

THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON IN *DHYĀNASALLĀPAÑÑĀḷ*: AN EXAMPLE FOR THE HERMENEUTICS OF CHAVARA

Joel Chiramal CMI♦
Joy Philip Kakkanatt CMI♦

Abstract: This article is an attempt to read through the Parable of the Prodigal Son in *Dhyānasallāpaññāḷ*, where Kuriakose Elias Chavara makes a synthesis of the Sacred Scripture and his personal reflection. Some passages from it are analysed to find the inner dynamics involved in the way he quotes the Scripture. Chavara's presentation of this parable in a 'Three-Scene Perspective' shows his radical interiorization of the Sacred Scripture as well as a three-fold identification, namely, with the character in the parable, society of the nineteenth century and the culture of the time. He presents himself before God and the community as a corporate personality. We also see that the Sacred Scripture remained his focus and foundation in his reformation pedagogy. It is a paradigm for modern-day pastors. This method of radical interiorization and contextual interpretation is a challenge as well as scope for all those who wish to follow the footsteps of the Word Incarnate.

Keywords: Sacred Scripture, Hermeneutics, Interpretation, *Dhyānasallāpaññāḷ*, Radical Interiorisation, Contextual Application,

♦ **Joel Chiramal CMI** belongs to Devamatha Province, Trissur of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate. He had his theological training in DVK Bengaluru. Email: chiramaljoel@gmail.com

♦ **Joy Philip Kakkanatt CMI** holds a Licentiate in Sacred Scripture from Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome, and a Doctorate in Theology with specialisation in Biblical Theology from Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome. Currently, he serves as the President of DVK Bengaluru. He has been visiting faculty at JDV, Pune; Samanvaya Theology College, Bhopal; Kristu Jyothi College, Bangalore, etc. He has authored several books and articles in the area of OT biblical studies. Email: jpkakkanttu@gmail.com

Parable of the Prodigal Son, Three Scene Narration, Vernacular Translation.

1. Chavara: 'An Indian Hermeneutic'

Seeing hermeneutics as a science of the rules of exegesis¹ and the way of understanding and appropriating a text,² we find an eminent hermeneutic genius in the person of Kuriakose Elias Chavara as he could understand and appropriate the biblical narratives in a unique manner in his writings and life. A humble attempt is done here to investigate the hermeneutics employed in the biblical narrations of Chavara, especially in his *Dhyānasallāpaṅṅal*.

While considering the approach employed by Chavara, he has a unique approach which is Indian, communitarian, personal and mystic. As Surgirtharajah notes:

Indian biblical interpreters have also been borrowing from the Indian tradition of storytelling. This method has been used by religious teachers to instruct their followers. Hermeneutics for them is not the re-reading of old texts but the re-telling of old stories for a new context. ... their hermeneutical attempts do not conform to the ground rules set by western academics, and their endeavours are likely to be condescendingly dismissed as lacking in "methodological rigour."³

Here, we would like to present the biblical interpretation of St Chavara in this line of thought. Chavara, who was a proud son of the soil, was exemplary to retain the smell of the soil in all his apostolic endeavours. The Indian culture of storytelling and profound integration of the value system into the personal life resulting in an integral personality is seen in his life. The following analysis throws light in this line.

2. Scriptural Interpretations in *Dhyānasallāpaṅṅal*: Lk 15:11-32 in Detail

Chavara cited scriptural verses profusely throughout the *Dhyānasallāpaṅṅal*, in the Indian mode of storytelling as mentioned above

¹ Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. by Denis Savage, London: Yale University Press, 1970, 54.

² Klyne R. Snodgrass, "Introduction to a Hermeneutics of Identity," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 168 (January-March 2011), 3.

³ R. S. Surgirtharajah, "Introduction, and Some Thoughts on Asian Biblical Hermeneutics," *Biblical Interpretation* 2 (1994), 254.

by Surgirtarajah. Among them, his articulation of Lk 15:11-32 is worth expounding.

