

## KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA'S VISION AND MISSION: BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Joy Philip Kakkanattu CMI♦

**Abstract:** The present article the biblical foundations of Kurikose Elias Chavara's vision and mission explores the theme of God's Mercy in the poetic work *Compunction of the Soul* of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara. His literary works are impregnated with Biblical concepts, metaphors, similies and other direct and indirect references. The theme of God's Mercy is studied in relation to Chavara's vision of life, his vocation, etc. Chavara's theological vision revolves around his basic conviction that incarnation is the ultimate manifestation of God's Mercy. His Marialogical understanding related to God's Mercy is also studied.

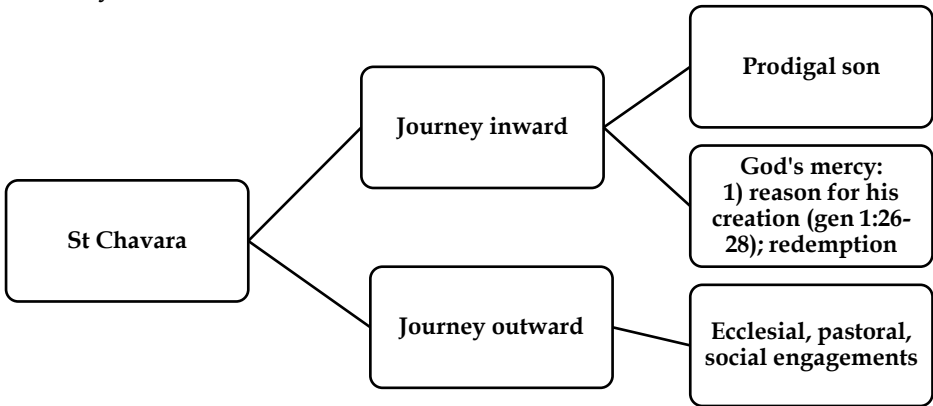
**Keywords:** *The Compunction of the Soul*, Divine Mercy, Seat of Mercy, Fountain of Mercy, Sea of Mercy, Divine Love

---

♦ **Joy Philip Kakkanattu, CMI**, born in Kerala, holds a BSc in Chemistry from MG University, Kerala, Licentiate in Sacred Scripture from Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome and a Doctorate in Biblical Studies from Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome. He has been a resident professor of Sacred Scripture at DVK for the last 19 years and is at present its President. He is also the President of the Catholic Biblical Association of India (CBAI), President of Catholic Faculties in India (CFI) and executive member of the Society of Biblical Studies in India (SBSI). His doctoral thesis was published by Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, titled God's Enduring Love in the Book of Hosea. A Synchronic and Diachronic Analysis of Hosea 11,1-11. He had the experience of both a pastor and a formator. His research interest is the Old Testament, contextual reading of the Bible, and thematic studies based on the Bible. He has edited many books, published over 50 academic and popular articles. He is a music composer, retreat preacher and lyricist. He is a visiting faculty at Institutes like Kristhujyothi College, Indian Institute Spirituality, Vijnananilayam, Janampet, Eluru, MMI Theologate, Chennai, JD Pune etc. He is the section editor (Word of God) of *Jeevadhara Journal for Socio-religious Research*. Email: jpkakkanattu@gmail.com

## 1. Introduction

The inspiration behind this article stems from the profound amazement I experience each time I read the works of Chavara, especially *The Compunction of the Soul* and his *Meditations*. These works are impregnated with Biblical concepts, metaphors, similes and other direct and indirect references. The closer I read his works, the more I tend to say that we have not measure the unfathomable depth and richness of his theological as well as Biblical erudition expressed with poetic versatility and literary astuteness. Chavara's life and spirituality can be broadly outlined as follows:



His inward journey is mostly traceable from his literary works, especially from *The Compunction of the Soul* and *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*. Both of them are autobiographical in style.

