

EMBRACING DIVINE LOVE: EASTERN CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY OF KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA

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Abstract: Kuriakose Elias Chavara's spirituality, deeply rooted in Eastern Christian mysticism, emphasizes the inseparable connection between the love of God and love of neighbour. His teachings parallel those of Eastern mystics like St Isaac the Syrian, focusing on divine love as foundational to the Christian journey. His contemplation on God's boundless mercy underscores the transformative power of love, nurturing spiritual growth and inspiring compassionate service. His spirituality reflects Eastern Christianity's concept of God's unconditional love, epitomized in Jesus Christ. This article explores asceticism, virtuous life, prayer, and contemplation as means of experiencing divine love. Asceticism is a purification process and virtuous life is aligning with God's will. Chavara's life illustrates detachment from worldly distractions and continuous dialogue with the Divine as integral to experiencing God's love. Eastern Christian spirituality emphasizes prayer, contemplation, and embracing divine love amidst trials and suffering, with Chavara exemplifying dedication to prayer and trust in divine providence. Compassionate concern for others, seen in Chavara's commitment to serving the marginalized, reflects divine love in action. His life inspires

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embracing spirituality through asceticism, virtuous living, prayer, contemplation, and compassionate service.

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1. Introduction

Kuriakose Elias Chavara's significance in Eastern Christian spirituality lies in his reflective teachings on love, prayer, and the pursuit of a virtuous life. He emphasized the inseparable connection between the love of God and the love of neighbour, advocating for a spirituality that transcends individual contemplation to actively engage with and serve the community. Kuriakose Elias Chavara emerges as a beacon of divine love. His spirituality deeply rooted in the mystical tradition of Eastern Christianity, reflects a harmonious blend of contemplation and compassionate service. Through his writings and exemplary life, Chavara continues to inspire individuals to seek a deeper connection with God, practice love and compassion, and engage in selfless service for the betterment of society. This article explores deeply into the teachings of Kuriakose Elias Chavara, with a primary focus on the theme of love within his spiritual viewpoint. To illuminate the profound resonance of his teachings with Eastern spirituality, we turn to St Isaac the Syrian¹, an eminent mystic of the East whose insights enrich our understanding of divine love and union with God. In this exploration, we delve into the spiritual legacy of Kuriakose Elias Chavara through the lens of Eastern Christian mysticism, drawing parallels with the timeless wisdom of St Isaac the Syrian.

2. Understanding Divine Love

At the heart of Kuriakose Elias Chavara's spirituality lies a profound recognition of love of God as the cornerstone of the Christian journey. That is, the love of God is the central point of his spirituality. As in

¹ St Isaac the Syrian, also known as Isaac of Nineveh, was a prominent figure in early Christian monasticism and Eastern Christian spirituality. He lived during the 7th century in present-day Iraq. St. Isaac is renowned for his profound spiritual writings, which explore themes such as the nature of God, the soul's ascent to divine union, and the transformative power of love and humility. His writings have had a lasting influence on Christian mysticism and Eastern spirituality.

Eastern Christian spirituality, he understands the divine love as a lived experience that shapes his spiritual journey. It was the foundation of his relationship with God and the driving force behind his pursuit of holiness and union with the divine. In the depths of his spiritual journey, he came to a profound realization: that God's essence, His very nature, is love. Through his contemplation and personal experience, he understood that God's love knows no bounds, extending infinitely to all beings. Reflecting on this divine truth, he proclaimed, "*ente appan* is most merciful, abounding in love and maintains the compassionate love, which is His very name."² In these words, he encapsulated the essence of his understanding - that God's mercy and love are inseparable, woven into the fabric of His being. For Chavara, God's love was not merely a benevolent attribute but the very essence of His identity. It was a love that surpassed human comprehension, encompassing all beings with its boundless embrace. St Isaac the Syrian beautifully articulates this truth, describing God's act of creation and governance as manifestations of divine love. He says, "In love did He bring the world into existence; in love is He going to bring it to that wondrous transformed state, and in love will the world be swallowed up in the great mystery of Him who has performed all these things; in love will the whole course of the governance of creation be finally comprised."³

2.1. God's Unconditional Love and Mercy

Divine love in Eastern Christianity is characterized by its unconditional and selfless nature. It is freely given by God to all creation, regardless of merit or worthiness. This love is not constrained by human limitations or conditions but flows from the overflowing goodness and mercy of God. God is good, and He results everything for us in order to set us on the upright path. There is no end to the good things He gives. But there is an end to every painful thing He allows.⁴ The Scripture says, "I act with steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth" (Jer 9:24). God loves with an everlasting love, and He is continuing His faithfulness to us (Cf. Jer 31:3). The mercy and love of God is the door which is opened (Cf. Rev 4:1) for all to heaven. It is an open door which no one is able to shut (Cf. Rev 3:8). It is a great door (Cf. 1 Cor 16:9; 2 Cor 2:12) and

² Cf. Z.M., Moozhoor, ed., *Chavarayachente Sampoorana Kruthikal*, Vol. III, *Adhyatmikakruthikal*, Mannanam: CMC Prasadhaka Committee, 2014, 17.

³ S. P. Brock, tr., *Isaac of Nineveh (Isaac the Syrian) 'The Second Part,' Chapters IV-XLI*, CSCO, Vol. 555, *Scri. Syri.* 225, Lovanii: Peeters, 1995, 38/2, 160.

⁴ Cf. Brock, tr., *The Second Part*, 39/15, 169.

a door of faith (Cf. Acts 14:27) which enables the whole human beings to experience the eternal glory with the Lord.⁵

God is so merciful that “He pours over us (His) immense grace that, like the ocean, knows no measure.”⁶ Contemplating the boundless mercy of God, Kuriakose Elias Chavara also found himself awash in gratitude and wonder. In the depths of his soul, he recognized the infinite grace bestowed upon him by the Lord of mercy. With each passing moment he reflected, ‘the Lord of mercy has bestowed on me His choicest graces.’⁷ These gifts, bestowed upon him without reservation or limit, filled his heart with profound joy and gratitude. In the face of such abundant mercy, he couldn’t help but marvel at the magnanimity of the divine. In moments of prayer and reflection, he lifted his voice to the heavens, expressing his gratitude in words that echoed with sincerity and reverence. ‘O Lord,’ he exclaimed, ‘Your ocean of mercy unstinted lavished on me, how happy am I!’⁸ These words were not merely an acknowledgment of blessings received but a heartfelt recognition of the sheer magnitude of God’s benevolence. For Kuriakose Elias Chavara, the mercy of God was not just a theological concept but a living reality that infused every aspect of his existence. It was a source of comfort in times of trial, a beacon of hope in moments of despair, and a constant reminder of the divine love that encompassed him.

All the actions of God are directed towards the single eternal good.⁹ Kuriakose Elias Chavara, throughout his life, witnessed how all of God’s actions were directed towards the single eternal good. Just as the Scripture proclaims, he understood that God works all things together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (Rom 8:28). He believed that God’s actions, whether they brought relief, joy, or grief, were ultimately aimed at our advantage and directed towards the eternal good. He recognized God’s compassionate nature, always seeking to lead humanity towards righteousness and salvation. He experienced firsthand God’s immense grace, as an ocean without measure, pouring over him and showering him with mercy and

⁵ Cf. Brock, tr., *The Second Part*, 5/4, 7.