2.1. The Parable of the Younger Son and the Merciful Father

God's mercy for the sinners is thrice illustrated⁴ in the fifteenth chapter of the gospel according to St Luke. They are given through the parables of the shepherd who abandons the ninety-nine sheep to save one, a woman who tries her level best to recover the lost coin, and the evergreen story of the lost son. To call it the story of "The Prodigal Son" alone is to emphasize the first half of the parable (vv. 11-24) to the neglect of the second half (vv. 25-32).⁵ The question of an apt title is a disputed discussion. Nolland seems to attribute the title to all the main characters of the parable. He tells, "The shape of the parable has been disputed in terms of the best title to be given for such a story. Does the story focus on the father, the prodigal, or the elder son?"⁶ For St Chavara, his attention falls with equal importance to the younger son and the father, where the elder son is in oblivion. Hence, in this perspective, the parable could be titled as the 'Parable of the Younger Son and the Merciful Father'.

2.2. Three-Scene Perspective of Chavara

The three-scene perspective of Chavara is the result of spontaneous overflow of a subjective evaluation of this parable, where Chavara is a subject among the other subjects, the son and the father.

According to Culpepper⁷ the parable can be broadly divided into two, vv 11-24 and vv. 25-32, whereas Wiersbe,⁸ use the following structure:

⁴ Raymond E. Brown, et al., *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Bangalore: TPI, 1990, 706.

⁵ Culpepper R. Alan, "The Gospel of Luke: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, in vol. 4, eds. Neil M. Alexander, et. al. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995, 300.

⁶ John Nolland, "Luke 9:21-18:34," in *Word Biblical Commentary*, in vol. 35b, eds. David A. Hubbard, et. al. Texas: Word Books, 1993, 781.

⁷ David R. Alan, "The Gospel of Luke: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," In *The New Interpreter's Bible*, eds. Neil M. Alexander, et. al. 12 vols. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995, 301-303.

⁸ Warren W. Wiersbe, "The New Testament: Matthew - Galatians," in *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, in vol. 5, Andhra Pradesh: OM Books, 2005, 234-238.

vv. 11-16: Rebellion – He went to the far country

vv. 17-19: Repentance – He came to himself

vv. 20-24: Rejoicing – He came to the father

vv. 25-32: The joy of forgiving

This parable evokes in the readers the knowledge of the two brothers' stories of the OT in which the younger brother triumphs over the elder as we see in the accounts of Esau and Jacob (Gen 25:27-34; 27:1-36); and Joseph and his brothers (Gen 37:1-4).⁹

Ringe wishes to see this parable from a two-scene perspective:

The complexity of this parable is remarkable, especially in comparison with the two preceding ones. Instead of the simple movement from lost to found, resulting in a celebration, this parable is developed through two scenes, one featuring each of the two brothers.¹⁰

Here, the three-scene perspective of Chavara becomes a unique interpretation of this parable. All three scenes are oriented on the hinges of relationality: relationality of the son to himself, the son to the father, and the father to the son.

2.2.1. Scene One: Younger Son's Reflection; Lk 15:17-19

These are the verses where the younger son reclaims his lost identity.¹¹ These verses record the interior monologue of the younger son. He is planning to return to his father. In the gospel, we see the three acts the son adopts at this juncture. One is that he came to himself (v. 17), then he plans to get up (v. 18) and go to the father (v. 18). He comes to this realization when he happens to be in the piggery and starves for the food. There, he resolves to say to the father, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands" (vv. 18-19).

⁹ Brown et al., *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 706-707.

¹⁰ Sharon H. Ringe, *Luke*, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995, 208.

¹¹ Alan, "The Gospel of Luke," 302.

The same passage has details which can be identified in twelve clauses in the account of Chavara given in *Dhyānasallāpaṅṅaḷ*.¹²

- i. Younger son remembers the face of the father seen long ago.
- ii. He realises that the wealth received from the father is scattered.
- iii. He serves an 'immoral one.'
- iv. He keeps someone else' "porks."
- v. He starves for food.
- vi. He became physically unfit because of hunger.
- vii. The gifted attire of the father is thrown away.
- viii. He has no sufficient dress to cover shame.
- ix. Now, he wears a dress made of waste cloth.
- x. He decides to appear before father in this manner.
- xi. The desire to meet his father is now an existential exigency where the delay can cause his death.
- xii. Decides to go to the father with his entire riches of a wild stick and hat of palm leaves.
- xiii. Consoles himself thinking of the fortunes of the servants of the father.
- xiv. Consoles himself trusting the graciousness of the father who forgets deeds of disloyalty.