## 2. God's Nature: Mercy

The more I read his poetic work, *The Compunction of the Soul*, the more convinced I became that his vision and life's strongest and most conspicuous foundation was his understanding of God's nature as Mercy. Hence, in this article, I try to look for his understanding of Mercy as God's nature in his poetic writing, *The Compunction of the Soul*. Over a century before Cardinal Walter Kasper<sup>1</sup> and various others emphasized God's Mercy as central to the Gospel and Christian living, and papal teachings, such as *Dives in Misericordia*, *Misericordiae Vultus*, and *The Name of God is Mercy*<sup>2</sup>, brought this focus to the forefront of Catholic theology, Chavara had already discovered this biblical treasure. The

<sup>1</sup> Cardinal Walter Kasper, *Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life* (New York: Paulist Press, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis, *The Name of God is Mercy* (New York: Random House, 2016).

centrality of Divine mercy is well reflected in Chavara's poetic line, "The Lord of mercy, the son of God, His glorious splendour I long to see; The fountain of mercy, God incarnate... I long to see."

The most significant theological vision of Chavara derives from his understanding of the nature of the God of the Bible as mercy. He applies Divine mercy both as an appellative of God and as an attribute to diverse situations and stages of life. We consider some of them.

### 3. Human Life: Gift of God's Mercy

In the very first stanzas of *The Compunction of the Soul*, we can notice Chavara's poetic skill in using the Genesis account of creation to refer to his birth. Of course, the added stress on the mercy of God as the basic divine character in creating him in God's likeness can be named as Chavara's ability to derive the theological meaning of the word of God as *Dei Verbum* suggests.

He begins *The Compunction of the Soul* by referring to God's mercy as the reason for his birth. He writes:

God almighty, who was in the beginning  
You created me, a son of Adam  
O God, wherefore this grace, reveal to me,  
O Lord eternal, it is your mercy only! (I, 1-4).

Chavara intertwines the divine creative power, as depicted in the creation of humans in God's image and likeness (Genesis 1:26) with God's mercy and relates it to his own birth.

Omnipotent your will, that me a sinner  
You moulded truly great in your likeness  
O God, despite my limitless unworthiness  
You did show in it, your mercy boundless (I, 9-12).

Chavara eulogizes this divine mercy when he writes,

God of unbounded kindness, Holy Lord  
O sea of mercy, of might, depth unfathomed  
You did look on me with tender care  
And tended me with unstinted love (I, 29-32).

In lines 25-28 he craftily presents God's mercy manifested in protecting him from illnesses associated with infancy and notes that if not for God's mercy, it would have been impossible for his mother to keep him healthy.

The baptism he received is also seen as sprouting from the saving grace of divine mercy which freed him from the clutches of the powers of the devil.

O Fount of Mercy, in your crystal streams of grace,  
Was my soul once cleansed and spotless fair  
Beauteous, bright, bedecked in gems of virtue  
Through my baptism, a boon, a day of days. (I, lines 33-34).

Chavara uses various images and figures to highlight the power of Divine mercy operated at baptism. Baptismal water is poetically portrayed as streams of grace gushing forth from the fountain of Divine mercy. Here, one can draw a parallel with Ezekiel's vision of streams of running waters flowing out from the threshold of the altar of the reconstructed Jerusalem temple, watering the world and thus providing the elixir of life.

In Poem II, 105-110, Chavara presents his baptism as the benevolent gift of God's saving gaze of mercy (*nin karunayin kadakanninal*) which cleansed him from original sin and reinstated him to the status of divine sonship marred by sin. Poetically,

Then, your saving gaze of mercy fell upon me  
And cleansing waters of Baptism I received  
The dawn of grace led to growth in virtue  
Sumptuous goodness swelled my soul as,  
In sacred waters, I was lavishly laved  
And cleansed from guilt, to divine sonship restored.

Here, Chavara's sacramental theology of baptism closely linked to the Pauline understanding is evident. That is, through the baptismal water, we are bidding farewell to the powers of death and sin and entering into life with Jesus Christ. The way he summarizes the role of Divine mercy in making him a Christian through baptism is captivating:

O Lord of infinite goodness,  
Boundless mercy, giver of peace  
You through your mercy infinite  
Made me a being immortal (II, 160-164).

