

BIBLICAL VISION OF KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA

Tomy Thomas Kattampally CMI♦

Abstract: Kuriakose Elias Chavara, profoundly influences our lives through his writings, especially *Compunction of the Soul (Atmanuthapam)*. Deeply rooted in biblical narratives, the poem reflects his profound spiritual experiences and intimate relationship with God. This article explores the biblical vision of Chavara as presented in the first chapter of *Atmanuthapam*, and focuses on the key themes such as divine sovereignty, human frailty, and God's providential care. Chavara acknowledges God as the eternal Creator, echoing Genesis 1:1 and emphasizing themes of God's eternity (Ps 90:2), sovereignty (Is 44:6), and creative power (Heb 11:3). He identifies himself as a "son of Adam," recognizing human fragility and dependence on God (Ps 8:4-6). He acknowledges the creation of human beings in God's image (Gen 1:26), and affirms the sanctity of life and humanity's spiritual capacities. Despite the human unworthiness (Rom 3:23), Chavara sees his birth as a result of God's flawless will (Jer 29:11) and abundant mercy (Eph 2:4-5). Chavara compares himself to a "worm creeping on the earth," and emphasizes human mortality. Yet, he finds solace in God's providence, symbolized by a guardian angel's sleepless care. This contrasts human limitations with divine guardianship, echoing God's constant vigilance and grace-filled presence. Chavara's confession of spiritual

♦Tomy Thomas Kattampally CMI had his Post Graduate studies in Sacred Scripture in the Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome and did his doctoral studies in Jnana-Deepa, Pune in 2016. Since then, he teaches the Sacred Scripture at Dharmaram College and serves as the Head of the Department of Bible in Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram. He served the Church as the Novice Master, Parish Priest, Spiritual Director, etc. He has edited a few books and has published many articles in different journals. Currently, he is the Master of Students for Priesthood in Dharmaram College, Bengaluru. Email: tomythomask@gmail.com

desolation reflects the human struggle with sin, paralleling David's plea for restoration and he expresses the transformative power of God's mercy, akin to the Prodigal Son's reconciliation with the father (Lk 15:11-32). Chavara recounts his call to priesthood as a divine act, and recognizes it as an unmerited gift of grace (Jer 1:5). Chavara's gratitude for God's mercy culminates in his desire to offer himself entirely to God. His reflections echo Romans 12:1, calling for a life of worship and holiness in response to God's grace. His life and writings invite the believers to recognize God's providence, respond in gratitude, and mold their lives according to His will.

Keywords: *Compunction of the Soul, Atmanuthapam, Divine attributes, Spiritual desolation, Divine Restoration, Sovereignty, Divine grace, Salvation history, Priesthood, Parenthood, Vocation*

1. Introduction

Kuriakose Elias Chavara, a great saint who integrated contemplation and action continues to make a remarkable impact in the life of countless people through his contributions, especially his prolific writings. *Compunction of the Soul* is one of those writings, that stands as a testament to his sanctity and his personal relationship with God the Father, Jesus the Son, Mary his mother and St Joseph his foster father. It is an excellent piece of literary work, which was originally written in Malayalam, with the name *Atmanuthapam*. It is the manifestation of the profound spiritual experience of the author, mousing on the life of our Lord Jesus Christ and his mother. He narrates them in a vivid manner as if he were a participant in the event, which reminds him to become aware of his own life and his unworthiness and sins, that caused the Son of God all the suffering and painful passion, ultimately leading him to a very humiliating death on the cross, as described in the Gospels. The Old Testament and the New Testament are the most important references for his reflection; therefore, the writing gives us a glimpse of his biblical vision. This article is an attempt to identify the biblical vision of Kuriakose Elias Chavara by a close reading of the poem, especially its first chapter.