2.2.2. Scene Two: Younger Son's Confession; Lk 15:21

Here in v. 21, the younger son sincerely starts his rehearsed speech:¹³ "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." We also see in the Lukan narrative, that, the son is unable to continue the prepared speech because of the unexpected intervention of the father. It can also be taken as the dramatic presentation of the author, where, now a clear scene talks nonverbally than the prepared speech of the son.¹⁴ Here, Chavara states and continues the confession in *Dhyānasallāpaṅṅaḷ* in a 'qualified way'¹⁵:

¹² Chavara Kuriakose Elias, *Cāvarayaccanre Sampūrṇakṛtikal*, vol. III: *Ādhyātmika Kṛtikal*, ed. Z. M. Muzhoor, Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Bl. Chavara, 1986, 16.

¹³ Alan, "The Gospel of Luke," 302.

¹⁴ Nolland, "Luke 9:21-18:34," 785.

¹⁵ Elias, *Cāvarayaccante Sampūrṇakṛtikal*, vol. III, 17.

- i. The father is addressed with 'possessive nature'.
- ii. The presence of the father is considered 'holy.'
- iii. Being addressed as the son is a 'glorious' title.
- iv. Getting identified with one among the servants of the father is a matter of 'great fortune.'

The subjective mode of textual analysis and the relationality are more evident in the further reflection Chavara makes on the text.

- i. Chavara identifies himself with the repented son.
- ii. Even in the sinful state, the relationality with the father is firm, which helps to address him "father."
- iii. The father in the story is identified as Jesus and God the Father at the same time. Chavara reminds Jesus that "the command to call him 'father' is received from him."¹⁶
- iv. The possessive address to the father is repeated with the addition of the quality of being bountiful.
- v. Chavara reiterates the confession of the younger son in the story as his own confession.

2.2.3. Scene Three: The Father; Lk 15:22-24

Through this third scene, Chavara tries to show the mind of the father reflected through his actions in Lk 15:22-24. In these verses, we see that the father is acting out forgiveness towards his son.¹⁷ The developments in vv. 22-24 indicates what was already entailed in the wordless scene of v. 20b.¹⁸ In the details, we understand that Chavara recalls this story through the eyes of the father.¹⁹

- i. Father welcomes the son to his embrace.
- ii. Tells the son that he is a loving father, and repeats the invitation.
- iii. Gives courage to the son to face the father.
- iv. I have descended from my throne to meet you.

¹⁶ The mystic of Chavara identifies Jesus and God the Father to make this argument. But we see in Mt 6:9-13 that Jesus told us to call God 'Father', not to call himself as 'father'.

¹⁷ Brown et al., *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 707.

¹⁸ Nolland, "Luke 9:21-18:34," 785.

¹⁹ Elias, *Cāvarayaccante Sampūrṇakṛtikā*, vol. III, 26.

After this address of the father to the son, Chavara goes to an elevated reflection. He explains the descent of the father from the throne²⁰ on the backdrop of three biblical narratives, namely, incarnation, good shepherd, passion narrative and the institution of the Eucharist.

2.2.3.1. The Descent of the Father on the Backdrop of Incarnation

The father in this parable pictures to us the attitude of our Father in heaven.²¹ The evangelist John presents the mind of the Father in sending Jesus, which is the love towards the whole creation²² and clarifies that the words of Jesus shows that he and the Father are one.²³ This is the starting point of the reflection of Chavara regarding the descent of the father in the parable, on the backdrop of incarnation. Here, we have a mystical dialogue where the 'Father' speaks to the 'younger son' who is Chavara.