Chavara opens the second poem also with the title "Lord of Mercy" addressing the Father. He identifies God's compassion in entrusting him to the care of Mother Mary.

Chavara deemed it a great act of God's mercy that spared him from a deadly epidemic. While many others who are holier than he had succumbed to this pandemic, the only reason for him not to be infected with it was "the ocean of your mercy." He explains this ocean of mercy (*rehamim*) as an expression of divine boundless love (*hesed*). The influence of Biblical vocabulary (e.g., Lam 3:22-23) is quite apparent. Listen to his words:

Were I to die then, O God of Mercy  
In eternal misery, I, then, would have rolled  
Full worthy to be condemned, though I'd been  
Through his infinite mercy, was I saved (II, 43-46)

Wafted aloft on the ocean of your mercy  
What reason was it your pity  
You did lavish on my ignoble soul, My Master  
What reason for such a grace, except your love! (II, 57-60).

It is inspiring to note that Chavara identifies his membership in the Church through baptism as the result of divine mercy (*daya*)<sup>3</sup> (Line 73-76, Mal, 8). He uses the idea of "chosen people" usually associated with people of Israel to refer to the Church. He distinguishes the Church from other religions in its capacity to love Jesus.

Me, you treated with kind predilection  
Wedded to your dear chosen people  
What thanks shall I render thee my Lord  
For this your mercy, so unlimited? (II, 73-76).

Chavara credited God's compassion for protecting him from the hardships common in his time, such as hunger and epidemics. He writes,

How numerous they who penury bear!  
Such sufferings you did me spare  
All because of your tenderness (*karuna*, *rahamim*) my Lord  
To serve you, hence, how I'm bound (II, 85-88).

Interestingly, Chavara recognizes the touch of God's boundless Mercy (*maha karuna*) in his middle-class family background, which gives him peace and joy

---

<sup>3</sup> The English translation uses various words like mercy, pity, kindness, etc., to translate the word *daya* used by Chavara, which basically belong to the semantic field of mercy.

Yet, another gift, have I to sing about!  
 Numberless, there are, who wield power  
 Kings, Chieftains, yet others rolling in gold  
 Oh, how numerous, My Goodness Infinite [boundless Mercy]  
 Had I, but been one such magnate, high  
 In this world, what fate had been mine!  
 The middle-class path you granted me to tread  
 Hence, I live thus in peace and joy. (II, 89-96).

In lines Poem II, 97-100, Chavara mentions some danger that potentially endangered his life at an embryonic stage, but saved by the shielding of the promptness of Divine mercy.

While yet an embryo in my mother's womb  
 Assiduous attempts the devil did make  
 To blast me the bud; your blessed Hand  
 As quickly then, in mercy, you did shield!

The poetic beauty in applying the birth of Jesus in the manger in Bethlehem to his own life finds its anchoring again in Jesus, the seat of Mercy (*Karunanidhi*) (II, 241). Chavara speaks of the intercession of Mother Mary which saved him from punishment of various sorts, also in relation to mercy in lines 253-288. He writes:

As often as I God's ire merited,  
 Betwixt me and God's uplifted hand  
 Mother of God, a potent shield you raised  
 Pleading my cause, Oh, fount of Love and Mercy (II, 253-256).

### **3.1. Vocation as Manifestation of God's Mercy**

Chavara narrates the vocation he received at the age of ten as a strong resolve of divine mercy that snatched him away from the clutches of sin and waywardness. In Poem I, lines 113-140, he describes the stages of his vocation as an unfolding of the work of God's mercy. He writes:

Ten long years passed riotously by  
 And that day of days he called me back  
 Sowed in me sacred seeds of wisdom  
 A firm resolve, else what my fate had been  
 No priest ordained among kinsfolk until then  
 Welcome tidings it came to all and sundry. (I, 113-118).

His mother's response to Chavara's desire to become a priest is:

Emotions wrung her heart in sooth  
That her son, one of two, God's own would be  
Pain of parting a wrench foreseeing  
She wisely prepared to the Holy Will to bow  
She wooed detachment, her heart firm fixed on God  
Praising Him for the infinite mercy He showed.  
"Though a sinner, my unworthiness He redeemed  
O wonder of wonders!", she cried, "Grace Supreme"  
Your mercies will I sing for ever and ever!"  
And forthwith to the seminary her son she sent. (I, 123-132).