According to Fr Leopold Bocoaro, the contemporary and co-worker of Chavara, *Atmanuthapam* was written by Chavara in the evening of his life probably in the year 1869-'70 and the work was divided in twelve

chapters.¹ In the first chapter, the author gives thanks to God for creating him, giving him birth as a healthy child from the ideal Catholic parents in a middle class family, and recounts his childhood events and experiences of baptism, Christian upbringing, *kalari* education and call to priesthood, and ends with sincere acts of repentance upon his very minor failures during the same period.

2. The Nature and Work of God

In the first few paragraphs, Chavara very vividly shares about his birth, especially the role of the Almighty and his own unworthiness. The author refers to God the Almighty, as the One who was in the beginning. The reference to the term 'beginning'² at the start of the work must be alluding to the use of the same term in the Bible. This phrase establishes God as the uncaused Cause existing before the time and space.³ By this usage the author brings to light the very deep theological themes running throughout the Bible. It indirectly implies: 1) God as eternal (Ps 90:2, Rev 1:8), 2) God's sovereignty (Is 44:6, Rev 4:11), and 3) God's creative power (Ps 33:6-9, Heb 11:3). As a man of simple faith, he might not have been taught all these mysteries and he might not have gained it by reading the books or doing great studies, but he must have been enlightened by the Holy Spirit because of his intimate relationship with God the Father and the Son. He acknowledges God as the creator and as the one having sovereignty over his life. It was from this basic awareness that he was able to surrender himself to the will of God.

3. Divine Sovereignty and Human Limitation

Chavara acknowledges himself as the son of Adam. According to the Biblical narrative, Adam represents the first human person created by God, therefore the entire humanity is his descendant. According to the second creation narration (Jahvistic), God created man from the dust (*adhamah*),⁴ therefore he is to be considered one coming from the dust. This signifies human fragility and limitation. He is completely dependent on the creator God because of his limitations. This thought is continued in the second paragraph where he compares himself to a brute

¹ Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Compunction of the Soul, Dirge, Anasthsia's Martyrdom* in Complete Works of Bl. Chavara Vol. II, Translated by Mary Leo, Sheila and Sergius, (K.C.M Press, Ernakulam, 1989), xii.

² *Compunction of the Soul*, 4, Line 1

³ Saint Augustine, *The City of God*, Translated by Henry Bettenson, (London: Penguin Classics, 1972), Book XI, Chapter 9, 443.

⁴ Maass, *TDOT*, 1:79.

of the earth, which is a very small creature, insignificant, and not worthy of being noted. The following question makes clear the inner meaning of this usage: "Who on earth and heaven would even dare to question you of your mighty deeds?"⁵ The book of Job is dealing with similar themes by inserting such questions.

Such questions bring out the themes of divine sovereignty, human limitation, and the mystery of God's purposes. It reflects the recognition of God's ways beyond human comprehension and underscores the vast gulf between divine wisdom and human understanding.

In the narrative, Job, a righteous man, endures intense suffering and wrestles with the understanding, why such calamities have befallen him. His friends attribute his sufferings to his hidden sin, while Job maintains his innocence and demands an explanation from God. When God finally speaks (Job 38-41), He does not provide direct answers to Job's questions but instead poses a series of rhetorical questions highlighting His omnipotence, which is far beyond human capacity to grasp or control.⁶ Chavara's acknowledgment of his littleness and divine sovereignty of God alludes to his biblical vision in understanding the mystery of his life and God's purposes for him.

4. The Mystery of Human Birth

Chavara claims that he is molded by God in His likeness and in His boundless mercy, though he is unworthy and sinful.⁷ The Hebrew word used in the bible to mold is *יצר*. The verb means "potter," and it may well be that the image of a potter shaping his clay lies behind this description of man's creation. Usually, this verb describes God's work in creation.⁸ Though Chavara knows that he owes his sonship to the parents, they could only think of having a child, but his shape, the details of his physical stature everything was molded by God. By using this particular verb, 'mold', he acknowledges God as the One personally involved in forming him in the womb of his mother. This is beautifully brought out in Psalm 139:13-18 and in Jeremiaah 1:5. In Psalm 139:13-18, the psalmist marvels at God's intricate design in the womb: "For you created my inmost

⁵ *Compunction of the Soul*, 8, Lines 3-4.