- i. "I have born as one of the creatures like you so that you may not get afraid"
- ii. "You and your mother had a good house, mat and pillow, when you were born"
- iii. "You and your mother had servants to assist"
- iv. "But, when I was born, my poor mother and I had only a cattle shed"
- v. "... as well as, rock instead of bed, and borrowed hay instead of mat and pillow"
- vi. "In this manner I was born"

Here, the subjective and relational mode of seeing the Scripture is well evident. We also witness a profound blending of Christology, incarnation theology, contextualized reflection seen in the use of household materials of the Keralite culture such as *pāyurṁ talayinayurṁ* and a personalized interpretation of the Scripture.

2.2.3.2. The Descent of the Father on the Backdrop of Good Shepherd, Passion Narrative, and Eucharistic Mystery

We have the descent of the father first on the backdrop of the imagery of the good shepherd illustrated in John 10:16. It is one of the major Johannine mission texts that shed significant light on Jesus' messianic

²⁰ Elias, *Cāvarayaccante Sampūrṇakṛtikāḷ*, vol. III, 26.

²¹ Wiersbe, "The New Testament," 235.

²² Jn 3:16 "God so loved the world that he gave his only son."

²³ Jn 10:30 "I and the Father are one."

consciousness during his earthly ministry.²⁴ This mission of the good shepherd giving his life²⁵ gives us an image of the passion of Jesus.²⁶

The genius of Chavara blends these two imageries with the parable in Lk 15:11-32 in *Dhyānasallāpanṇaḷ*.²⁷ This search of the father indicates the motive of Jesus presented in the fourth gospel of preparing rooms in the dwelling place of the Father.²⁸ Chavara proceeds this to the suffering that the good shepherd has to undergo which is linked to the prophecy of the suffering servant whose wounds would heal us.²⁹ Following this, his reflection culminates in the fullness of life achieved through the Eucharistic mystery.³⁰ This is presented as the continuation of the 'father's' talk to the 'younger son' Chavara.

- i. "I wandered in search of you in the forest, fields, oceans and hills." (Ref. Jn 10:16)
- ii. "I came in search of you out of the love for you, so that I may take you to my palace and make you joyful." (Ref. Jn 14:6)
- iii. "This became known by your enemies under whom you were in slavery"
- iv. "Your enemies caught me, beat, wounded, and killed me." (Ref. Jn 10:18)
- v. "Using that wounds and bruises as medicines for your sickness, I healed you." (Ref. Is 53:5-6)
- vi. "To nourish you, I fed you with tasty food and drink, made of my sweet blood." (Ref. Jn 6:55)
- vii. "Why are you afraid to come to my presence even after seeing all these?"

²⁴ Andreas J. Köstenberger, "Jesus the Good Shepherd Who Will Also Bring Other Sheep (John 10:16): The Old Testament Background of a Familiar Metaphor," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 12.1 (2002), 67.

²⁵ Jn 10:18 "No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord."

²⁶ Köstenberger, "Jesus the Good Shepherd," 68.

²⁷ Elias, *Cāvarayaccante Sampūrṇakṛtikaḷ*, vol. III, 26.

²⁸ Jn 14:6 "In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?"

²⁹ Is 53:5 "But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed"

³⁰ Jn 6:53 "So Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."

In addition to the relational aspect, here we see a theological interpretation of the parable. The descent of the father in the parable reflects the salvific motive of God the Father which was accomplished through the suffering of Jesus. The son in the parable represents the whole of humanity, and Chavara presents himself before the Divine as a corporate personality representing the whole of the people of God. The 'father' here is a motherly figure who gives life, provides medicine through suffering, and nourishes with nutritious blood.

3.1. Characteristics and Uniqueness of the Chavara Approach

Chavara's subjective mode of textual analysis, relational way of presentation, solid reflection with inter-testamental references, mystical as well as intuitive reading, rooted in and blended with theological doctrines, and a tasteful way of articulation in the culture and context, reflects a person who truly interiorized the Sacred Scripture in the history of then and now. His approach has similarities when it is compared with the scholarly Scripture analysis of today, even though St Chavara wrote not with an academic intention.

3.1.1. Radical Interiorization of the Sacred Scripture

The radical interiorization of the Sacred Scripture here refers to a deep, personal, and transformative engagement with the biblical text. It is an approach to the Sacred Scripture that asks us to go beyond the surface-level understanding and to seek a more profound understanding that touches the heart and transforms the inner person as we learn from the life and works of Chavara. It can be seen as the result of two factors, as enumerated below.