His mother understands Chavara's vocation to the priesthood as a vivid manifestation of God's infinite mercy. Thus, Chavara sees God's abundant mercy guiding his life to the priestly vocation.

#### **4. Incarnation: Tangible Expression of God's Mercy**

Incarnation is presented as the fulfilment of the pact God made in mercy after the original sin. The inflow of Biblical images picturesquely narrating the whole mystery of the incarnation is stupendous, practically versifying the Gospel account of incarnation (II, 160-186). He highlights God's mercy that led to the promise of sending his son to save humanity from the curse of original sin. To quote some of the lines,

A son of Adam, who by original sin  
Destroyed ruthlessly, all that was good and fair,  
Finding salvation as if by anticipation  
From punishment I was saved, and so my kin  
Besides through your sole Mercy  
To send forth your son, you made a pact (II, 165-170).

After the description of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, Chavara makes a petition to the merciful Lord in beautiful poetry:

O God-man, my master, seat of mercy, Lord  
Look with pity on me a sinner... (II, 241-242).

Chavara's vision of incarnation as enfleshing Divine mercy is further elaborated with brilliant poetic skill in Poem III. His desire to behold the glorious splendor of the Lord of mercy is a theological treatise on the infancy narrative. The very beginning of the poem sets the tone vividly:

The Lord of mercy, the son of God  
His glorious splendor, I long to see

The fountain of mercy, God Incarnate  
 Who, the ugly form of man assumed  
 To uproot him from the slush of sin  
 The Redeemer of human kind, I long to see. (III, 1-6).

In this poem, he covers the life of Jesus focusing more on the Synoptic Infancy Narratives. From John's Gospel, he takes the miracle at Cana and the *ego eimi* saying of Jesus "I am the Good Shepherd." From the public life of Jesus, Chavara includes, in this poem, the baptism, the forty days of fasting in the wilderness and the call of the disciples. The beauty is that all these episodes express the longing of the author to witness Jesus, the Mercy Incarnate, in search of the lost sheep. He concludes the poem thus:

The Good Shepherd, seeking the flock  
 That had gone astray, I long to see  
 The Lord of goodness, proclaiming himself  
 As our loving friend, I long to see (III, 97-100).

However, as an Appendix to Poem III, Chavara completes the biographical sketch in Poem III, this time stressing a Biblical theological vision of Incarnation, accentuating Jesus as the tangible presence of God's mercy (Appendix III, 1-8).

Merciful Lord, Son of almighty God  
 O that I may see!  
 Sea of Mercy, seat of Compassion  
 Who effaced the stain of Sin  
 Who the imprisoned souls redeemed  
 O that I may see!  
 O source of all treasure, your eminence debased  
 From misery to save me.

In Poem IV, reflecting on the incarnation of the Logos, understood by Chavara as "Infinite Goodness and fountain of Mercy" (IV, 37) in Mary's womb, Chavara compares it with keeping of the tablets of the Law in the tabernacle of the Jerusalem temple, and writes:

In this tabernacle he placed the Tablet  
 Inscribed with the commandments divine  
 So, in your scared womb immaculate  
 The adorable Deity, calmly dwells (IV, 45-48).



In the same poem, while narrating the ordeal of Joseph and Mary to find a place in Bethlehem, he speaks of incarnation as the decision of God's Mercy. Hear him:

So, by reason of my dark sin  
 You the mother of God's own dear son  
 The Lord of heaven [in his mercy]  
 Came to His own to be rejected by them (IV, 157-160).

In one of the poems, (V, 43-45), the mystery of the incarnation is presented as the result of the trinitarian perichoresis full of mercy as a soliloquy of Mother Mary:

O Father, Sea of Mercy, Your Spirit,  
 Lord of Mercy, by His Benevolence took birth in my womb  
 The blessed Gem of your Son, I pray,  
 Place in my arms, that people may behold.