⁶ Brock, tr., *The Second Part*, 40/13, 177.

⁷ Cf. Z.M., Moozhoor ed., *Chavarayachente Sampoorana Kruthikal*, Vol. II, *Sahithyakruthikal*, *Athmanuthapam*, Mannanam: CMC Prasadhaka Committee, 2014, II:57-58.

⁸ Cf. *Athmanuthapam*, II: 57-58.

⁹ Cf. Brock, tr., *The Second Part*, 39/3, 163.

love. Through his life and teachings, Chavara exemplified the profound love and mercy of God, inviting others to experience the boundless grace and compassion that he himself had encountered.

In the realm of Eastern Christian teachings, particularly exemplified through the experiences of great mystics, lies a profound understanding of divine protection and providence. It is firmly believed that all individuals are encompassed under the benevolent shield of the merciful God. Isaac the Syrian narrates this care of God:

Often it happens that a man unwittingly travels a road where there lies a wild beast, or murderers, or something of the kind. But the universal providence of God delivers him from injury, either by delaying him on his way for some reason until the dangerous beast has gone off, or by an encounter with someone, to make him turn aside from the road. And again, sometimes a venomous serpent is found lying in the road yet out of sight, but God, not willing to surrender the man to this trial, suddenly makes the serpent hiss and withdraw from the place, or slither out in front of him, and the wayfarer when he sees it is put on his guard, and is saved from it, even though he is undeserving on account of his secret sins, which only he knows; yet God still rescues him, for His mercy's sake. And again, it often happens that a house, or a wall, or a stone is about to fall, and it slips from its place with a splintering sound, but people are found sitting there, and in His love for men God commands an angel to hold it back, and to keep it from falling until they rise up from thence; or else, under a certain pretext, He leads them out, so that no one is found underneath. But as soon as they go out, He straightway lets it fall. And even if it happens that someone is caught, He works the matter so that they are in no way hurt. By this, God wishes to show the infinite magnitude of His power.¹⁰

God protects and guides us all the time, but we can see this protection better when we keep away from sin and focus on God alone. Chavara also believed this and he emphasized the importance of purifying oneself from sin and focusing solely on God. He saw divine providence as a radiant thread woven into the tapestry of life, particularly evident to those who faced challenges in pursuit of truth. He believed that during trials and tribulations, those who maintained unwavering faith

¹⁰ Isaac of Nineveh, *The Ascetical Homilies*, Miller D., tr., *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*, Boston: HTM, 1984, 7, 65.

in God experienced His presence more tangibly, finding solace and sustenance in His care. For him, purity of heart and devotion led to a deeper experience of divine favor and guidance. He experienced God's providential care as a constant presence, offering comfort and support to those who walked the path of righteousness. That is, God's providence is most clearly perceived by those who live in accordance with His will, remaining steadfast in faith and devotion even in the face of challenges. He emphasized the importance of purity, devotion, and unwavering faith as pathways to experiencing the intimate care and guidance of divine providence in one's life.

Kuriakose Elias Chavara's spiritual journey, much like that of Eastern mystics is marked by a profound realization of the boundless mercy of God. In contemplating the magnificent nature of divine mercy, he, too, stands in awe of its incomprehensible depths. He marvels at the vastness of God's forgiveness and mercy. In echoing Isaac the Syrian's sentiments, Chavara finds solace and wonder in the unyielding mercy of the Creator. He acknowledges that like a powerful spring that remains unaffected by a small amount of dust, the mercy of God continues to flow ceaselessly, unaffected by the imperfections and mistakes of His creations.¹¹ This profound understanding permeates his spirituality, shaping his perspective on repentance, forgiveness, and the transformative power of divine love. For him, the mercy of God stands as an immutable force, capable of washing away even the deepest stains of sin and offering redemption to all who earnestly seek it. In this shared experience of divine mercy, he bears witness to the unfathomable depths of God's love for His creation, inspiring others to turn to Him with contrite hearts and unwavering trust in His boundless compassion.

Kuriakose Elias Chavara's encounters with the boundless love and mercy of God are beautifully articulated throughout his writings. He teaches that divine love is the source of spiritual nourishment, sustaining and nurturing the soul, leading to spiritual growth. He humbly acknowledged humanity's limitations, comparing it to the simplicity of worms, yet marveling at God's tender care, reminiscent of a mother nourishing her children even in their sleep.¹² His faith in God's constant presence and benevolence was unwavering. He believed that the Lord stood beside him always, eager to fulfill his needs and desires without

¹¹ Cf. Isaac, *The Ascetical Homilies*, 51, 244.

¹² Cf. Leo Mary, tr., *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara, Vol. IV, The Letters*, Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Bl. Chavara, 1990, VII/10.

even needing to be asked.¹³ He found immense joy in God's blessings, both worldly and spiritual, declaring that his happiness stemmed from the divine goodness and grace.¹⁴ Moreover, Chavara attributed the growth and success of the Congregation not to human efforts but to the miraculous workings of God, who nurtured it with divine intervention and marvels.¹⁵ He acknowledged that all achievements were not due to his own abilities but rather the work of God's hand, despite feeling unworthy. Through these writings, his experiences of God's boundless love, mercy, and providence resonate profoundly, portraying his unwavering faith and reliance on the divine.

2.2. Eternal and Unchanging Love

In Eastern Christian spirituality, divine love is depicted as timeless and steadfast, never subject to alteration or decay. It existed before time began and will continue for eternity. Unlike human emotions or affections, which may fluctuate or fade over time, God's love remains constant and unwavering. It is a steadfast and enduring force that sustains and upholds the universe. Hence with much affirmation Isaac the Syrian says, "For if it is believed by everyone that the creation came into existence as a result of the Creator's goodness and love, then we know that this original does not ever diminish or change in the Creator's Nature as a result of the disordered course of creation."¹⁶ God is complete in His love, and His love is steadfast in nature. From very eternity this love is same and without change. The Scripture says, "O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and steadfast love for your servants who walk before you with all their heart" (1 Kings 8:23). From every eternity God is one and the same and "The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases" (Lam 3:22).

The spirituality of Chavara resonates with the eternal and unchanging nature of divine love as described in Eastern Christian spirituality. Just as Isaac the Syrian emphasizes the immutable nature of God's love, his teachings highlight the eternal constancy of God's love for humanity. In his understanding, divine love transcends the limitations of human emotions, persisting unchanged throughout

¹³ Cf. *The Letters*, VII/6; VII/10.

¹⁴ Cf. *The Letters*, VII/2; VII/7.

¹⁵ Cf. *The Letters*, VI/1.

