

## **EASTERN MYSTICAL PARADIGMS IN KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA**

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**Abstract:** Chavara's profound faith in Christ and his deep love for Him had a transformative effect, shaping him into a vessel of divine grace. Immersed in the teachings of God and fortified by His word, Chavara possessed the audacity and certainty to undertake extraordinary measures for his community. True mystics shall play a crucial role in establishing the Kingdom of God within this world by utilizing all the available resources. Constant communion with the Almighty not only cultivated a rich inner life within him but also impelled him to dedicate his existence to the service of the divine. Through meditation, he established unity with God, and in and through his actions, he embodied solidarity with the marginalized and impoverished. Chavara emulated the fervour of Elijah, driven by an unwavering zeal for the living God. His teachings were not mere words but emanated from his own lived experiences. In the tradition of Carmelite mystics, Chavara embraced spousal mysticism, wherein the relationship between humanity and God mirrors a spiritual marriage—an intimate and reciprocal bond of love and commitment. The core of Chavara's mysticism is his Abba (*appa*) experience.

**Keywords:** Mysticism, *ente appa*, Mystical experience, Mystics, Interiority, Indwelling presence, Contemplation, Long to see, Mystical

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roots, *Dhyansallapangal*, Eastern/oriental, *Darsanam*, *Vasam*, *Sallapam*, *Kāṇākeṇam*, Carmelite, Spousal Mysticism

## **1. Introduction**

In various major religious traditions, a central conceptual theme revolves around the imperative of purifying and transforming the individual to facilitate the integration and maturation of one's personality with the divine. While the methods employed for this purification vary across different cultural and religious contexts, a recurring motif is that of an inner and outer journey. Throughout the history of mysticism, it has been widely acknowledged that the mystical path encompasses distinct stages of progression, ultimately leading to heightened levels of consciousness.

A longstanding tradition within mysticism underscores the necessity for the individuals to undergo inner transformation, involving a relinquishment of selfish attitudes and limited ways of relating to the world. Hence, the major religious traditions emphasize the importance of a path focused on purification and transformation to achieve the integration and unification of the individual's personality with the divine. True mystical experiences are characterized by an immediate sense of contact with the transcendent, signifying a profound connection beyond the ordinary realms of existence.

Pseudo-Dionysius, a fifth-century Syrian Monk, is credited with gathering-up the patristic mystical heritage and definitively introducing the word "mystical" into the Christian tradition. Following Gregory of Nyssa in particular, he used the word to refer to the deeper meaning of scripture and the sacraments, in which God's love is revealed and through which the Christian participates in this mystery.<sup>1</sup> The present article is an attempt to understand and underscore the various dimensions or paradigms of mysticism in Kuriakose Elias Chavara who relentlessly sought the will of God in contemplation and action for the glory of God and the good of the people.

## **2. Mysticism: A Total Submission to God**

Our faith in Christ is a gift of God and a voluntary commitment on our part. Understanding fully the meaning, relevance and the beauty of this faith is our real commitment. This quest is a difficult one, filled with

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<sup>1</sup> J. Welch, "Mysticism", in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, Joseph A. Komonchak (chief ed.), Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991, 695.

many crises. Its aim is surely not to weaken the faith but to make it a living experience. Mysticism is often regarded as an encounter that transcends the boundaries of religion, intellect, imagination, and the senses. Mystical experiences are deemed the most elevated and purest form of knowledge, and those who embark on the mystical path attain the richness of life by forsaking worldly desires - a realm beyond the grasp of the ordinary people. One of the aims of all religions is the union of the soul with God, which is the highest form of mystical experience. Christian life is much more than a natural human life. A Christian—the saint, according to St Paul, accepts God's invitation and strives to attain the supernatural goal to which human being is elevated and ordained through grace. This acceptance of God's invitation implies the submission of human being's intellect to truths which are beyond discovery by the natural light of reason. It also implies reliance on the superior power that helps him/her to attain the divine distinction. Above all, the acceptance is a symbol of the total and loving dedication of the whole being of man to that supreme God.<sup>2</sup>