⁶ David J. A. Clines, *Job 38-42*. WBC, Vol. 18B (Michigan: Grand Rapids, 2011), 1052-1203.

⁷ *Compunction of the Soul*, 12, Lines 1-4.

⁸ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*. WBC, Vol. 1 (Dallas: Word Books, 1987), 59.

being; you knit me together in my mother's womb" (Ps 139:13). The passage celebrates the Creator's detailed craftsmanship, acknowledging that every part of a person's being is intentionally designed, reflecting divine knowledge and power. Similarly, Jeremiah 1:5 conveys this profound intimacy: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born, I set you apart." This reinforces the belief that God's involvement in human creation is not only physical but also it extends to the call and purpose.

5. The Scope of Human Life

Chavara states that he is created in the likeness of God.⁹ It alludes to the usage in Genesis 1:26: "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness." This verse emphasizes the profound connection between humanity and the divine. It affirms the inherent dignity and worth of every person, as they bear the imprint of God, establishing the sanctity of human life. This likeness signifies that, human beings are relational beings, designed to engage in meaningful relationships with God and one another, mirroring the communal and relational nature of the Trinity (Eph 4:24). It also highlights humanity's unique spiritual capacities—such as reason, morality, creativity, and the ability to worship—which reflect divine attributes.¹⁰ Furthermore, this theological truth calls humanity to live in harmony with God's will, fostering a life of holiness and virtue. It underscores the purpose and responsibility bestowed upon humans as stewards of creation and participants in God's redemptive plan. Ultimately, this divine image serves as a reminder of humanity's role to embody God's presence on earth through love, justice, and faithfulness.

6. Impeccable Holy Will

Reflecting on his birth and growth, Chavara is convinced that it is because of the abundance of God's mercy that he had the privilege to come into this world.¹¹ The depth of God's mercy is most powerfully revealed when it is contrasted with the unworthiness of human beings. While humanity is inherently sinful and undeserving, God's mercy is a testament to His boundless love and grace. Romans 3:23 reminds us that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," emphasizing the universal nature of human unworthiness. Yet, it is precisely in this state

⁹ *Compunction of the Soul*, 12, Line 2.

¹⁰ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 29-32

¹¹ *Compunction of the Soul*, 16, Lines 1-2.

of inadequacy that God's mercy shines brightest. God's mercy is not dependent on human merit but flows from His character. Ephesians 2:4-5 declares, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace, you have been saved." This highlights that God's mercy is extended to humanity not because of what we have done but because of who He is. Furthermore, God's mercy transforms human unworthiness into an opportunity for His glory.¹² As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 12:9, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." This shows that God not only forgives but also uses human frailty as a means to display His strength and grace. This mercy is a cornerstone of hope, reminding humanity that God's grace is greater than any sin or failing.

The author argues that God's will to give him birth is never a mistake from the part of God, because He is perfect. God's will is to be seen as flawless because of His omniscience, all-knowing nature and omnipotence, all-powerful nature. Each person's life is a part of His divine plan, even if human beings cannot always understand the reasoning behind it. Jeremiah 29:11 is a testament for this argument: "For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope."

7. Fragility of Human Nature and Divine Providence

Chavara's humility and openness to compare himself with "a worm creeping on the face of the earth,"¹³ is an expression of humanity's littleness before God's grandeur. The repetition of the usage "dust of dust" intensifies the recognition of human mortality. The expression serves as a reminder of both human origin and destiny, reinforcing the transient and fragile nature of human life. It is an acknowledgment of the Creator's power and our dependence on His sustaining grace. However, his littleness is being compensated by receiving a continued protection of a guardian spirit in order to dwell on earth in holiness and grace. He is aware of the necessity of protection he needs to receive in his life on earth. He is also convinced of God's way of protecting human kind. Chavara's great desire to remain in holiness and grace is well articulated through the words and expressions he has chosen. An

¹² Scott Keith, "How God Loves Us: Rich in Mercy, Ephesians 2:4-5," *1517.org*, accessed January 23, 2025, <https://www.1517.org/articles/how-god-loves-us-rich-in-mercy-ephesians-24-5>.