¹⁶ Brock, tr., *The Second Part*, 38/5, 161.

eternity. This steadfast love of God forms the cornerstone of his spiritual foundation. God's love can be experienced as unwavering to those who walk before Him with sincerity and devotion. Chavara could affirm the perpetual nature of God's steadfast love, which endures beyond the confines of time and space. Wrapped in the celestial embrace of divine devotion, his verses resound with the profound conviction that his existence finds purpose and sustenance solely through the boundless love of God, as he eloquently proclaims: 'My love, you are my happiness, how can I live unless you stand by me, you are my breath, you are the drink of life, where can I find comfort except in you.'¹⁷ This poem beautifully encapsulates his deep spirituality, portraying a profound sense of devotion and reliance on a higher power, often interpreted as an expression of love for the divine. In these lines, he poetically articulates his inseparable connection to his beloved, who symbolizes the source of his joy, sustenance, and solace. The opening line, 'My love, you are my happiness,' immediately sets the tone of affection and adoration. Here, 'love' transcends the human realm, embodying the divine presence. This love brings profound joy and fulfillment to Chavara's life, emphasizing the centrality of divine love in his spiritual journey. The subsequent lines, 'how can I live unless you stand by me, you are my breath,' further illustrate his dependence on the divine. Just as one cannot survive without breath, he implies that his existence is intertwined with the presence of his beloved. This dependence signifies a deep spiritual connection, where the divine is not just an abstract concept but an essential aspect of his being. 'You are the drink of life' evokes imagery of sustenance and nourishment. Here, Kuriakose Elias Chavara portrays the divine as the source of spiritual nourishment, essential for his sustenance and growth. This imagery resonates with the concept of spiritual nourishment and the idea that divine love is what truly sustains and fulfills the soul. The next line, 'where can I find comfort except in you,' summarizes the essence of his spirituality. It reflects his belief that true comfort and solace can only be found in the divine presence. This line underscores the idea that the ultimate source of peace and contentment lies in a deep and intimate relationship with the divine. That is, Kuriakose Elias Chavara affirms that his existence is upheld by the everlasting and immutable love of God.

¹⁷ Cf. *Athmanuthapam*, II: 143-144.

3. God's Love Revealed in Jesus Christ

The ultimate revelation of divine love in Eastern Christianity is found in the person of Jesus Christ. The main and only reason for the coming of Jesus on earth is not human sin but divine love. The Scripture says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). For Kuriakose Elias Chavara, Jesus Christ was the epitome of divine love. He understood Christ's life, teachings, death, and resurrection as profound demonstrations of God's love for humanity. He believed that Jesus, as the Incarnation of God, showed the depth of divine love by experiencing human life firsthand and sharing in our joys and sorrows. He viewed Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross and subsequent resurrection as the ultimate expression of God's love and mercy. He believed that through these events, God demonstrated His willingness to go to extraordinary lengths to reconcile humanity to Himself and to restore harmony between humanity and the entirety of creation. Through the Incarnation, God revealed Himself to human beings to the highest degree. In turn, human beings are called to respond to this revelation of love with their own love for God. It is the result of Incarnation that human beings are able to attain such a state of love when he becomes like God.¹⁸ Isaac the Syrian describes the great privilege of contemplating God and hearing His Voice that human beings got with Incarnation:

The Word Who became man clothed Himself in it, and therewith He spoke to us in our body. Every man who has been clothed with it has truly been made like unto Him Who came down from His own exaltedness, and did the splendour of His majesty, and concealed His glory with humility, lest creation should be utterly consumed by the contemplation of Him. Creation could not look upon Him unless He took a part of it to Himself, and thus conversed with it, and neither could it hear the words of His mouth face to face.¹⁹

Kuriakose Elias Chavara applied these ideas in his life through his deep understanding and personal experience of the significance of the Incarnation and its call for a response of love towards God. He believed that God, in His infinite mercy, chose to reveal Himself fully to humanity

¹⁸ Cf. H. Alfeyev, *The Spiritual World of Isaac the Syrian*, CSS, 175, Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 2000, 49-50.

¹⁹ Isaac, *The Ascetical Homilies*, 77, 381.

through the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. In response to this profound revelation of love, he endeavored to cultivate a deep and sincere love for God in his own life. He expressed this love through prayer, devotion, and service to others, as he recognized that responding to God's love involves not only words but also actions. He understood that through the Incarnation, human beings have the potential to attain a state of love and likeness to God and believed that by embracing the teachings and example of Jesus Christ, he can grow in holiness and become more like God in his thoughts, words, and deeds. Hence, he sought to emulate the humility, compassion, and selflessness of Christ in his own life, striving to embody the love of God in all his interactions with others. He cherished the privilege afforded to humanity through the Incarnation, which allows for contemplation of and communication with God. He understood that through Jesus Christ, God condescended to speak to humanity in a language they could understand, reaching out to them with words of truth, grace, and salvation. So he valued prayer and meditation as means of communing with God, seeking to listen to His voice and discern His will in his life.

The crucifixion and death of Jesus was the peak point of the sacrificial love of the Divinity. Incarnation refers to this peak point. When reflecting on this mystery, Isaac the Syrian sees the Cross as the bridge to the peaceful abode and the crown of thorns (Cf. Mt 27:29) as the helmet of salvation (Cf. Eph 6:17). With these delightful thoughts, Isaac the Syrian utters this heart-touching prayer which reflects God's great love:

May the Cross of shame which You mounted for my sake become a bridge to that peaceful abode; may the crown of thorns with which Your head was crowned, become for me the *helmet of salvation* on the heated day of battle; may the spit which Your face received prepare me to have an open face before the tribunal at Your advent; may Your holy body which was exposed on the Cross crucify me to this world and its lusts by means of love for You; may Your clothing for which lots were cast tear asunder before my eyes the garment of darkness with which I am inwardly clothed; may the water and blood which came forth from You become for me a document granting liberty from the ancient state of servitude; may Your Body and Your Blood which have been mingled with my body remain within me as a pledge that

I will not be deprived of the constant sight of You in that realm which has no end.²⁰

Kuriakose Elias Chavara's deep connection with the embracing love of God was nurtured through meditative reflection on Jesus' ultimate sacrifice on the Cross. This contemplation served as a source of spiritual comfort and inspiration, deepening his understanding of divine love and strengthening his faith. He regarded Jesus' journey to Calvary, His crucifixion, and His death with profound reverence and spiritual significance. In his mystical reflection on Jesus' journey to Calvary, he envisions it as a grand procession, the royal journey of the Divine Bridegroom towards the sacred marriage tent, the *kalyāna pantal*. Adorned with a crown of precious diamonds by His mother, Jesus eagerly anticipates the nuptial procession, dressed in resplendent attire and accompanied by joyful melodies and well-decked comrades. Along the way, He is refreshed with sweet drinks, ensuring His strength for the journey. Finally, as the procession reaches Calvary, the sacred mount, the nuptial ceremony climaxes as the Bridegroom enters His bridal chamber, the Cross.²¹ For Kuriakose Elias Chavara, this journey symbolizes not just suffering but a profound act of love and union, where Jesus willingly embraces His destiny for the sake of divine love, ultimately finding union with the Cross in a sacred marriage.

4. Paths to Divine Love

Eastern Christian spirituality emphasizes the importance of asceticism, virtuous life, prayer and contemplation as means of experiencing divine love. Through disciplined spiritual practices, one cultivates intimacy with God and open themselves to the transforming power of His love.

4.1. Asceticism

Asceticism, or the practice of self-discipline and self-denial, plays a central role in Eastern Christian spirituality. The Eastern Fathers view asceticism as a means of purifying the soul from sinful passions and attachments that hinder the experience of divine love. By renouncing worldly pleasures and practicing silence and solitude, fasting, vigil, obedience, and other such activities, one creates space in his life for God's grace to work and for divine love to flourish. The ascetic life, characterized by self-denial and detachment from worldly distractions, creates space for the soul to be filled with divine love. If a man in his

²⁰ Brock, tr., *The Second Part*, 5/25, 16.