Kuriakose Elias Chavara exemplified a life fully immersed in and enriched by his faith. He recognized the distinctive role of his family in nurturing his spiritual journey. His connection with God was deeply personal, allowing him to address the divine with an intimate term "Abba", signifying a close, fatherly bond. Naturally, Chavara used the affectionate expression "ente appa" to address God, reflecting a heartfelt and personal connection. As he grew up, Chavara's relationship with God and fellow humans retained a profound sense of maturity and intimacy. His spiritual journey was characterized by a harmonious blend of deep devotion and a close, personal connection with the divine and those around him. The strong and vibrant faith in Christ and deep love towards Him transformed Chavara to a man of divine graciousness.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century was, in many respects, a period of crisis for the Catholic community of Kerala. Kuriakose Elias Chavara was the man sent by God to help the people tide over the crisis successfully. The secret behind such wonderful achievements was that Chavara was a man of great interiority, living in constant union with God and dedicating his life and activities to His service. On his deathbed, he proclaimed that he had preserved his baptismal innocence throughout his life. History venerates him as a devout servant of God, a contemporary prophet, and

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<sup>2</sup> K. C. Chacko, *Lead Kindly Light*, Kakkanad: A Beth Rauma Publication, 2014, 111-112.

a man of unwavering faith with a profound vision. Chavara dedicated himself to the spiritual, social, and cultural well-being of God's people, demonstrating extraordinary courage in confronting the challenges of his era. Like the mystics such as John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila, and Catherine of Siena, who encountered the most intimate and sublime ecstasy in their union with God, Kuriakose Elias Chavara experienced this mystical connection in his spiritual journey.

### **2.1. Mystics: Persons for Others**

Mysticism is a profound and unique encounter with the divine reality, a gift freely bestowed by God, leading to a deep sense of union and knowledge. Authentic mysticism invariably engenders a heightened capacity for generous love towards others and is often observed among Christians who devote themselves to prayer and remain attuned to God's presence in their lives. In the perspective of Indian sages, mysticism serves as an experiential and intuitive pathway to access the realm of the ultimate Being. Within the mystical experience, the highest level of knowledge and profound encounter is attained through the pinnacle of intuition, marking it as the foundational and paramount experience.

Understanding Christianity is best achieved through the lives of its notable figures rather than its doctrines and dogmas. The credibility of doctrinal formulations and authoritative declarations within the Church is primarily derived from the character of Jesus Christ. Even when delving into the dynamic and transformative mystical experiences, a more profound grasp is gained through the lives of mystics who have been touched by the divine essence embodied in Jesus Christ, nurtured within the Christian community. Furthermore, a Christian mystic is not someone dwelling in an isolated ivory tower of Christ-consciousness. Christ consciousness, at its core, is inherently focused on others. In Jesus Christ, we encounter a figure who willingly surrendered his own self for the sake of others, ensuring abundant life for all (Jn 10:10). From this standpoint, a Christian mystic is an individual whose consciousness undergoes a deep and fundamental transformation through Christ-consciousness. Such a mystic continues to dwell in a state of profound

awareness of the Divine, effecting change within their own life and contributing to the transformation of others.<sup>3</sup>

The constant experience of the indwelling presence of the Father not only turned Chavara into a person of profound interiority and helped him to live in continuous mystical union but also to dedicate his life and activities to His service. On his beatification on 8 February 1986 at Kottayam, Kerala, Pope John Paul II said:

The Church throughout the world rejoices with the Church in India as Fr Kuriakose Elias Chavara is raised to the rank of the Blessed in the great Communion of Saints. This man advanced to great heights of holiness through his wholehearted cooperation with the grace of God. He possessed an ardent love of God. All his 65 years long earthly life, Blessed Chavara laboured generously for the renewal and enrichment of Christian life and growth of the Church. His deep love of Christ filled him with apostolic zeal, which has helped him in a special way to preserve and strengthen the unity of the Church. With great generosity he collaborated with others, especially his brother priests and religious in the work of salvation.<sup>4</sup>