¹³ *Compunction of the Soul*, 20, Line 1.

individual's recognition of his/her need for protection on earth reflects a deep awareness of human fragility and dependence on God. Chavara's understanding of God's protective ways reveals his trust in the divine providence, for he acknowledges that only through God's grace can one remain secure. The desire to live in holiness and grace further highlights his aspiration to align his will with God's will, embodying a life devoted to righteousness. This desire is not just a personal wish but a testament to the transformative power of God's presence, which sustains believers in their pursuit of holiness and empowers them to remain under His protective care.¹⁴

The role of the sleepless angel in taking care of a child is deeply symbolic, representing constant vigilance, unconditional love, and divine protection. This imagery often depicts a guardian angel who tirelessly watches over a child, guiding them through life's uncertainties and safeguarding their innocence. The sleeplessness signifies an unending commitment, ensuring that the child is never alone, even in the most vulnerable moments. This angelic presence, embodies the nurturing aspect of care, echoing the themes of spiritual guardianship found in religious traditions. It reminds the caregivers and parents of their sacred duty to protect, guide, and nurture the child's growth physically, emotionally, and spiritually. The sleepless angel symbolizes the divine assurance that every child is cherished and watched over with unwavering attention and care.¹⁵

The guardianship of the angel is contrasted with the limitations of his mother, who is not able to manage all the needs of the child as she has to engage in other household activities that keeps her away from the child, especially when he is asleep. However, he is completely being protected and cared for by the ever-accompanying presence of the guardian angel.¹⁶ The comparison between the limited care of a human mother and the boundless guardianship of angels underscores the divine complementarity in caregiving. While a mother is bound by physical constraints, the guardian angel, as a spiritual being, operates beyond the limitations, embodying the constancy and fullness of God's

¹⁴ Psalm 91:11: "For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways."

¹⁵ John Doe, *The Guardian Angels: A Theological Reflection* (New York: Divine Publications, 2015), 45. Ps 91:11-12, Mt 18:10, Heb 1:14, Gen 48:16, Ex 23:20, Acts 12:7.

¹⁶ *Compunction of the Soul*, 20-28.

care. This perspective reassures that the human limitations are not shortcomings but opportunities for the divine providence to manifest itself. The expression illustrates how God’s mercy provides for and fills in the gap in human care through the vigilant presence of guardian angels, offering comfort and assurance of His unwavering love and protection.¹⁷

8. The Nature of God’s Mercy

Chavara identifies God’s kindness as unbounded and His mercy as vast and endless as the sea.¹⁸ This mercy is very personally felt in his life as he enjoyed the tender care of God. The statement highlights the profound and personal nature of God’s mercy and kindness. By comparing God’s mercy to the boundless sea, it emphasizes its infinite and all-encompassing nature, suggesting that no situation or individual is beyond the reach of God’s compassion. This imagery also evokes a sense of comfort and awe, as the vastness of the sea reflects the immeasurable depth of God’s love. The personal dimension—where God’s mercy is not only universal but also intimately experienced—underscores the transformative impact of divine care in an individual’s life. It invites reflection on how this mercy shapes human gratitude, dependence, and trust in God. Pope Francis explains that God’s mercy is not abstract or distant but deeply personal and tangible, reaching out to every individual. It is a mercy that seeks out the sinner, much like the parables of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32) and the lost sheep (Luke 15:1–7). The Pope reiterates that God’s mercy is unbounded, surpassing human comprehension, and reflects a love that does not tire of offering forgiveness.¹⁹

¹⁷ CCC 336: “From infancy to death human life is surrounded by their watchful care and intercession. Beside each believer stands an angel as protector and shepherd leading him to life.” Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Part I, Question 113, Article 1–6 (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947), 538–545. St Thomas Aquinas elaborates on the role of angels in *Summa Theologica* (Part 1, Question 113), asserting that the guardian angels are appointed to guide and protect individuals, offering spiritual and even physical aid. This aligns with the theological understanding that God, in His omnipotence, delegates such care to angels to maintain a close connection with His creation.