²¹ Cf. *Atmanuthapam*, VIII.

mind is unbound with the world, Isaac the Syrian considered that as a virtue.²² He says that liberation from the world precedes the bond with God.²³ Abandonment of the world itself is the basement for the experience of love. It is followed by solitude which provides the possibility to converse with God and the constant converse results the experience of love. He illustrates:

From genuine prayer, the love of God is born, for love comes of prayer and prayer from the practice of seclusion. We have need of seclusion that we may have the possibility to converse with God by ourselves. But seclusion is preceded by the abandonment of the world. For, if a man does not first abandon the world and abstain from all therein, he will not be able to dwell in solitude. And again, abandonment of the world is preceded by patient endurance. Patience is preceded by hatred of the world, and hatred of the world is preceded by fear and yearning. ... If the mind has not first acquired patience, a man will be unable to choose a wild and desolate place, bereft of any inhabitants. And if he does not choose for himself a life of seclusion, he will be unable to persevere in prayer. And if he does not constantly converse with God and continue in those deliberations and ruminations which are conjoined to prayer, and in the various forms of prayer's teaching, then he will never gain experience of love.²⁴

Kuriakose Elias Chavara emphasized the importance of detachment from worldly distractions and attachments as a necessary step towards deepening one's relationship with God. He believed that by freeing oneself from the influences of the world, one could create space in their hearts and minds to focus on God's presence and guidance. He viewed the abandonment of worldly concerns and desires as foundational to experiencing divine love. It is his vision that by letting go of worldly pursuits and placing God at the center of one's life, one could open themselves up to the transformative power of God's love. For this, he valued solitude and considered it a means of fostering intimacy with God. He believed that withdrawing from the busyness of the world allowed one to engage in meaningful conversation with God through prayer, reflection, and meditation. In the quietude of solitude, Kuriakose

²² Cf. Isaac, *The Ascetical Homilies*, 1/6, 4.

²³ Cf. Isaac, *The Ascetical Homilies*, 1/29, 7.

²⁴ Isaac, *The Ascetical Homilies*, 63, 303-304.

Elias Chavara found that one could experience God's presence more deeply and listen attentively to His voice. He says:

When a soul delights in solitude, Jesus Christ will come to converse with it in solitude and begin communing with it. At first you will not understand the language. Then it is that the Lord will lead you to the wine-cellar and pour out some wine for you - a little at first. In course of time you will begin to understand the language. When your spouse sees that you understand His speech, He will speak more and more distinctly and show you the magnitude of His love. Then the bride will love more and the bridegroom will rejoice over it and adorn her with ornaments. Thus commences the divine union.²⁵

Kuriakose Elias Chavara advocated for a life characterized by continuous dialogue with God. He believed that maintaining a constant awareness of God's presence and actively engaging in conversation with Him throughout the day nurtured a vibrant and enduring relationship with the Divine. Through this ongoing communion with God, one could cultivate a deep and abiding experience of divine love. In the spirituality of Kuriakose Elias Chavara, the journey towards experiencing God's love is intricately linked with the process of detachment from the world, seeking solitude for intimate conversation with God, and fostering a continuous and heartfelt relationship with the Divine. These principles guide one on a path of spiritual growth and transformation, leading to a profound encounter with God's boundless love and grace.

4.2. Virtuous Life

In Eastern Christian spirituality, the importance of living a virtuous life as a means of embracing divine love is foundational. Virtue is seen as essential for spiritual growth and union with God. By cultivating virtues, individuals align themselves with the divine will and open themselves to the transformative power of God's love. Isaac the Syrian says that without attaining perfection in virtues, no man can acquire purity, which is the requirement for perfect love.²⁶ Chavara also believed that attaining the divine love is intimately connected to the cultivation of virtues in daily life. As individuals cultivate virtues, such as, humility, repentance, compassion, forgiveness, purity of heart and obedience their lives become radiant with the transformative power of divine love, influencing their interactions and relationships. They provide a

²⁵ *The Letters*, VII/8.

²⁶ Cf. Isaac, *The Ascetical Homilies*, 34, 157.

framework for living a life that is aligned with the teachings of Jesus Christ and reflective of God's love and grace.

4.2.1. Humility

Humility is considered the mother of all other virtues by the Eastern Church Fathers, both Greek and Syriac.²⁷ Kuriakose Elias Chavara, known for his holiness and dedication to serving God and others, exemplified humility in his life and teachings. He understood humility as encompassing love and compassion, reflecting God's own model. He recognized that true humility expresses fervent love and respect towards one's neighbor, seeking their good above one's own interests. He emphasized that humility entails honoring and respecting others, acknowledging their dignity as fellow creations of God. By showing honor and respect, one cultivates gentleness and humbleness, mirroring the attitude of Christ. He believed that by embodying humility, individuals contribute to reconciliation and healing in relationships and communities, fostering unity and peace. He understands humility as an inner virtue that requires genuine love and spiritual insight. It is not merely outward humility but springs from a heart filled with love and understanding of God's will. He emphasized the importance of meekness and kindness, even towards those who provoke or mistreat us. True humility enables individuals to respond with patience and grace, reflecting the character of Jesus Christ in challenging situations. The life of Chavara teaches that true humility enables individuals to see others through the lens of God's boundless compassion and it involves recognizing the potential for goodness and redemption in every person, regardless of their current moral condition. He understood that those who acquire true humility are blessed, as they are continually drawn close to Jesus' heart. Humility opens the way for a deeper communion with God and participation in His divine love and mercy. Even animals can sense this sort of genuine humility. At the sight of a humble person, their ferocity will calm and they will approach him as he is their own master. Isaac the Syrian asserts:

The humble approaches the beasts of prey and as soon as their eye rests on him, their wildness is tamed and they come to him and accompany him as their master, wagging their tails and licking his hands and his feet. For they smell from him the smell which spread from Adam before his transgression, when the beasts gathered near

²⁷ Cf. T. Špidlík, *The Spirituality of the Christian East: A Systematic Handbook*, Gythiel A. P., tr., CistSS, 79, Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1986, 88.

him and he gave them names, in Paradise - the smell which was taken from us and given back to us anew by Christ through His advent, which made the smell of the human race sweet.²⁸

Kuriakose Elias Chavara professed humility as his fourth vow and was humble in all his words and deeds. He embraced humility as the foundation of all his virtues. He exemplified humility through his acts of service to others. He tirelessly worked for the welfare of the poor and the marginalized, considering it a privilege to serve those in need. His life was a testament to the belief that true greatness is found in selfless service. Despite his significant contributions to the Church and society, he remained humble and unassuming. He never sought recognition or praise for his works but instead directed all glory to God. His humility was evident in his simple lifestyle and his willingness to embrace the lowliest tasks. He treated everyone with respect and kindness, regardless of their social status or background. He humbly interacted with people from all walks of life, showing compassion and empathy towards their struggles. His gentle demeanor and humility endeared him to many, making him a beloved figure in his community. Humility was a central theme in Chavara's personal prayer and reflection. He constantly sought to cultivate humility in his own heart, recognizing his own limitations and dependence on God's grace. His deep humility was rooted in his profound sense of God's presence and providence in his life. He embraced God's will with humility and trust, even in the face of adversity and suffering. He saw every trial as an opportunity to grow in humility and faith, surrendering himself completely to God's plan for his life. The life and teachings of Kuriakose Elias Chavara exemplify the transformative influence of humility in the spiritual path, enabling him to wholeheartedly embrace divine love.