Here, Chavara brings the motive of evangelization as presenting the merciful face of Jesus to all people.

While speaking of the various traits of the Word Incarnate, as part of the musing of St. Joseph seeing child Jesus in Mary's hand, Chavara includes the unchangeable or steadfast character of Divine Love (*hesed*), a quality strongly present in the Psalms (V, 147-148).

You my father, you my maker,  
 And even changeless, I know, is your Love  
 But when of my heavy sins I think  
 How could I stand thus before you!

In lines 159-162, Chavara imagines Joseph considering Jesus as the manifestation of Divine Mercy, as a burning bush, but his sins block him from approaching this long-thirsted treasure of mercy.

O furnace of love, ardently I thirst  
 For the treasure of your mercy e'en tough  
 Hindered by sin; when your eyes benign  
 Oft I've felt, chasing my doubt. (V, 159-162)

In lines 163-166, the reflection on the divine character progresses in the same train of thought, and we have the picturesque narration of Joseph's musings:

When your bright visage I see  
 My gloom effaced, Love glows

In your look of Mercy, I behold  
A gentle saviour not a judge (V, 163-166).

As Chavara continues his reflections on Incarnation, he shifts from St. Joseph to his own self, and affirms,

“O shepherd gracious, seeking lost sheep  
You came; save me, I’ve gone astray.” (V, 173-174).

In Poem VI, Chavara brings in another nuance of the Incarnation. In contrast to the enkindling fire of divine justice that consumed the sinful ones, in the Incarnation, He comes to show His shining Mercy. Hear him:

And besides, His just laws to maintain  
Ages back, a warning message He sent  
But men on earth with burning passions rife  
His Will defied and were with fire destroyed  
Then, He displayed undisputed justice  
But now, He comes His shining Mercy to show  
To bring them back to the glory lost of yore  
Through their grievous transgressions sore! (VI, 57-64).

How eloquently he brings in the difference between OT theology and NT theology with a focus on Incarnation and mercy, but connecting to the Book of Genesis and alluding to the episode of Sodom and Gomorrah. He continues this thought by depicting the Incarnation as the first coming of the Son of Man sowing the seeds of mercy and compassion and watering it with grace so that the seeds grow and produce fruit. He will come a second time in glory not in mercy but to show His perfect justice and might. Thus, we are now in the interim between the first coming in Incarnation and the second coming in Judgement. This interpretation is presented as Mother Mary’s explanation to a query of a woman named Shanthi:

Mistress, benign, for your son’s sake  
Resolve the doubt that burdens me so oft  
At the advent of the Son of the mighty God  
Will not the world with certain awe be filled?  
Oft I’ve my forefathers hold as true  
The message of God in the sacred Scripture  
That the Earth would tremble with awful fears  
When God’s own Son, the Prime Prince appears. (VI, 69-71).

Mary's reply in the words of Chavara is:

Your words are true, but hear this too  
He would come twice on the face of the earth  
First to bring salvation to the erring humanity  
And then, the just and evil to prize or punish  
To prove His Mercy to man so miserable and mean  
Has He come forth now into this world indeed  
Patience and Obedience as a team of oxen of plough  
Furrowed His soft body and made it bleed  
He watered the field with very grace it needed  
He sowed the seeds of kindness and mercy  
And gathering the grains in the fields did flourish  
His dear little ones He'll tenderly nourish (VI, 77-84).

As a whole, Chavara presents the great theological vision that the Incarnation is the merciful act of God drawing support from the Bible. After listening to Mother Mary's explanation of the purpose of the Incarnation as not judgmental but to make his glory available as mercy, Chavara presents its missiological impact on Shanthi and her kinsmen in lines VI, 261-264.

This, the Lord of Mercy's first advent  
To save His people through mercy's display  
The wondrous tidings, spread and day after day  
Shanthi and her kinsmen came, the Lord to adore.