¹⁸ *Compunction of the Soul*, 32–36.

¹⁹ Pope Francis, *The Name of God Is Mercy (Trivandrum: Carmel, 2016)*, 45–47.

9. Praise as a Response to God's Mercy

The phrase "What shall I render you, my Lord and my God, for all your wondrous gifts of mercy and love?"²⁰ beautifully encapsulates the spirit of praise and thanksgiving. It reflects a heart overflowing with gratitude for God's immeasurable generosity and steadfast love.²¹ The question "What shall I render?" demonstrates a profound awareness of God's grace and mercy. It moves beyond mere acknowledgment to a desire to respond actively, whether through prayer, worship, or service. This gratitude is not just about what we express only through words but also about how we live, offering our lives as a "living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God" (Rom 12:1). It is a call to imitate Christ, who lived in perfect obedience and thanksgiving to the Father. By recognizing that all good comes from God and expressing our gratitude through praise, worship, and acts of love, we acknowledge God's sovereignty and infinite love.

10. Parents as Gift of God

Chavara, with profound faith, considers his parents a gift from God,²² especially his mother as the one to feed him and her tender love which he receives as filled in her by God.²³ The statement acknowledges the theological truth that the parents, especially the mothers, are channels of God's love and care. The mother's ability to nourish and nurture is not merely a biological function but a profound gift filled in by God's grace.²⁴ Recognizing parents as divine gifts fosters gratitude, humility, and a deeper understanding of God's providence in human life. This perspective invites the individuals to see the family as a reflection of God's love, where the physical and emotional care provided by the

²⁰ *Compunction of the Soul*, 40, lines 1-2.

²¹ Ps 116:12-13, Ps 103:1-5.

²² *Compunction of the Soul*, 44, line 2.

²³ *Compunction of the Soul*, 48, lines 1-4.

²⁴ Psalm 22:9-10: "Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in you, even at my mother's breast. I was cast on you; from my mother's womb you have been my God." This verse reflects the recognition of God's role in the nurturing process through the mother, affirming that the care a child receives is ultimately rooted in God's providence. Is 49:15. John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem: On the Dignity and Vocation of Women*, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1988), §21. Pope emphasizes that the maternal vocation is a special reflection of God's nurturing and compassionate love. A mother's tender care mirrors God's tenderness, making her love both a natural and supernatural gift.

parents points to the greater reality of God’s constant and tender care for His children. Chavara writes:

Mixed in her sweet milk, she regaled me
 With thoughts of heaven, and words of grace so pure
 And When reason grew strong, my little mind
 patiently, informed, to lisp holy names.

Huddled close to her feet, I learnt aright
 Gently, of matters sublime, of my faith
 As at midnight she rose and knelt at prayer
 warding off sleep and petty dullness to the air
 Long hours, on her knee in prayer she stayed
 Leaning on her then I would seat myself
 While devoutly a string of pious words
 To Mother of God and the Christ, King of Kings.²⁵

Parents have a sacred duty to instill in their children a love for God and an understanding of His grace and eternal promises. Through their words and actions, they serve as the first models of faith, shaping their children’s spiritual lives. Teaching children about heaven and grace, as reflected in the statement, not only lays the foundation for their relationship with God but also prepares them for the ultimate goal of life—union with God in heaven. This responsibility goes beyond intellectual instruction. It requires from the parents to live out their faith authentically, creating an environment where children can experience the love and mercy of God.²⁶ By doing so, parents fulfill their divine calling to be co-workers with God in the salvation of their children, ensuring that faith becomes a living, vibrant reality in their lives.