4.2.2. Repentance

In Eastern Christian spirituality, repentance is seen as the gateway to divine love, as it opens the heart to receive God's grace and mercy. Through sincere repentance, individuals are restored to communion with God and are empowered to live lives characterized by love, humility, and virtue. Central to the concept of repentance in Eastern Christianity is the belief in God's boundless mercy and forgiveness. Repentance has given to human beings as a grace beyond grace. It is a

²⁸ Isaac of Nineveh, *Mystic Treatises*, Wensinck A. J., tr., *Mystic Treatises by Isaac of Nineveh*, Nieuwe Reeks Deel 23.1, Wiesbaden, 1969, 82/577, 386.

second birth in God. That of which we have received by Baptism, we receive by means of repentance.²⁹ Isaac the Syrian says, "Repentance is a second grace; it is born in the heart from faith and fear. Fear is the paternal rod which guides us up to the spiritual Eden."³⁰ This world is an ocean, and we have to cross this ocean to reach the divine love. Repentance, which is the ship and fear, the pilot helps us to cross over the sea of this world to God.³¹

The life of Chavara epitomized repentance as he continually sought spiritual purification and renewal. His journey was marked by a profound humility, acknowledging his own shortcomings and sins before God. He embraced repentance not as a one-time event but as a daily practice, recognizing the need for ongoing conversion of heart and mind. His genuine sorrow for past mistakes and steadfast dedication to improvement were clear signs of his contrite spirit. As a man deeply immersed in the mysteries of Christ, he humbly regarded himself as the most ungrateful of creatures, feeling undeserving even of the title of humanity. He referred to himself as a sinner in numerous instances, acknowledging his shortcomings and faults. Moreover, he expressed his unworthiness by describing himself as a great sinner and the most unworthy one, emphasizing his profound sense of inadequacy. He saw himself as the wicked one and devoid of inner light, highlighting his recognition of his own moral frailty. He considered himself the least among others, devoid of abilities, and likened himself to one who is deaf, dumb, blind, idiotic, and destitute, illustrating his deep humility and self-awareness.³²

Through repentance, he found solace in the mercy of God, fervently seeking reconciliation and communion with the divine. His life serves as a testament to the transformative power of repentance, inspiring others to embrace humility, seek forgiveness, and strive for spiritual growth.

4.2.3. Compassion and Forgiveness

In Eastern Christian spirituality, compassion and forgiveness are deeply rooted in the theological understanding of God's mercy and love for humanity. The concept encompasses both the divine compassion extended to humanity and the call for believers to embody compassion

²⁹ Cf. Isaac, *Mystic Treatises*, 43, 210.

³⁰ Isaac, *Mystic Treatises*, 43, 210.

³¹ Isaac, *The Ascetical Homilies*, 46, 224-225.

³² Cf. *Athmanuthapam*, I:129; III:55; II: 242; VII:162.

and forgiveness in their own lives. God's boundless compassion and love for humanity is exemplified in the Incarnation of Christ, who enters into human suffering to redeem and reconcile humanity to God. The example of Christ's self-sacrificial love serves as a model for believers to follow, inspiring acts of compassion and forgiveness towards all people, regardless of their actions or beliefs.

As human person is the image and likeness of God, a compassionate heart is the reflection of God's own compassion and mercy. It is God's own love and mercy flowing through human hearts. Isaac the Syrian says: "There is nothing which brings the heart as near to God as mercy."³³ It enflames knowledge in the soul as oil feeds the flame of the torch.³⁴ A person with a merciful heart always shows compassion towards his neighbour and does not venture to repay for the sufferings caused by them. Isaac the Syrian claims: "Merciful is he, who shows his compassion towards his neighbour not only in gifts, but who after hearing or seeing anything that causes suffering to any one, cannot withhold his heart from burning; who, even if he receives a blow on his cheek from his brother, does not venture to repay him even with a word and so cause him to suffer intellectually."³⁵ He has compassion on all without making any distinction.³⁶ It makes him more and more in the likeness of God. His mind as well as his body becomes immerse in spiritual things spontaneously. Isaac the Syrian describes this Gospel way of a merciful man:

And further, a man must not merely with joy suffer injustice as regards his possessions and the rest of the external things which come upon him, but he must also lay down his life for his brother. This is the merciful man, and not he that simply shows mercy to his brother by giving him something. And whoever burns within his heart when he sees or hears of something that grieves his brother, such a one is truly merciful, as is also the man who being slapped by his brother does not act shamelessly and answer abusively, thus grieving his brother's heart.³⁷

³³ Hansbury, tr., *St. Isaac of Nineveh on Ascetical Life*, New York: SVS Press, 1989, 4/77, 76.

³⁴ Cf. Isaac, *Mystic Treatises*, 46, 221.

³⁵ Isaac, *Mystic Treatises*, 4, 30.

³⁶ Cf. Isaac, *The Ascetical Homilies*, 6, 54.

³⁷ Isaac, *The Ascetical Homilies*, 4, 30-31.

The life of Kuriakose Elias Chavara was a living testament to the profound intertwining of compassion and forgiveness. He embodied the essence of mercy by forgiving his debtors, rising above the narrow path of retribution to maintain tranquility and radiance throughout his being. His compassion extended far beyond material possessions, encompassing a willingness to surrender his very life for the sake of others. He understood that true mercy involves not only giving but also enduring injustices with joy, following the Gospel command to give without expecting in return. His compassion, rooted in the likeness of God's own mercy, propelled him to become a healer of souls, offering himself as a living sacrifice for the salvation of others. He approached every individual with a heart full of empathy and understanding, recognizing the inherent dignity of each person as a beloved child of God. His commitment to forgiveness mirrored God's unconditional love, as he extended grace and reconciliation even to those who had wronged him. His life was a testament to the transformative power of forgiveness, demonstrating that true strength lies not in holding onto grudges but in embracing the healing freedom found in pardoning others. His compassion knew no bounds, as he tirelessly worked to alleviate the suffering of the marginalized and oppressed, showing kindness and solidarity to all. Like a true martyr, he implored mercy on the world, sharing in the suffering of all humanity, whether righteous or sinful. His life exemplified Isaac's vision of the merciful man - a deliverer, a soother, a defender, and ultimately, a living martyr for the cause of love and redemption.³⁸ Kuriakose Elias Chavara's compassionate and forgiving nature shines through various instances: he patiently taught Syriac to Philipose, a forty year old seminarian despite challenges, praised the ascetic practices of Antony Kudakachira's monastery despite past conflict, and showed love and sympathy to Antony Thondanad, aiding his return to the Church despite his previous involvement in troubles. Despite facing rejection and humiliation from his own parish, he responded with forgiveness and love. He never harbored ill-feelings and continued to serve and support the parish.³⁹ These examples illustrate his embodiment of the love of God through his service to others, regardless of their circumstances or past actions, showcasing his unwavering commitment to forgiveness and compassion. Kuriakose Elias Chavara found profound comfort and

³⁸ Cf. Isaac, *The Ascetical Homilies*, 64, 312-314.