Theological engagement is deemed incomplete without the essential essence of Mystery, and within this context, mystics are revered for their role in illuminating profound realities inherent in all Christians. These mystics possess a conscious awareness of the divine love story unfolding within the intricate themes and subplots of their lives. In their mystical encounters, there exists a seamless coordination of both intellect and will, both fervently directed towards God - the ultimate and perfect objective of their endeavours. Mystic contemplation, as observed, serves to deepen the entire personality, imbue character with richness, and foster the development of virtues within the individual. Kuriakose Elias Chavara's writings are replete with such elements, portraying his mystical experiences as a profound connection with both God and humanity. Chavara emerges as a mystical personality wholly devoted to both God and humankind.

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<sup>3</sup> S. Chackalackal, "Holistic Integration of Mystical Aspirations and Social Commitment: Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara of the Nineteenth Century," *Herald of the East* 11, 2 (2015), 182.

<sup>4</sup> T. Panthaplackal, *A Pearl Truly Indian*, Ernakulam: The CMI Generalate, 2005, 60.

## 2.2. Mysticism: An All-Embracing Experience

According to Underhill, "Mysticism is the art of union with Reality. The mystic is a person who has attained that union in greater or less degree; or who aims at and believes in such attainment."<sup>5</sup> Chavara's life and writings exemplify a seamless integration of mystical aspirations and a deep commitment to societal well-being. The mystical dimension, in his perspective, entails a comprehensive merging of seemingly conflicting aspects within the created world and human constructs. Chavara's writings distinctly echo his mystical core rooted in his profound Christ (*Appa*) experience. He encountered God as the embodiment of love and joy, sustaining him like nourishment and vital as his very breath. Despite the trials and tribulations he encountered while nurturing his communities, his heart rejoiced solely due to the profound awareness of the divine presence within. Reflecting on this experience, he sang:

Severed from you, my God my only good  
 What joy, peace, or wellbeing can be mine?  
 You my love, my joy, and all my good fortune  
 If not with you, how could I live my life  
 My very breath, my food, my drink  
 What a solace have I save in you!<sup>6</sup> (Canto ii/141-146).

Central to his vision is the Church's primary mission of disseminating this Christic consciousness. Chavara actively pursued this goal by establishing religious communities, nurturing dedicated and holistic pastors, and conceptualizing transformative projects. What stands out is his inclusive approach, evident in initiatives fostering self-respect and self-reliance. All these endeavours collectively contribute to the continuous establishment of the Kingdom of God within the entirety of creation. A genuine mystic does not establish rigid boundaries between the sacred and the profane. Instead, they embrace a perspective that transcends individual traditions, viewing the mystical realm as an integrative attitude. This holistic perception of reality is nurtured in the enduring awareness of the ultimate consciousness. Practical theology takes on a holistic dimension when it evolves into a more experiential framework. For Christians, the quintessential model for life and mission is found in the embodiment of Jesus of Nazareth. His life is characterized

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<sup>5</sup> Underhill, *Practical Mysticism*, New York: J M Dent & Sons Ltd., 2006, 7.

<sup>6</sup> *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara: Compunction of the Soul, Dirge, Anasthasia's Martyrdom* (CWC), Vol. II, Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Chavara, 1989, 10.

by a seamless integration between his teachings and actions, as well as a dedicated focus on addressing various human needs. This coherence is evident in the way Jesus approached his mission. Similarly, the life of Chavara serves as a vivid illustration of this integrated and holistic vision. In examining his life, one can observe a harmonious blending of various elements, mirroring the unity between his spiritual teachings and his practical engagement with the diverse needs of humanity. Chavara's holistic approach provides a compelling example for those seeking a balanced and comprehensive perspective in theology and practical application. Thomas Kochumuttom precisely puts this idea:

While thinking of the establishment of a religious house their intention, obviously, was to be able to do the many good works for that would otherwise be left undone in the Church and society- it should be a "house built on hilltop (*bes-rauma*)" for all others to look at and be inspired, a 'mirror of virtuous life' (*punnyattinte Kannati*) looking at which all can easily learn what it means to lead a virtuous life, and 'spiritual resort' (*punnya sanketam*) where all are welcome to come and be spiritually refreshed and revitalized.<sup>7</sup>

### 2.3. Passion for Seeing God

Chavara's spirituality is characterized by an intense yearning to behold God, a longing for the *darśan*, or vision, of the divine. This sentiment is vividly expressed in his *Compunction of Soul*, a lengthy poem spanning 168 lines, wherein he pours out his profound desire to witness the Lord in every aspect of His existence – from every stage of His life to His full glory, beauty, and magnanimity. The refrain that punctuates every other line echoes this fervent longing: *kāṇākeṇam*, ("I long to see you!"). In this book we see:

The Lord of mercy, the Son of God  
His glorious splendour, I long to see!  
How he stayed for nine months  
In the womb of His mother, I long to see!  
Born in her womb, how to Bethlehem he came  
To obey mighty Caesar, I long to see!  
How Jesus, Anna's grand son  
Was hunger-smitten, I long to see

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<sup>7</sup> T. Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2017, 23.

And with the Phrases discussed law  
 In his twelfth year, I long to see!  
 The Good Shepherd, seeking his flock  
 That had gone astray, I long to see;  
 The lord of goodness, proclaiming Himself  
 As our loving friend, I long to see!<sup>8</sup>

Chavara's longing stemmed from profound meditative prayer and a profound awareness of the ever-present Divine. The pinnacle of religious experience lies in this yearning to witness the celestial manifestation. The fervent aspiration to behold God revolutionizes one's existence; and upon the fulfilment of this longing through a divine encounter, the beholder deems nothing else of value. Feeling the assurance of being God's cherished child, Chavara found the courage to come back to Him, much like the prodigal son. Embracing the same emotions as the prodigal son, Chavara prays:

Oh, it is a long time since I saw *enṭe appan's* divine face. I squandered all He gave me. Now I am working for an unjust employer, feeding his pigs. I am so famished that I wish I could feed on the food the pigs eat... Further delay is suicidal. So here I am on my feet to return home with my jungle-stick and country cap (*toppi-pāla*)... O my soul! Your *appan* is so bounteous as to forgive and forget every act of the ingratitude of yours... Would He not be furious with me, would He even deign to look at me? Can I go into His presence without permission?... How can I approach such an august presence and seek forgiveness? ... Still, *enṭe appan* is so generous and full of love that I needn't entertain any fear... Behold, the doors are wide open! There, *enṭe appan* is coming out!... O *enṭe appā!*, I have sinned against heaven and before You... I am not worthy to be called Your son... My heart, however, tells me to call You by no other name than *enṭe appan*... Therefore, *enṭe appā*... forgive me... O *enṭe appā*, I cast myself on my knees before Your throne of mercy...<sup>9</sup>

Chavara possessed a keen perception of the heart, one that remained ever vigilant. In the tapestry of life, whether woven with threads of joy or sorrow, he discerned the hand of God with effortless clarity. Thus, his

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<sup>8</sup> CWC II (1989), 17-19.

<sup>9</sup> *Colloquies* in CWC III (1990), 4-5.

gaze upon the divine remained steadfast and unbroken, transcending the fluctuations of circumstance.