11. The Mystery of Salvation

Chavara narrates in the poem how his mother whispered in his ears the episodes of the salvation history, beginning with the mystery of the Trinity and followed by the mystery of incarnation of the Son and his

²⁵ *Compunction of the Soul*, 52-60.

²⁶ “These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up” (Deut 6:6-7). This passage highlights the duty of the parents to immerse their children in God’s teachings, ensuring that faith becomes an integral part of daily life. Prov 22:6, Eph 6:4, 2 Tim 1:5.

passion and death.²⁷ The poem reflects the profound mystery of the Incarnation, a central doctrine of Christian theology that reveals God's infinite love and humility. Highlighting the Trinitarian presence—God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—the poem sets the stage for the divine plan of salvation, culminating in the Incarnation of the Word. The Son of God took human form in Mary's womb, underscores the unity of divine and human nature and its transformative significance for the humanity.

The mystery of the Trinity, as revealed in the Scripture, emphasizes the unity of God as three Persons—Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit—distinct yet one in essence (Mt 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14). The mother's act of whispering the salvation history to her child mirrors the sacred responsibility of the parents to impart faith to their children. The Incarnation is the climax of God's salvific plan, as stated in John 1:14: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us," signifying God's profound humility and love. The reference to the Son taking human form in Mary's womb underscores the pivotal role of the Blessed Virgin in salvation history, as declared by the angel in Luke 1:35, where Mary conceives by the Holy Spirit, bringing forth the Son of God. Father, Son and the Holy Spirit in union, serves as the bridge for humanity's redemption, making the cross the ultimate expression of divine love and sacrifice (Phil 2:6–8). The reflection on the Trinity and Incarnation invites the reader to meditate on God's immeasurable love and the invitation to communion with Him through Christ.

12. Spiritual Desolation and Divine Restoration

Alas, my Lord! God of love and goodness,
 Joy and peace, since from me have fled
 My heart score-pressed with sorrow and pain; I felt
 I was no more the privileged child of God.²⁸

The above lines manifest the heartfelt confession of the author vividly portraying the spiritual desolation and deep sorrow of feeling alienated from God's love and goodness. The lament reflects the human experience of separation from the divine intimacy due to sin, trials, or a sense of unworthiness. Yet, it is precisely in such moments of despair that he expresses the awareness of God's overarching love and the potential for restoration. This sentiment is echoed in the cries of David in Psalm 51, where he pleads for God's mercy and restoration after

²⁷ *Compunction of the Soul*, 72-76.

²⁸ *Compunction of the Soul*, 100.

realizing the weight of his sin: “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (Ps 51:10). Similarly, the prophet Isaiah reassures that despite the human failings, God’s love and compassion are never withdrawn: “Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken” (Is 54:10). The poet’s reference to being “no more the privileged child of God” aligns with the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk 15:11–32), where the wayward son, consumed by sorrow and regret, feels unworthy of his father’s love. Yet the father’s merciful embrace underscores the enduring nature of the divine love and forgiveness, reaffirming the believer’s identity as a child of God. Theologically, this confession resonates with the understanding of grace as God’s unmerited favor, extended to the fallen humanity. St Augustine reflects on such struggles in his *Confessions*, where he acknowledges the restlessness of the human heart until it finds rest in God. The sorrowful plea thus becomes a moment of grace, a turning point toward spiritual renewal and reconciliation, illustrating the redemptive nature of the divine love.