3.1.1.1. Lack of Availability of the Sacred Scripture in the Vernacular

Chavara's acquaintance was not restricted to any one of the books of the Bible, but to the whole Bible. We also must see that it is very unlikely for Chavara to have constant touch with any of the Malayalam versions of the Protestant Bible available at his time. The reasons to be pointed out are:

- i. There is a significant difference in the vocabulary used by Chavara to quote the Biblical references³¹ with that of the Ramban Bible, Benjamin Beyli's Bible, and Gundert's Bible.

³¹ A clear example is the designation of the younger son. Ramban, Gundert as well as Beyli used *mutiyanāya* (മുട്ടിയനായ) whereas St Chavara uses *dhūllicc* (ധൂളിച്ച).

- ii. Catholic missionaries were hostile towards the Protestant Church of that time. Hence, the education provided by the Protestant missionaries was denied to the Catholics.³² Chavara, working under the Catholic missionaries, there is less chance that he was using the Bible provided by the Protestant missionaries.
- iii. During Chavara's time, Protestants did not translate the complete Bible. But Chavara quotes in Malayalam even from the books that were not yet translated by the Protestants.³³

This points to the radical interiorization of the Sacred Scripture that he had based on the versions available in foreign languages. His interiorization of the Scripture verses is radical, in that it was easy for him to switch spontaneously in context to the vernacular, that too from various books of the Bible.³⁴

3.1.1.2. Other Contextual Exigencies

On the other hand, the contextual exigency is not restricted to the lack of availability of the text. The illiteracy of the people whom he served³⁵, the presence of misleading leaders in the Church,³⁶ and the inability of the clergy to guide the people³⁷ also add to the exigency he faced. This can be seen as pressure from outside urging the 'good shepherd' in the heart of Chavara to radically interiorize the Sacred Scripture to provide spiritual nourishment for all under his care.

3.1.2. Threefold Identification

About the parable of the 'Younger Son', we can point out a three-fold identification of Chavara, namely, with the Biblical characters, vulnerable in the society and the listeners. But, these identifications are not restricted to this parable alone. We see them elsewhere also in the *Dhyānasallāpannaḷ*.

³² Fr Emmanuel TOCD, 17.

³³ In comparison with the Ramban Bible, Gundert Bible and Beyli's Bible.

³⁴ In *Dhyānasallāpannaḷ* we can find more than 40 references from 17 books of the Bible.

³⁵ Mathias Mundadan, *St Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2020, 28.

³⁶ Gregory Neerakkal, *si em ai sabhayuṭe caritra sankṣēpaṁ*, Trichur: St Joseph's IS Press, 1970, 38.

³⁷ Mundadan, *St Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 220.

We see that he identifies himself with the younger son, attributing himself as the prodigal one³⁸ in the passage dealt with in the previous chapter. In the other instances of *Dhyānasallāpannaḷ*, he identifies himself with the Patriarch Jacob³⁹, the soldier who beat Jesus,⁴⁰ the good thief,⁴¹ Zachaeus,⁴² and John who stood beneath the cross.⁴³

While being identified as the younger son of the parable, he describes his appearance as a member of the agrarian society. The areca leaf cap⁴⁴ and the wild stick, typically symbolize a farmer. It goes in hand with the historical fact, that the then society in which Chavara lived was primarily an agrarian society.⁴⁵ They were vulnerable to natural calamities, and exploitation from the landlords, uneducated, and had a life that was considered at the lower strata of society.⁴⁶

The vocabulary he used give some indications about his audience. It is a sign of effective communication.⁴⁷ Even though it is necessary for every communication, it was all the more necessary at a time, when the audience was illiterate. Furthermore, this identification is seen in his choice of mode of articulation. To articulate the 'sublime' matters of

³⁸ Elias, *Cāvaṛayaccante Sampūrṇakṛtikaḷ*, vol. III, 16-17.

³⁹ "I will not leave your feet as Jacob told to the angel."