³⁹ Cf. T. Panthaplackal, "Blessed Chavara A Brief History," *Journal of St. Thomas Christians*, 16, 1 (2005), 15.

meaning in the embrace of divine love, a journey marked by forgiveness and compassion. Through these virtues, he opened his heart to the transformative power of grace, experiencing spiritual growth and enlightenment.

4.2.4. Purity of Heart

Purity of heart in Eastern Christian spirituality signifies the inner cleanliness and integrity of one's thoughts, desires, and intentions, aligning them with the will of God. Rooted in the teachings of Jesus Christ, it involves a constant pursuit of spiritual cleansing through repentance, prayer, and ascetic practices, aiming for freedom from worldly attachments and distractions. This single-minded devotion to God fosters a deep communion with the divine, leading to the transformative experience of union with God. Purity of heart encompasses a holistic transformation of the entire person, guiding individuals towards inner harmony and wholeness as they journey towards the ultimate goal of spiritual perfection. According to the Eastern tradition, the disposition of the constant loving awareness of God is stemming from the purity of heart.⁴⁰ To keep purity in our mind and heart, we need to create hatred towards sin and must ready to uproot the origins of passions from within.⁴¹ Hence Isaac the Syrian warns: "Set every small desire at naught, that you may not ponder upon the vehemence of its burning. For patience, shown for a short time with respect to small matters disperses the danger of great ones. It is impossible to overcome great evils, if you do not subdue with lesser."⁴² As long as we carry evils in ourselves, we shall not be able to perceive their malodour, and if we do not hate them, we cannot smell the stench of their activity. Isaac the Syrian says, "Withdraw from evil, and immediately you will comprehend its malodour. For if you do not withdraw, you will never learn it, nay rather, you will put on its stench like a beautiful fragrance, and you will reckon the nakedness of your shame to be a veil of glory."⁴³

Kuriakose Elias Chavara, characterized by his purity of heart, exemplifies a life liberated from worldly affairs, directing his mind towards God and divine matters. Through an unwavering commitment

⁴⁰ Cf. S.P. Brock, "The Prayer of the Heart in Syriac Tradition," *Sobornost* 4/2 (1982), 141.

⁴¹ Isaac, *The Ascetical Homilies*, 32, 151-152.

⁴² Isaac, *The Ascetical Homilies*, 32, 154.

⁴³ Isaac, *The Ascetical Homilies*, 32, 152.

to purity, he cultivated an increasing love for divine mysteries, recognizing the necessity of detesting sin and eradicating passions within. He understood that withdrawal from evil unveils its foulness, enabling spiritual growth and the bearing of new fruits in Christ. For him, the heart remained the focal point, a vessel for constant awareness of God and contemplation of divine mysteries. This purity of heart not only enabled him to participate in God's purity but also guided him towards perfection. On his deathbed, Kuriakose Elias Chavara expressed gratitude for God's grace, acknowledging that he was able to maintain the purity bestowed upon him through baptism. For him, purity served as the conduit through which he could fully embrace divine love, allowing its transformative essence to permeate every aspect of his being.

4.2.5. Obedience

In Eastern Christian spirituality, obedience is a transformative practice essential for embracing divine love, as it fosters humility, trust, and self-emptying. By submitting to the will of God as expressed through spiritual authorities, individuals dismantle barriers of pride and self-centeredness, opening their hearts to receive God's grace more fully. Obedience nurtures trust in the providence and wisdom of God, as individuals learn to rely not on their own understanding but on the guidance of those who are spiritually more advanced. This trust deepens the bond of love between the individual and God, as it reflects a willingness to submit to divine guidance even when it may be difficult or challenging. Furthermore, obedience cultivates a spirit of self-emptying and sacrifice, mirroring the example of Christ who humbled Himself and became obedient unto death on the cross. By imitating Christ's obedience, individuals participate in His self-giving love, which leads to a deeper communion with God and a fuller experience of divine love. In Eastern Christian spirituality, obedience is not merely a matter of external compliance, but a profound spiritual discipline that shapes the heart and soul, enabling individuals to embrace and embody the divine love more fully in their lives. Through humility, trust, and self-emptying, obedience becomes a pathway to union with God, where divine love flows freely and abundantly into the hearts of those who seek it.

Kuriakose Elias Chavara exemplifies the profound connection between obedience and embracing divine love in Eastern Christian spirituality through his life of devotion and submission to the will of

God. As a man deeply rooted in the Christian tradition, he understood obedience not as a mere adherence to external rules but as a spiritual discipline aimed at aligning his will with the Divine. Through embracing obedience to his spiritual mentors and superiors, he nurtured humility, trust, and self-emptying, thereby opening himself to the boundless love of God. His steadfast adherence mirrored Christ's obedience even unto death, illustrating a profound submission to Divine guidance and providence. His commitment to obedience served as a channel for his profound communion with God, allowing divine love to saturate his entire being. As he submitted to the will of God through obedience to his spiritual authorities, he found his path illuminated by the radiant presence of divine love, guiding him ever closer to union with the Divine. His obedience was not merely an obligation but a transformative practice that infused his life with the richness of God's love, leading him on a journey of spiritual growth and fulfillment.

4.2.6. Meditative Reading of the Scripture

In Eastern Christian spirituality, Scripture plays a central and indispensable role in embracing divine love as it serves as a primary source of revelation and guidance for understanding God's nature, His will, and His love for humanity. Through the reading, meditation, and contemplation of Scripture, individuals deepen their understanding of God's love as revealed through the life, teachings, and salvific work of Jesus Christ. Scripture serves as a living word that nourishes the soul, leading individuals into deeper intimacy with God and fostering a personal relationship with Him. Through the study, meditation, and contemplation of Scripture, individuals are invited into a sacred dialogue with God, wherein divine love is encountered and embraced. By immersing oneself in Scripture, individuals cultivate a deeper intimacy with God and a heightened awareness of His abiding love, thereby facilitating a profound embrace of divine love in their lives. Isaac the Syrian asserts: "The reading (of Scripture) manifestly is the fountainhead that gives to prayer - and by these (two things) we are transported in the direction of the love of God whose sweetness is poured out continually in our hearts like honey or a honeycomb, and our souls exult at the taste which the hidden ministry (of prayer) and the reading (of Scripture) pour into our hearts."⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Brock, tr., *The Second Part*, 29/5, 131.

Chavara's embrace of divine Love was deeply rooted in his constant meditative reading of Scripture, a practice he held dear for its transformative power. Through the Scriptures, he found a pathway to keep his mind dwelling continually in heaven, fostering a perpetual conversation with God in every moment. This habit acted as a barrier, blocking the door of his mind against worldly distractions, smoothing his journey towards God with an illuminated path free from darkness. Reflective reading of Scripture ensured purity in his soul, enlightening his prayers and guiding him towards contemplation. For him, making a habit of reading Scripture regularly was like keeping a light shining in his soul. He believed it helped him remember important things, like staying away from things that could lead him away from God, and it also strengthened his connection with God through love and prayer. To him, Scripture was akin to an ocean of spiritual wisdom, its depths holding pearls of meaning that captivated his heart and soul, compelling him to forsake the world's distractions. The enlightenment gained from these mysteries fueled his inclination towards the love of God, leading him to forget worldly concerns and focus solely on understanding and embracing divine love.