## 2.4. Mystics: Persons of the New World

Mystical experience is a kind of pilgrimage. The starting point of this pilgrimage is flight from the world, with attention and a life of silence, so that they may listen to God. They enter the living temple, man's heart, where they encounter the living God. St Ephrem says: "O glorious God who dwells in ineffable silence, you have built for my renewal a tabernacle of love on earth where it is your good pleasure to rest, a temple made of flesh and fashioned with the most holy sanctuary oil. Then you filled it with your presence so that worship might be fulfilled in it, indicating the worship of the eternal persons of your Trinity."<sup>10</sup>

Once an individual traverses into the depths of one's own heart, he/she finds himself/herself within a treasure house that holds the key to witnessing the celestial riches. The humble discovers the treasures within, and the staircase to heavenly realms is concealed within the chambers of the heart. Sustaining a profound fervour necessitates dwelling within oneself, engaging in introspection, envisioning a new world, and nurturing thoughts and emotions aligned with the aspirations of a renewed existence.

If mysticism may be defined as the experience of a loving knowledge of God, then mystical theology is systematic reflection on that experience. The Eastern Church has never maintained a sharp distinction between the experience and its theory. Experience and doctrine mutually condition one another so that the Eastern theological tradition is essentially a mystical theology. The Fathers of the Church and early writers do not identify spirituality as a discipline distinct from their normal theological endeavours. The mystics are viewed as persons who illumine the deepest realities present in all Christians. The mystery upon which the human rests the centre toward which the soul journeys, is in love with us and desires for us what we most deeply desire ourselves.<sup>11</sup> As a man of essential mysticism, Chavara is a practical mystic. The history of the universal Church records that only those men and women who led a life encircled by the Divine Spirit could make

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<sup>10</sup> S. Brock, *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and Spiritual Life*, Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1987, 349.

<sup>11</sup> J. Welch, "Mystical Theology," in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, Joseph A. Komonchak (chief ed.), Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991, 693.

remarkable and lasting contributions to the Church in its formative years. Kuriakose Elias Chavara was definitely a social reformer, a brilliant educationalist, a great litterateur, an able administrator, a knowledgeable liturgist, a promoter of inter-religious understanding, an orator and linguist, and above all, a very holy man. He pioneered several new initiatives for the spiritual, religious and social uplift of Kerala society, and in that way was a man ahead of his times.

Standing in the great line of Christian mystics, Kuriakose Elias Chavara had a unique vision of God and humankind. The spirituality of Chavara was a combination of Indian, Eastern/oriental and Carmelite features of mysticism. Rooted in these age-old traditions, Chavara and his companions took to a life of contemplation that led them to intense apostolate.

## **2.5. Mystical Roots of Kuriakose Elias Chavara**

### **2.5.1. Biblical Root**

The primary source of Christian spirituality is the Bible which invites and makes us enter into the mystery of salvation unfolded in it, especially in the person of Jesus the eternal Word and the Son of God become man. Chavara was a religious who was transformed by the divine love and in turn, transformed the society in which he lived with his firm conviction of the gospel values. He fostered a profound filial bond with Jesus, affectionately addressing Him as “ente appa” or “my beloved father.” In contrast to many other spiritual figures who perceive their connection with Jesus in terms of a bride and bridegroom relationship, Chavara was deeply influenced by the parable of the Loving Father (Lk 15:11-32). In this parable, he found resonance with his own spiritual journey, seeing himself as the prodigal son returning to the loving embrace of the all-encompassing father, who he recognized as Jesus himself. This “appa experience” symbolized the culmination of an intimate and lifelong filial relationship that Chavara nurtured with Jesus.<sup>12</sup>

In a scientific study of *Dhyanasallapangal*, the contemplative colloquies of Chavara, by the prominent biblical scholar Paul Kalluveettil, we see Chavara emerges as a figure labelled as a “dynamic hermeneut of the Word,” portraying him as a true disciple of Jesus and an exceptional interpreter. Kalluveettil’s analysis suggests that

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<sup>12</sup> S. Chackalackal, “Holistic Integration of Mystical Aspirations and Social Commitment,” 191.

*Dhyansallapangal* is deeply rooted in biblical principles, with both its thematic content and stylistic presentation drawing inspiration from the Bible. Expanding on his observation, it is evident that Chavara embodies not just dynamism but also a mystical interpretation of scripture. His engagement with the Word of God transcends mere academic pursuit, delving into the realms of spirituality and personal connection. With a profound faith and reverent demeanour, he immerses himself in attentive listening to the Word, and fervently engages in response. This is not a detached study, but a deeply personal communion marked by a mystical aura.