⁴⁰ "It is your hands that beat on his cheeks." He uses here second person singular as a reflective personal pronoun.

⁴¹ "Being crucified on the cross of the thief who was crucified on your right, I plead with the fervent voice of that noble man."

⁴² "You came to my home of heart, which is full of dirt of sinfulness and cruelties, without considering that I myself am more unclean and sinful than Zachaeus."

⁴³ "You entrusted this poor Kuriakose as son to your mother, by telling her that 'Here is your son.'"

⁴⁴ In the vocabulary of St Chavara we read *toppippāla* (തൊപ്പിപ്പാല). This protective hat on head was in use till recently in Kerala among the farmers. Refer O.K. Santhosh, "Politics of the Studies on Folklore," *Malayāḷappacca*, 01 (2015), 15.

⁴⁵ Mundadan, *St Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 412.

⁴⁶ Sophy Rose, *A Pillar and Guiding Light: Kuriakose Elias Chavara, a Theologian of the Church*, Kochi: Chavara Central Secretariat, 2020, 40.

⁴⁷ More light on this can be found in the deliberation on the *Form of Life* in the *Philosophical Investigations* of Ludwig Wittgenstein where he discusses fundamentals of communication. Marie McGinn, *Wittgenstein and the Philosophical Investigations*, New York: Routledge, 1997, 50.

spirituality, Chavara did not go for the 'sublime' language of that time, Sanskrit. P.K. Rajasekharan states:

His poems and sermons represent the interventions he made in the life of his community in particular and in the life of his society in general. While he insisted with an almost divine obstinacy that every church should have a school attached to it and went on to start a school for teaching Sanskrit more than a hundred and fifty years ago. In his poetry and prose, he chose to make his way through the bylanes of poetry, rather than along the highway of Sanskrit.⁴⁸

This is clear in the *Dhyānasallāpanna!* where we scarcely come across a Sanskrit word, making it possible to read the work legibly even after one and a half centuries of its creation. He follows a diction that the common people of that time followed. Rajasekharan continues:

His poems [*Compunction of the Soul, Martyrdom of Anastasia and Dirge*] were written in an age when neo-classical traditions in poetic diction reigned supreme. Yet these poems were written in a diction which was closer to the spoken idiom than to the highly ornate, Sanskrit-riddled neo-classical style.⁴⁹

3.2. Impact of the Scripture-Based Reformation: Re-birth of a Society Conscientized of its Identity

Chavara's recognition of the true identity was in the context of ambiguous identity. This illusionment of identity was a result of various factors such as a life in a pluralistic religious society, caste system, foreign invasion etc., that characterised nineteenth century.⁵⁰ When society was craving for an identity, we find Chavara, as one with the conviction of his identity. His first poem in *ātmānutāpaṃ* clearly shows how one person and society get their identity from the Divine⁵¹ which he explains through the Genesis account of creation.⁵² He could find all

⁴⁸ P.K. Rajasekharan, "The Grace of the True Vernacular," in *The Life and Legacy of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, ed. John Mannarathara, Kochi: Viva Books, 2015, 45.

⁴⁹ Rajasekharan, "The Grace of the True Vernacular," 45.

⁵⁰ E.R. Hambye, *History of Christianity in India*, vol. III: *Eighteenth Century*, Bangalore: The Church History Association of India, 1997, 22.

⁵¹ Z.M. Muzhoor, *Atmānutāpaṃ: Chavarayachan*, Thevara: Janatha, 1990, 1.

⁵² Chavara Kuriakose Elias, *Cāvarayaccanre Sampūrṇakṛtikā*, vol. II: *Sāhityakṛtikā*, ed. Z. M. Muzhoor, Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Bl. Chavara, 1986, 1.

men and women as the sons and daughters of one God and treat them as his own tracing his origin back to the Genesis account, and not to that of Matthean. This is reflected in the Chronicles he wrote, where people of other religions and especially the lower castes are mentioned with utmost gratitude about the cooperation they rendered with the construction of the monastery at Mannanam.⁵³