In resonance with the traditions of the Eastern Fathers, Kuriakose Elias Chavara's spirituality resonates deeply with the teachings of Scripture. His literary works are imbued with profound biblical allusions and references, showcasing a devout adherence to a Scripture-centered approach to spirituality. Drawing from the rich wellspring of Biblical wisdom, he weaves together theological insights and practical guidance, inviting his followers to engage deeply with the sacred texts as a source of spiritual nourishment and guidance. Through his writings, he underscores the timeless relevance of Scripture in shaping one's spiritual journey and fostering a profound connection with the divine love.

4.3. Prayer and Contemplation

In Eastern Christian spirituality, prayer and contemplation play vital roles in embracing divine love. Through prayer, individuals engage in direct communion with God, expressing their love, gratitude, and desires. This dialogue fosters a deepening of the relationship between the individual and the divine, creating an intimate connection characterized by trust and surrender. Contemplation, on the other hand, involves quieting the mind and opening the heart to receive divine guidance and illumination. Through contemplative practices such as

meditation, individuals seek to align their will with the will of God, allowing divine love to permeate every aspect of their being. By cultivating a life of prayer and contemplation, according to Eastern spirituality, individuals can experience the transformative power of divine love, leading to spiritual growth, inner peace, and union with God. Isaac the Syrian says, "From genuine prayer, the love of God is born, for love comes of prayer."⁴⁵ Isaac claims that it is only by constant converse with God, continuous meditations and reflections on things which are conjoined to prayer and by various forms of prayer's teaching that one can attain the experience of love.⁴⁶

Constancy in prayer is an attitude of the soul towards God, which shows her intimacy and nearness with Him. Isaac writes: "Sit before his face at all times, thinking of him and recollecting him in your heart. Otherwise, if you only come to see him after a long interval, you will not be able to speak freely with him because of your sense of shame. Freedom of speech is born from constancy; such constancy among men concerns only the things of the body, but with God, it is the attitude of the soul, and the nearness brought about by prayer."⁴⁷ As a swimmer dives into the sea until he finds a pearl, one has to keep constancy in prayer, until he finds in himself the Pearl, Jesus Christ, the love of God.⁴⁸ Constant memory of God generates love in the heart. Constant prayer in the heart is the continuous expression of this love. Contemplation is a highest mystical stage, which leads the soul towards the love of God. In Isaac's view, it is an experience of the departure from this world and participation in the world to come.⁴⁹

Kuriakose Elias Chavara was known for his profound dedication to prayer and contemplation. He emphasized the importance of prayer, meditation and contemplation as ways to experience God's love and deepen one's relationship with Him. For him, prayer was not merely a ritualistic act but a profound conversation with God, where he poured out his heart, expressed his gratitude, and sought divine guidance. Through prayer, he cultivated a deep intimacy with God, nurturing a relationship built on love, trust, and surrender. He engaged in contemplation as a means of deepening his spiritual connection and

⁴⁵ Isaac, *The Ascetical Homilies*, 63, 303.

⁴⁶ Cf. Isaac, *The Ascetical Homilies*, 63, 304.

⁴⁷ Isaac, *The Ascetical Homilies*, 5, 48.

⁴⁸ Cf. Isaac, *The Ascetical Homilies*, 48, 231-232.

⁴⁹ Cf. Alfeyev, *The Spiritual World of Isaac the Syrian*, 226.

understanding of God's will. In moments of quiet reflection and meditation, he sought to quiet his mind, allowing space for divine wisdom and illumination to penetrate his soul. Through contemplative practices, he opened himself to receive insights and guidance from the divine, leading him closer to the heart of God. Through meditation, he experienced God's mercy and compassion profoundly. He saw Jesus as his Master and Teacher who taught him to pray and to meditate. He addressed Jesus as 'Appa' (Father) in his meditation, symbolizing a close, filial relationship with God.

Kuriakose Elias Chavara was deeply devoted to prayer and contemplation, showing a strong preference for being alone to focus on his spiritual connection. He symbolically portrayed his desire for a solitary union with the divine by likening the act of enclosing his heart within the tabernacle of Jesus.⁵⁰ He listened attentively to the voice of Jesus, whom he considered his beloved spouse.⁵¹ He observes that in prayer and contemplation, love creates an environment where communication flows effortlessly, guided by an inherent wisdom within the heart. Even in moments of uncertainty, when love unites two souls, dialogue flourishes and they are drawn together naturally. In his work 'Colloquies,' the concept of meditation is beautifully expressed as a dialogue with God, a heartfelt conversation between intimate companions united with the divine. He portrays this communion as akin to friends sitting closely together, effortlessly finding endless topics to discuss out of their mutual love. In this profound relationship, words become secondary as the heart itself communicates in its own language. The mere presence of these friends, without the need for verbal exchange, brings comfort and warmth to the soul, illustrating the depth and richness of meditative prayer.⁵²

Kuriakose Elias Chavara, a man deeply devoted to contemplation, infused his every moment with prayer and communion with the divine. His spiritual practice was not confined to designated times or places but permeated every aspect of his being, as he saw the sacred in the ordinary and the mundane. Inspired by his commitment to prayer, he entered into a covenant with God, a sacred pact wherein he dedicated every heartbeat, every blink of his eyes, every breath he took, and even the

⁵⁰ Cf. *The Letters*, VII/9.

⁵¹ Cf. *The Letters*, VII/7.

⁵² Cf. *Colloquies*, 2.

smallest sounds of nature as offerings to the divine.⁵³ This was not merely a superficial gesture but a profound union of his entire being with the works of the Lord. In his view, every aspect of existence was an opportunity for prayerful connection, an avenue through which he could express his devotion and seek divine presence. His prayer life was characterized by a continuous dialogue with the divine. With each breath, he whispered the mantra, "O Lord, do not separate from us until we are one with you,"⁵⁴ a constant invocation of unity and oneness with the divine presence. This mantra was not just a repetition of words but a heartfelt plea for spiritual union, a desire to dissolve the boundaries between himself and the divine until they became one. Through his unwavering commitment to prayer in every movement, he embodied the essence of contemplative spirituality. His life serves as a testament to the transformative power of prayer, reminding us that true communion with the divine is not limited by time or space but can be found in the rhythm of our breath, the beating of our hearts, and the very fabric of existence itself. He writes to the sisters: "Above all learn the art of loving Jesus Christ. Stay constantly in His presence. Walk along with Him. Converse with Him continuously."⁵⁵

5. Finding Divine Love amidst Trials

In Eastern Christian spirituality, embracing Divine love in trials and sufferings involves surrendering to God through prayer, finding solace in mystical union with Christ, and understanding the redemptive power of the Cross as the ultimate expression of divine love. Individuals cultivate patience, endurance, and compassion, trusting in God's providence and serving others amidst their own struggles. Anchored in the hope of the resurrection, they find strength and transformation, knowing that even in the midst of adversity, God's love sustains and ultimately redeems all suffering, leading to eternal communion with Him. Suffering borne from free will is a manifestation of love. Isaac the Syrian says, "A little trouble for God's sake is more excellent in God's eyes than much service without suffering."⁵⁶ Thus suffering serves as an excellent means to embrace the love of God. God opens His door of

⁵³ Cf. *The Letters*, VII/3.