In Poem VI, after a pretty long reflection on the Trinitarian, Christological and soteriological dimension of the Incarnation, Chavara concludes it with a prayer again anchoring on the Mercy of God:

He who created all through His simple will  
Weeps now as if devoid of every might  
Wherefore my Lord! Sure, your love divine  
No reason do I see for this plight  
Grant, O Mercy, that with sanctity my soul may flood;  
Forgiveness of Sins through your precious Blood (VI, 349-352).

The thrust on Divine Mercy manifested in the life of Jesus can be identified in other poems narrating the other stages of His life. Chavara interprets the comment of Simon when Jesus was brought to the temple for dedication, differently from the Gospel account: for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all

peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel" (Luke 2:30-32). He brings in the idea of mercy into it. Hear him:

Your grace, mercy and kindness Lord I have seen,  
May your servant now bid me leave, .... (VII, 109-110).

He applies the Prodigal Son's squandering of father's property, to his own life, which caused the passion of Jesus. He identifies the Father in the Parable as Jesus the Infinite Good. He writes:

Yet, your handiwork I am, You are my refuge  
Oh! eternal good, in you I trust  
From your sacred presence, I fled in fear  
Though I forgot you, I am so sure,  
Certain, I know, you haven't cast me off  
When I forsook and turned myself away  
Still remembering, you followed my trail  
And warded me from the attack of worms (VII, 241-248).

While applying the parable to his own self, Chavara identified himself with the prodigal son, and while he was reluctant to approach the Father seeking pardon, the Father (Jesus) rich in mercy tells:

...I doubt alas, immense is my vice!  
"Come to me your sins entire I condone."  
Let me stretch out my lifted hand and wash  
Think now, that I'm your Father merciful  
Come near that I may press on you my kiss  
.... (VII, 283-286).

The betrayal of Judas is also explained with a tint of Divine Mercy:

As if to greet, with a kiss betrays Him  
Yet meekly [with great mercy] turns round to say  
"Do you, my friend, so heartlessly you behave?"... (VII, 297-299).

In his narration of the arrest of Jesus, Chavara follows the Gospel of John because the question of Jesus to the crowd who came to arrest him, "Whom are you looking for?" (John 18:4) comes only in John. When we go through the poetic analysis of the arrest of Jesus (Jn 18:4ff.), we can recognize the profundity of his theological vision, of course strongly rooted in the Bible. Chavara recognizes in the answer of Jesus "*ego eimi*" (I am he) the revelation of the God of the Bible as creator and saviour, and a reference to the revelation of the name of God to Moses. In VII, lines 309-339, we can experience the beauty of his poetic and theological

acumen. He subtly distinguishes the growth of the Biblical understanding of the nature of God manifested in mercy, and summarizes the whole Exodus narrative as the revelation of the name of God "I am who I am". Chavara presents his vision of the Biblical revelation in his contemplation of the meaning of Jesus' reply. He then applies his meditation to his life too, imagining himself among the crowd. Chavara states the whole meaning of Jesus' message is to be understood in Great Mercy (*maha daya*). This mercy is revealed in Jesus' following Chavara amidst his distractions in life.

"Say you, why did you come" he asked  
 "To seek by royal mandate a man by name  
 Jesus of Nazareth, hither we came!"  
 "Know ye, I am He, who is Jesus!  
 Leave my disciples alone, harm them not"  
 On hearing these words, "I am He!"  
 Each and each, they dropped down as dead.  
 My Lord, my God not an angry word  
 Escaped your lips; great indeed your strength  
 Hark the day ire will soon arrive.  
 Your mighty cross will send forth shafts of fire  
 Remember well what the Gospel says  
 It is all in fine the message unique of love  
 Who you are, who you came to capture,  
 Do you mark well, I'm the creator  
 And besides you are my subjects....  
 He saw these outrages, yet through His mercy  
 Observing His Spirit abiding in my heart  
 His words divine he recalled to his mind  
 "I am your Father, I, your loving God" ....  
 Goes hunting base worldly passions,  
 You in sheer sympathy dog my foot-steps,  
 Showing love and mercy, you call me back,  
 O pity, I, a sinner, steel my ears. (VII, 301-342).