### 2.5.2. Oriental Root

According to one of the pioneers of Christian mysticism Evagrius Ponticus (ca. 345–399), theology is “knowledge of God gained from first-hand experience. It comes not from books, but from prayer.”<sup>13</sup> Evagrius respects the value of reading, of study, of reason; he did not doubt the profound value of dogma, liturgy, and ecclesiastical authority. But for him, theology in the strict sense is the “encounter of the praying mind with God.”<sup>14</sup> To those who raise their hearts to God, He comes down to meet them, speak to them and entrust them with certain duties. This call echoes in the depth of one’s heart. To listen to it, one needs to descend to the realm of the heart. The Christian spiritual tradition presents the response of human being to the call of God in this manner. The Fathers of the Church, especially the Fathers of the Christian East have encountered this call with great interiority.<sup>15</sup>

Kuriakose Elias Chavara, a revered saint of the Syro-Malabar Church, was deeply rooted in the spiritual traditions of his native Kerala, India, which indeed have Oriental roots. Here are some aspects of Oriental spirituality that influenced Chavara:

**2.5.2.1. Syriac Christian Tradition:** Chavara belonged to the Syro-Malabar Church, which traces its origins to the early Christian communities in India. The Syriac Christian tradition, with its rich liturgical and spiritual heritage, deeply influenced Chavara’s

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<sup>13</sup> W. Harmless and R. R. Fitzgerald, *The Sapphire Light of the Mind: The Skemmata of Evagrius Ponticus*, *Journal of Theological Studies* 62 (2001), Oxford University Press, 498.

<sup>14</sup> Harmless and Fitzgerald, *The Sapphire Light of the Mind*, 498.

<sup>15</sup> H. Thottakkara, *The Prayer of the Heart*, Alwaye: Star Publications, 2004, 10.

spirituality. This tradition emphasizes asceticism, prayer, and community life.

**2.5.2.2. Syro-Malabar Liturgy:** Chavara was immersed in the liturgical practices of the Syro-Malabar Church, which incorporates elements from the East Syrian (Chaldean) liturgical tradition. The liturgy emphasizes the mystical participation in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, fostering a profound spiritual connection with God.

**2.5.2.3. Monastic Influence:** Chavara was a founding member of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI), a religious congregation rooted in the Oriental monastic tradition. Monasticism has been a significant feature of Oriental Christianity, emphasizing prayer, meditation, and asceticism as means to draw closer to God.

**2.5.2.4. Eastern Christian Mysticism:** Chavara's spirituality was shaped by the mystical traditions of Eastern Christianity, which include practices such as hesychasm (the practice of inner stillness and contemplative prayer) and the Jesus Prayer. These practices aim at cultivating union with God through prayer and inner purification.

### 2.5.3. Indian Root

We see the mystical experience of Chavara, which are expressed in his *darsanam*, *vasam*, and *sallapam* by means of which he practiced the Christian spiritual values in the Indian society. The Indian Philosophical systems and Hindu-Indian religious traditions offer a rich tapestry of paths toward liberation from the cycle of birth and death. Among these, three classical paths stand out: *Karma-marga*, *Jnana-marga*, and *Bhakti-marga*. Chavara exemplified the essence of *Karma-yoga*, or *Karma-marga*.<sup>16</sup> This spiritual path involves the pursuit of enlightenment through selfless actions, coupled with devoted worship of God and constant contemplation of transcendent truths. Throughout his life, Chavara embraced this path with sincerity and courage.