⁵⁴ *The Letters*, VI/6.

⁵⁵ *The Letters*, VII/6.

⁵⁶ Isaac, *Mystic Treatises*, 34, 150.

mercy, reveals His mysteries and boosts up with His love to those who endure trials and tribulations for His sake.

The experience of feeling abandoned or undergoing spiritual desolation is also serve as a means to embracing divine love in Eastern Christian spirituality by deepening one's reliance on God's grace and fostering a more profound spiritual intimacy. This stage of spiritual darkness prompts individuals to surrender their ego and self-will entirely to God, allowing divine love to fill the void left by the absence of familiar comforts. By embracing the darkness as a sacred space for encounter with the divine, individuals can cultivate a more profound trust in God's providence, leading to a transformative union with divine love that transcends the limitations of human understanding. Thus, the experience of abandonment becomes a path to deeper communion with God, wherein individuals discover that divine love remains steadfast and unwavering, even in the midst of apparent darkness. Isaac the Syrian claims, "Let us not be troubled when we are found in darkness, especially if the cause of it is not in us. But reckon this as the work of God's providence for a reason which He alone knows."⁵⁷

Kuriakose Elias Chavara, embraced divine love during his trials and sufferings through a life dedicated to prayer, service, and complete trust in God's providence. Despite facing numerous challenges, facing physical ailments like rheumatic fever and loss of vision, as well as mental sufferings such as the opposition of his parents to his divine calling, the loss of his family to epidemic, familial pressure to abandon his vocation after the death of his parents and brother, and the threats posed by the schism in the Malabar Church, his faith in divine providence remained unshaken. Despite facing impediments during the construction of the monastery and the risk of losing monasteries to forceful occupation by schismatics, he found refuge in his unwavering trust in God's plan. Through these trials, he maintained steadfastness in his faith, demonstrating resilience and reliance on divine guidance despite overwhelming challenges.⁵⁸ He maintained unwavering faith in divine providence. He found solace and strength in his deep prayer life, relying on God's guidance and grace to navigate difficult situations. His suffering became a source of sanctification and a testament to his trust in God's love and mercy. His firm trust in divine love enabled him to persevere through adversity with humility, patience, and compassion,

⁵⁷ Isaac, *The Ascetical Homilies*, 50, 241.

⁵⁸ Cf. Panthaplackal, "Blessed Chavara A Brief History," 18.

leaving a profound legacy of faith, holiness, and service to inspire others in their own journeys of embracing God's love amidst trials and sufferings. His motto 'The Lord is my portion' reflects his unwavering trust in God's providence and his willingness to surrender to God's will even with personal loss and challenges.

6. Compassionate Concern for Others

Eastern Christianity teaches that every human being is created in the image and likeness of God. Therefore, showing compassionate concern for others is not merely a moral duty but also a recognition of the divine presence in each person. By loving and caring for others, individuals honor the image of God within them. Through the Incarnation, God revealed His boundless love for humanity. Compassionate concern for others is seen as participating in this divine love, as individuals are called to imitate Christ's selfless love and compassion for all. It is the contemplation in action. At the same time, it is the fulfillment of the commandment of love.⁵⁹ Isaac the Syrian explains: "I mean the love of God, and what He taught to be the like of this: love unto His image. The possession of the former is the aim of spiritual contemplation; that of the second, of contemplation and practice."⁶⁰ The excellent love of neighbour illumines one's mind by constant contact with and love unto God.⁶¹ Through external deeds one expresses this love openly. It is love in practice.

Kuriakose Elias Chavara, known for his deep spirituality and commitment to serving others, shared divine love through compassion and concern for others in various ways. He recognized the importance of education in uplifting society and promoting the dignity of every individual. He initiated to establish schools to provide education, especially to the marginalized and underprivileged sections of society, regardless of caste or creed. Through education, he sought to empower individuals to fulfill their potential and contribute positively to society. He was a strong advocate for the empowerment of women in society. He established religious congregation for women, providing them with opportunities for education and spiritual growth. He was deeply committed to promoting social justice and equality. He spoke out against social evils such as caste discrimination and worked to create a more just

⁵⁹ Cf. Isaac, *Mystic Treatises*, 81, 381.

⁶⁰ Isaac, *Mystic Treatises*, 81, 381.

⁶¹ Cf. Isaac, *The Ascetical Homilies*, 4, 32.

and equitable society. He advocated for the rights of the poor and oppressed, providing them with practical assistance and support to improve their lives. As a spiritual leader, Kuriakose Elias Chavara inspired others through his exemplary life of prayer, humility, and service. He lived a simple and austere life, dedicating himself to prayer, contemplation, and the pursuit of holiness. His life of holiness and virtue attracted many followers, who were inspired by his love for God and neighbor. He demonstrated compassion and care for the sick, the elderly, and the marginalized. He personally tended to the sick and suffering, offering them comfort and solace in their time of need. Generally, Kuriakose Elias Chavara shared divine love through his compassionate concern for others, particularly the marginalized and vulnerable members of society. Through these he taught that genuine love for God manifests in acts of service and charity toward others, embodying the selfless love of Christ. He dedicated himself to God through acts of love and service, sharing his divine experiences with others. He saw his actions as expressions of his devotion and understanding of God's will, striving to guide others towards spiritual growth and union with the divine.

7. Conclusion

The spirituality of Kuriakose Elias Chavara, viewed through the lens of Eastern Christian tradition, unveils profound insights into the essence of divine love, mercy, and providence. Rooted deeply in the mystical tradition of Eastern Christianity, Kuriakose Elias Chavara's teachings resonate with the timeless wisdom of Eastern mystics like St Isaac the Syrian, highlighting love as the cornerstone of the Christian spirituality. His spirituality emphasizes the inseparable connection between the love of God and the love of neighbor. Central to his spiritual journey is the realization of God's unconditional and eternal love, epitomized in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Through contemplation on Christ's sacrificial love, he finds inspiration and solace, viewing the crucifixion not as mere suffering but as a grand procession towards union with the divine. His spiritual legacy underscores the transformative power of divine love, nurturing the soul and leading to spiritual growth and fulfillment. Through his writings and exemplary life, Kuriakose Elias Chavara exemplifies the profound impact of experiencing God's boundless love, mercy, and providence, inspiring others to cultivate deep relationships with the divine.

In essence, Kuriakose Elias Chavara emerges as a beacon of divine love, inviting individuals to embrace the transformative power of love, live lives rooted in compassion and service, and journey towards union with the divine. His spirituality offers profound insights into asceticism, virtuous living, and the meditative reading of Scripture as pathways to divine love, guiding individuals towards spiritual renewal and a fuller experience of God's boundless love. Through prayer, contemplation, and compassionate concern for others, his life exemplifies the resilience and transformative power of divine love, reminding us that true fulfillment is found in embracing divine love and the overflowing of divine love as actions towards humanity, echoing the profound spirituality of Eastern Christianity.