The apprehension that, the society was well informed of their identity through him, is gathered from the fact that of the tedious efforts they rendered to remain to the truth. Chavara's conferrers rendered a commendable job under the successor of Chavara, Fr Kuriacose Porukara TOCD⁵⁴ in eradicating a schismatic trend that arose in the community. As well, the Congregation had the pain of losing its seven beloved members due to the ex-communication they faced for the request for an indigenous bishop.⁵⁵ Even though the Thomas Christians of Malabar had a heritage of nineteen centuries, we see that it emerged as a *sui iuris* Church within some decades after the death of Chavara.⁵⁶

The all-India jurisdiction,⁵⁷ sprouting of a number of indigenous congregations, and a huge number of vocations to religious and priestly life that the present Syro-Malabar Church enjoys, trace back its root to her identity that was re-established through the person of Chavara. The reunion movement which was very well coordinated and guided by the spiritual sons of Chavara could add the Malankara Church to the Catholic communion.⁵⁸

All these point out the deep-rootedness and strong conviction of the person of Chavara with regard to the identity that one has with relation to the Divine, evolving from the Sacred Scripture.

⁵³ Valerian, *Viśud'dha Cāvāra Kuryākkōs Ēliyās Accan*, rev. ed. Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2020, 245-259.

⁵⁴ Neerakkal, *si em ai sabhayuṭe caritra saṅkṣēpaṁ*, 40.

⁵⁵ Mani Pius, *daivavum manuṣyaruṁ ivarkk svantaṁ*, Kochi: Chavara Central Secretariat, 2020, 155.

⁵⁶ Paul Pallath, *The Liturgical Heritage of the Syro Malabar Church*, Changanassery: HIRS Publications, (2019), 280.

⁵⁷ With the document, *Tamquam viti palmites* by which Pope Francis erected the Diocese of Shamshabad on 9 October 2017. Cf. Joseph Antony, *Hierarchical Authority in the Indian Church*, Kottayam: Paurastya Vidyapeedam, 2022, 14.

⁵⁸ Neerakkal, *si em ai sabhayuṭe caritra saṅkṣēpaṁ*, 50.

3.3. Radical Interiorization as the Scope for the Modern-Day Pastors

As *The Interpretation of Bible Today* asks to complement the Historical-Critical Method with the contextual meaning of the Sacred Scripture,⁵⁹ this reading looks forward to its implication for today. Even though the radical interiorization that Chavara is not a New Age movement in the strict sense, it has the feature of personal experience which is not at the cost of dogma or the practice of religion.⁶⁰ Before Indians become seriously infected by the European trend of embracing the new-age movements,⁶¹ modern-day pastors can take, adapt and introduce this experiential approach of Chavara, to the mainstream in an attractive manner.

It is a paradigm for modern-day pastors who are entrusted to seek and find the lost sheep to bring them to the fullness of life (Jn 10:10), also, a challenge as well as scope for all those who wish to follow the footsteps of the Word Incarnate.

4. Conclusion

The hermeneutics of Chavara is rooted in the radical interiorisation of the Sacred Scripture. It is not restricting the interpretation to the realm of mere intellect. On the other side, it shows that hermeneutics is more experiential, as well as a ground for inspiration. The life of Chavara shows us the co-relatedness of his hermeneutics and the *ortho praxis*.

It is beyond words to describe the genius of Chavara, who could articulate the scriptural passage in a truly interiorized manner. His hermeneutical and exegetical approach is unique. It is imaginative as well as intuitive, since his intertwining of the Biblical verses and theological concepts is fusing with the history of salvation and the mystery of divine-human encounter. He, who was courageous enough to confess that he never lost his baptismal innocence, presents himself in the position of a repentant son⁶² showing that he represents before God in prayer as a corporate personality, representing the people under his care and the weak human nature.

⁵⁹ Joseph Ratzinger, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, Bangalore: NBCLC, 1994, 24.

⁶⁰ Chris Crews and Bron Taylor, "Religion, COVID-19, and Biocultural Evolution: Introducing a Special Issue focusing on Religion and the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 415 (2022), 6.

⁶¹ Crews and Taylor, "Religion, COVID-19, and Biocultural Evolution," 7.

⁶² Rose, *A Pillar and Guiding Light*, 112.