Chavara's lifestyle, spiritual practices, and mystical insights closely mirror the fundamental teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita*. The *Gita* advocates the path of detached action, emphasizing the performance of duties without attachment to the outcomes. It encourages the

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<sup>16</sup> A. Thottakkara, "Saint Chavara, A Karma-Yogi: A Paradigm of the Mysticism of Active Ministry," Keynote Address in the Workshop on Theological Studies on St Chavara, Kakkanad: Chavara Central Secretariat, 2019, 1.

individuals to fulfil their responsibilities while relinquishing selfish desires and maintaining equanimity in success or failure.<sup>17</sup> This philosophy promotes a spirituality rooted in active engagement with the world—an ethos that resonates deeply with the life and teachings of Chavara.

#### 2.5.4 Carmelite Root

The spousal mysticism is the principal theme in the writings of Carmelite mystics basically accepted by Chavara. Just as Theresa of Avila and other mystics, Chavara perceived God as the Bridegroom and the soul as the bride. As George A. Maloney puts it, "the mystics surrender themselves in their own unique energies to those of God. A new communion of love is reached as we seek to 'do' not according to our inner words and desires, but according to God's Word. Our impulsiveness and self-centredness which isolate and insulate us, change to active receptivity in our openness to cooperate with the graceful energies of God operating at each moment in each event."<sup>18</sup>

Chavara epitomized a man of God, steeped in contemplation and mysticism. His profound intimacy with the Lord mirrored that of his master, Jesus, allowing him to maintain an inner freedom akin to that which Jesus embodied. This freedom empowered him to traverse freely among people, bearing a message of love. In his transcendence, Chavara shed the shackles of attachment – be it to possessions, acclaim, or even the very success of his divine mission. His detachment extended even to his own life, for he was wholly surrendered to the will of God. Such boundless trust in the divine endowed him with a freedom without limits.<sup>19</sup> Often, he would linger in rapturous communion before the Eucharistic Lord, spending extended periods in ecstatic devotion. Through these moments of profound connection, he drew sustenance and guidance, emanating a spiritual presence that touched the lives of those around him. In his *colloquies*, he wrote with much passion: "O My

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<sup>17</sup> A. Thottakkara, "Saint Chavara, A Karma-Yogi: A Paradigm of the Mysticism of Active Ministry," 4.

<sup>18</sup> George A. Maloney, *Mysticism and the New Age: Christic Consciousness in the New Creation*, New York: Alba House, 1991, 55.

<sup>19</sup> M. Maniampra, *Psycho-Theological Paradigms in Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, (Theological studies on Saint Chavara 3), Kochi: Chavara Central Secretariat & Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2019, 10.

Father (*Ente Appa*), my heart however tells me to call you by no other name than my Father..."<sup>20</sup>

In his Letter to the sisters, he articulates his inner feelings when he reads about the noble status of the consecrated virgins:

O this is a great blessing! When I read a part of the book, *Monacum Sanctae*, written by Saint Liguori for religious sisters, I was jealous of you. This is true. This is verily true. You are blessed. O queens of my Lord and my God, how great and praise worthy is this state of life you have ascended. Only on the day of judgement you would understand that so many earthly queens have been jealous of your treasures.<sup>21</sup>

In letter, VII/6, Chavara borrows the words of Christ the Bridegroom who has fixed His gaze on His beloved brides who are attracted to the worldly joys and things. He trained early members of the community of sisters to live in the ever-abiding presence of the divine Bridegroom and to keep constant communion and communication:

Ha! Live in the love of Jesus! Remain always in His presence. Walk by His side; converse with him always. When you feel desire, love or attraction towards something, the loving Lord turns towards you and tells you, "Look at me, will that thing make you happier than I will? Is it sorrow or trouble? Then why are you troubled? I can liberate you from your troubles and make you happy. Is it not enough for you? Even for a moment He is not away from you. He wants you to make you happy and he wants only that you love him."<sup>22</sup>

In one of his letters, he wrote: "O Lord, do not be separate from us until we are one with you."<sup>23</sup> He could listen to the footsteps of the Lord who accompany him in his soul. He therefore began to see his project as God's projects. Gratefully and with a sense of unworthiness he recalls how he was wonderfully cared, taught and trained in a good path by the special love of God that accompanied him always.<sup>24</sup> He continually experienced God as a loving friend accompanying him. His works were natural expressions and extensions of his intimate God experience and lived mysticism. Mystical experience is the mark of a person who is close

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<sup>20</sup> CWC, vol. III, *Colloquies in Meditation*, 5.