Chavara believes that Jesus' sacrifice at Calvary is the greatest expression of Divine Mercy and the remembrance of this great act of Mercy is the only hope for him as a sinful person. I quote a few lines:

When I discover I am but a worm, worse  
 Even than they, I tremble with fear and woe  
 Will you forsake me an ungrateful wretch?

Yes, your wisdom impels, your mercy forbids!  
 To learn of my mercy, come follow in spirit  
 You, who came in search of your lost sheep  
 The sick alone do need you, the Healer!  
 Every sorry sinner, who fled to you... (VII, 353-359).

Here too, it is foundational to Chavara's theological vision that the Incarnation is God's kenotic love in mercy in search of the strayed sheep. Chavara envisions the 33 years of Jesus' life as the shepherd leaving the 99 in the wilderness and going in search of the lost one (Lk 15:1-7).

### **5. Mariological Vision**

Chavara's Mariological vision is highly Christologically interlinked through the divine nature of Mercy. It is well expressed in Poem IX, 93-95. It expresses also his vision of women as rich in mercy. He presents entrusting Mary to St John as a symbol of mercy. Listen to him:

Her disciple and Son in one, the symbol of mercy  
 The Marys three and the rest with full of merciful grace  
 Kissed it, aye, washed it in tears  
 While the mother seat of Mercy, adored him (Poem IX, 93-95).

The Mother's Greif (*Mathrudukham*) is written in the form of a meditative vision and lamentation of Mother Mary about the mystery of the Incarnation and the life of Jesus. Various events of the Infancy Narrative are presented in the light of the events of the Passion Narratives. What struck me while reading through this poem is Chavara's interpretation of the Institution of Eucharist (as a Marian reflection) as an expression of Jesus' compassionate mercy and a symbol of His unending love. I quote:

What lack of gratitude  
 Did you see in me, my love,  
 Yester-night Eucharist you founded  
 To stay with us for aye (Mother's Grief, 165-167)

Commenting on the desertion of the disciples after the betrayal of Judas, Chavara highlights the intercessory power of Mary. Mary in her soliloquy says: If only that Judas approached her trusting in the mercy of Jesus, she would have interceded on his behalf to you to show mercy to him.

Yet in your mercy, if to me [you<sup>4</sup>] he had turned  
Willing you would have showed him mercy... (181-183)

In line 190, the poem shifts from vision to dialogue. John visits Mary and at the request of Mary, he goes to fetch Peter to Mary. When Peter shows reluctance, John encourages Peter, telling him,

Our Mother has sent this message to you, "your sorrow cast aside  
Be not broken, mourn you not, Our mother seat of Mercy,  
[It is Son of God's Mother, an ocean of Mercy (karunambudhi),  
have no fear]  
Hearing these words, Peter, all his pain, he banished (196-199).

Chavara presents the meeting of Peter with Mary and the rest of the disciples as a public confession. Peter publicly confesses his sins and implores pardon (201-225). Interestingly, Mary makes almost a prayer of absolution akin to that of the Sacrament of Confession: Here too, Chavara clearly implies the power of mediation of Mary.

The mother then in humility down she knelt and said,  
Peter for pardon of sins out of his compassionate mercy  
I have prayed to my son, nay your august master and Lord.  
When the mother said, 'Let us pray for pardon  
By virtue of His Mercy,' together they came,  
Fell prostrate and begged for forgiveness  
And she, most prudent, lifted them up one by one  
And praising God, she assured them of pardon... ((221-229).

## 6. Conclusion

This article is only a trailblazer for exploring the literary, poetic and biblical-theological versatility of Kuriakose Elias Chavara. My humble attempt is to set in motion a direction we need to embark on studying the person, vision, influences and mission of Chavara, traceable from his literary works. The more profoundly we analyze his writings, the more we realize that there is much more to understand him. Much before the Church consciously thought of the centrality of divine mercy in Biblical revelation and its importance in Christian theology and living, Chavara recognized its centrality as his longing was to behold the glorious splendour of the Lord of Mercy manifested in the person and mission of Jesus Christ.

---

<sup>4</sup> In English translation it is wrongly translated you instead of me, thus altering the meaning.