to the 'Table of the Lord' and were given 'midday meal', which attracted them to the schools.

One of the means sought for the preparation and distribution of midday meals was *pidiyari* scheme and the fathers sent letters to the neighbouring parishes and started collecting rice from the parishes of Pallippuram, Muttom, Vechoor, Vaikom, Muttuchira, Kudamaloor, Kaippuzha, etc.⁹² When schools were opened in those parishes, they also made use of the *pidiyari* scheme in their own respective places. Therefore, on 3 December 1865, the fathers bought eighteen acres of paddy field with the purpose of meeting the expenses of the schools.⁹³

23. Dress Distribution and Enhancement of Self-Respect

Men and women of low castes of Travancore were not allowed to cover their chest clothes. Children walked around naked as Chavara observed during his *Kalari* education.⁹⁴ He specifically instructed the parents not to allow children go naked even inside the house.⁹⁵ It was in this social situation that he decided to distribute dress for women and children when they started coming to the church for learning catechism. A part of the collection at the Mannanam Chapel on the feast of Saint Joseph was spent to buy the clothes for the children. Chavara introduced uniform dress at Mannanam in May 1865.⁹⁶

This was a noticeable change from a church which was hitherto inwardly focused to an outwardly focused church, and it was easily accomplished by a strong leader with pastoral concerns for the downtrodden. That leader was committed to the mission of leading the church to the peripheries. It is understood that the culture of the church follows the culture of the leadership. The leaders' understanding and ownership overflow to everyone.

Thus, with the concerted efforts of the priests, parents, housewives or mothers of the families and many others, within a period of three to four

⁹² ASJM, *Alochana* in November 1864.

⁹³ ASJM, *CMM*, vol. 3, p. 90.

⁹⁴ Chavara, *Atmanuthapam*, Cantos 1: 93-112.

⁹⁵ Chavara, *Chavarul*, II: 3. Chavara, *CWC.*, vol 4, *Letters*, IX:10.

⁹⁶ ASJM, *Alochana* in May 1865.

years, a system of common education was established; regular classes were conducted with a prescribed syllabus; in addition, the system of paying the salary, midday meal, uniform, pastoral care of the students as well as their parents, etc., were taken care of. Before 1864 Catholics had no doors opened for education of their children because Monsignor Baccinelli was very much against the Catholics going to those schools run by non-Catholics.⁹⁷ Chavara brought in revolutionary changes by the schools he and his confreres started in different parts of Kerala.

In 1864, Chavara had changed his residence to Koonammavu, but very often he visited Mannanam to motivate his confreres and to take care of the educational projects initiated there. Religious instruction and general education were, for Chavara, two sides of the same coin. He regarded education as a means to uplift the poor. It was indeed a revolutionary act at that time. Thus, the system of education, the Lord's Table, the midday meal, and distribution of dress, etc., brought forth a social transformation in Kerala. During the formal release of the stamp of Kuriakose Elias Chavara, held at Trivandrum on 20 December 1987, R. Venkataraman, the then President of India, affirmed: "Christian missions worked among the *adivasis*, the aboriginals, and among the *Harijans*, in a practical implementation of the Christian ethic of service. Few people have exemplified this dimension of Indian Christianity as memorably as Father Chavara." He called Chavara a strong social prophet of the time and appreciated the role of St Chavara as a social reformer of Kerala and his various contributions for the transformation of the society. He could be rightly called a Prophet of our times.

The education must be deep-rooted with strong fundamentals of moral and spiritual training along with intellectual formation, psychological maturity, and skill development. Chavara visualised a comprehensive education and he inspired his successors to continue it with timely renewal.

⁹⁷ Baccinelli Report 1867, Q. 53.