<sup>21</sup> CWC, vol. IV: Letters, VII/2, Bangalore, 2020, 124.

<sup>22</sup> CWC, vol. IV: Letters, VII/6, 131.

<sup>23</sup> CWC, vol. IV, *Letters*, VII/6.

<sup>24</sup> CWC, vol. II, *Atmanuthapam*, 1:130-140.

to God in sanctity. Chavara's profound connection with Jesus, nurtured through prayer and austere spiritual disciplines, infused every aspect of his being with a divine essence, allowing him to perceive the world through Jesus' eyes. In his actions and responses, there was a constant yearning to align with God's will, characterized by a spirit of servitude and humility. This intimate communion empowered him to extend care, comfort, forgiveness, and ministry to those in need, reflecting the compassion and love of Jesus Himself. In his *Colloquies*, Chavara writes, "In order to grant all my heart's desires, and permitting me to ask without any hesitation for whatever favour I like to have, He deigns to dwell day and night continuously very close to my room."<sup>25</sup>

The Carmelite tradition in the Christian spirituality lays great emphasis on the virtue and wisdom that can be acquired through the practice of silence. Thus, the ancient rule stipulates: "Each one of you is to stay in his own cell or nearby, pondering the Lord's law day and night and keeping watch at his prayers unless attending to some other duty. The practice of prayer is to be fostered in silence. The mystical intuitive experience is 'a ray of darkness' due to the excess of light. It leads one to mystic silence."<sup>26</sup> Chavara was very fond of silence and solitude. He invited the sisters to keep this valuable silence: "If you love reading, you will love solitude. When a soul delights in solitude, Jesus Christ will come to converse with it in solitude and begin communing with it."<sup>27</sup>

### 3. Conclusion

Kuriakose Elias Chavara was a man of contemplation and action. The time that he spent in prayer especially before the Blessed Sacrament boosted his life for the action. One can be a mystic in the sense that one is habitually in personal union with the Lord. Chavara's personal union with God kept ever deepening, never diminishing, and this is what qualifies him for the title of a mystic. In meditation, Chavara found unity with God, while in action; he found unity with the poor and underprivileged. His relationship with God filled him with merciful love, reflecting in his amiable, compassionate nature, always available to others. Drawn irresistibly to the Eucharistic Lord, Chavara learned of divine mercy. His humility, contrition, and self-surrender stemmed from

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<sup>25</sup> CWC, vol. III: *Colloquies*, 19.

<sup>26</sup> T. Kadankavil, *Chavara- A Multidimensional Saint*, Kottayam: Deepika Book House, 2014, 192.

<sup>27</sup> CWC, vol. IV: *Letters*, VII/8.

the profound belief that he was insignificant before the Lord. Like the prodigal son, he embarked on a journey towards his loving Father.

Chavara indeed exemplifies a profound spiritual perspective, one that sees the hand of God in every aspect of life. Viewing the world through the lens of divine providence, he found peace and acceptance in all circumstances, recognizing them as expressions of God's will rather than mere chance or chaos. His deep faith allowed him to maintain equanimity in both joyful and challenging times, knowing that all experiences served a higher purpose ordained by God. This unwavering trust in divine providence not only brought him tranquillity but also empowered him to navigate life with grace and resilience. By surrendering to God's will completely, Chavara cultivated a sense of inner peace that transcended external circumstances. His steadfast belief in the guiding hand of God provided him with a foundation of strength and serenity, enabling him to remain composed and centered amidst life's storms. In emulating Chavara's attitude of acceptance and trust in God's providence, one can strive to cultivate a similar sense of peace and tranquillity in one's own life, regardless of the challenges one may have to face.