13. Mystery of Vocation to Priesthood

Chavara says that it was in the midst of spiritual desolation that he was called to the sacred vocation of priesthood. It was a special call as there was no priest in his family and among the relatives. This choice of God is compared to an act of ear-marking to be his possession.²⁹ This statement highlights the profound and mysterious nature of God’s call to discipleship and priesthood, emphasizing the divine initiative in setting the individuals apart for His service. The experience of spiritual desolation preceding the call underlines the transformative power of grace: even in the moments of seeming spiritual abandonment, God’s voice can break through, inviting the individual to a life of service. The idea of being “ear-marked” by God for His possession recalls biblical themes of divine election and consecration. Jesus, in John 15:16, affirms, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last.” This passage affirms that vocation originates not from human merit but from God’s sovereign choice and purpose. Theologically, the call to priesthood is understood as a personal and irrevocable gift from God, marked by the sacrament of Holy Orders. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (§1578) states that no one has a right to receive Holy Orders; it is granted by God’s initiative

²⁹ *Compunction of the Soul*, 116-120.

through the Church. This divine choice reflects God's desire to equip the chosen individual with the grace to fulfill the mission entrusted to them.

The notion of being set apart for God is also tied to the concept of holiness and consecration. In the Old Testament, priests and prophets were anointed and consecrated for God's service, signifying their unique relationship and responsibility (Ex 28:41). In the New Testament, this consecration is extended to all the Christians through baptism but finds a special expression in the priestly vocation, which involves acting in *persona Christi* during sacramental ministry. The statement also underscores the role of divine providence in calling the individuals beyond the human expectations, as seen in the biblical narratives of David (1 Sam 16:7-13) and Paul (Gal 1:15-16), who were called despite not fitting in the conventional expectations. This reflects the mystery of God's election and His ability to see beyond human limitations, choosing the "weak to shame the strong" (1 Cor 1:27).

Chavara's entry into the seminary and his growth is very vividly presented towards the end of the first chapter.³⁰ He conveys a powerful message that by being taught in virtue, especially by serving at the altar for the Eucharistic celebration, he progressed in the way of holiness and he managed to get rid of the evil forces. This statement reflects the Christian call to a life of holiness and moral integrity by rejecting sin and all that hinders spiritual growth. Scripture repeatedly emphasizes the need for vigilance, self-discipline, and reliance on God's grace to avoid evil and remain steadfast in the pursuit of righteousness (Rom 12:9, 1 Thess 5:22).

14. Conclusion

In the first chapter of *Atmanuthapam*, Kuriakose Elias Chavara expresses his gratitude for his birth, upbringing, and call to priesthood. Chavara expresses his unworthiness and acknowledges God's eternal nature, sovereignty, and creative power. He sees himself as a descendant of Adam, formed from the dust and inherently fragile, yet personally molded by God's hands. This acknowledgment highlights human dependence on God's mercy and sovereignty, which surpass human comprehension. Chavara's reflections on his birth emphasize the dignity of human beings created in God's image, with spiritual capacities and responsibilities that match with God's redemptive plan. He regards his life as a manifestation of God's mercy, which transforms human

³⁰ *Compunction of the Soul*, 136-140.

unworthiness into a testament of divine grace. His gratitude for God's boundless mercy and kindness is similar to the vastness of the sea, and he dedicates himself to a living in alignment with divine will.

Chavara's mother played a pivotal role in shaping his faith. Her nurturing was imbued with the divine grace, as she imparted the mysteries of the Trinity, Incarnation, and salvation history to him. Through her teachings and prayers, she modeled a life of holiness and devotion, emphasizing the sanctity of parenthood as a channel of God's love and guidance. Chavara's imagery of the "sleepless angel" protecting him complements his understanding of divine guardianship, contrasting it with human limitations. The poem also portrays moments of spiritual desolation, where Chavara feels alienated from God's love. Yet, these trials become opportunities for grace, echoing themes of repentance and divine restoration. His call to priesthood emerges from this spiritual struggle, likened to God's act of consecrating him for a special purpose. This divine election mirrors Christ's words in John 15:16, emphasizing the transformative power of God's grace. In the *Compunction of the Soul*, Chavara intertwines personal experiences with biblical theology, offering a compelling vision of God's mercy, human dignity, and the transformative power of faith. His reflections invite the readers to deepen their relationship with God and embrace a life of holiness and gratitude.