

REINTERPRETING KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA: TAYLOR'S DWELLER AND SEEKER FRAMEWORK FOR CONTEMPORARY PASTORAL CARE

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Abstract: This article examines the life of Kuriakose Elias Chavara through the lens of Charles Taylor's dweller-seeker framework. In the context of the declining influence of traditional religion in the West, the paper explores Charles Taylor's conceptualisation of the contemporary spiritual landscape using the framework of

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“dwellers” (those deeply committed to their established faith) and “seekers” (those actively searching for truth). The paper then applies Taylor’s framework to the life and mission of Chavara, arguing that he exemplified both dwelling and seeking while grounding firmly in the Church. Finally, the paper highlights the outcome of applying the dweller-seeker framework to Chavara’s life and its relevance to the Church in addressing the multifaceted challenges posed by dwellers and seekers in contemporary times.

Keywords: Charles Taylor, Kuriakose Elias Chavara, Dwelling, Seeking, Catholic Church, Pastoral Care

1. Introduction

The membership and influence of traditional religions are increasingly declining in the West, especially in Europe. The secular reductionist approaches, in general, deny the role of the supernatural and confines itself to the boundaries of the universe. One of the popular expressions of this view is from Carl Sagan, an American scientist: “The cosmos is all that is or was or ever will be.” These notions and ideologies shook the fundamental belief systems of the Western world. According to a report from the German Bishops’ Conference in 2022, 522821 people left the catholic faith in one year.¹ However, the present trend of decreasing Church membership is not a closed door for its mission.

Despite the unparalleled challenges the Church experiences, the current situation presents unique opportunities to proclaim the Gospel. One way to explore these opportunities is to comprehend the orientation of the faithful in the Church. Another is to look beyond the boundaries of the West. This paper attempts to understand the orientation of the faithful of the Western Church using the dweller-seeker framework of Charles Taylor. Charles Taylor is a well-known and influential Canadian philosopher whose notable works include *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* and *A Secular Age*. His reflections on Catholicism in contemporary society, which is entitled “A Catholic Modernity?” have initiated various scholarly discussions. Even though a lot has been written about dwelling and seeking within the Catholic Church, this paper’s uniqueness lies in applying this framework in the Indian context,

¹ Deutsche Bischofskonferenz, “Katholische Kirche in Deutschland Statistische Daten 2022” (Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz, June 28, 2023), https://www.dbk.de/fileadmin/redaktion/diverse_downloads/presse_2023/DBK_FLY_Statistik_2022_Ansicht.pdf.

especially to the life, works and activities of Kuriakose Elias Chavara. He is a Catholic Saint belonging to the Syro Malabar Church in India. He was a social reformer known for his innovative approaches to transform the society. Furthermore, he was a holy saint who heroically practised virtues, initiated reforms to strengthen the Church and defended her from schisms.

Through this paper, we attempt to answer the following research question: How can Charles Taylor's framework of dwelling and seeking, when applied to the life, works, and mission of Kuriakose Elias Chavara, offer insights to guide the Catholic Church in addressing the lived realities of dwellers and seekers among its faithful? To answer the question, this paper begins by exploring Taylor's framework of dwelling and seeking. Then, this framework is applied to the life and mission of Chavara. Finally, the conclusion gives insights into how the life and works of Chavara can inform the Church's response to dwellers and seekers.

2. The Evolving Spiritual Landscape in Contemporary Times

Charles Taylor refers to Robert Wuthnow's typology of Dwellers and Seekers to conceptualise the spiritual landscape in contemporary times.² In *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s*, Wuthnow analyses the gradual evolution of spirituality in the American conscience since 1950.³ In this attempt, he makes a stark distinction between the Spirituality of Dwelling and Seeking. According to Wuthnow, the traditional spiritual life was oriented towards the spirituality of dwelling and underwent a major change in 1965 due to moral and political uncertainties. These challenges and uncertainties paved the way for developing and fostering a spirituality oriented towards 'seeking.' Dwellers are those totally committed to the Church in which they have been raised, while seekers are not committed to an institution but to searching for the truth. In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of seekers and a decrease in the number of dwellers, and Taylor expects this trend to continue. Taylor observes: "...[W]e can predict that

² Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 512.

³ Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America since 1950s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

the number of seekers will probably increase with time over against the dwellers.”⁴

2.1. Dwelling and Seeking in the Age of Authenticity

Charles Taylor contests the claim of secularisation theorists that religion is an outdated reality overlooking decline and demise. These ‘subtraction stories’ characterise modernity as a liberated phase from the bondage of religion and the consequent decline in religious beliefs and practices. Taylor critiques this claim by unravelling the layers of historical changes that led to the present situation, leading to a nuanced understanding of the present situation.⁵ He calls the present age, beginning in the 1960s, “the age of authenticity.” This age is an outcome of historical changes and cannot be understood as the result of the necessary removal or subtraction of religion. One of the defining features of the age of authenticity is the freedom that an individual enjoys to pursue a path of their choice to fullness or to keep away from any religious or secular ideologies. The roots of this expressive individualism are not recent, but they can be traced back to the Romantic period. However, it was not an accessible option for the majority of the people and was confined to the elites. In contrast, in contemporary times, it has become a mass phenomenon.⁶

According to Taylor, the age of authenticity opens up diverse options for the individual, including the possibility of following a traditional religion. These options allow the individual to live a life on one’s own terms. Some trending expressions such as ‘do your own thing’ and ‘be yourselves in the world of today’ are examples of the age of authenticity gaining currency among the masses. Unlike traditional religions, where birth defines membership, in the age of authenticity, a choice is made on the ability of a religion or an ideology to make an impression on the individual. For an individual, the choice one makes “...must speak to me; it must make sense in terms of my spiritual development as I understand this.”⁷ In place of external authority and doctrines, the choice

⁴ Charles Taylor, “The Church Speaks - to Whom?,” in *Church and People: Disjunctions in a Secular Age*, ed. Charles Taylor, José Casanova, and George F. McLean (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2012), 23.

⁵ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 22.

⁶ Taylor, 473.

⁷ Taylor, 486.

of a spiritual path is identified exclusively based on the meaningfulness of the spiritual path. This can result in extreme positions of denial and affirmation of the possibility of transcendence, leading to militant atheism and fundamentalism. Furthermore, there can also be diverse middle positions concerning these extreme positions, leading to the 'fragilisation' of the options of believing and non-believing. Hence, Taylor observes that "[t]his mutual fragilisation of all the different views in presence, the undermining sense that others think differently, is certainly one of the main features of the world of 2000, in contrast to that of 1500."⁸ One of the outcomes of this feature in the age of authenticity is the opening up of diverse options before an individual, leading to the possibility of unlimited pluralism in public space. Taylor states, "Of course, this understanding of the place and nature of spirituality has pluralism built into it, not just pluralism within a certain doctrinal framework, but unlimited."⁹ He calls this social imaginary an "immanent frame" where both belief and non-belief exist together.

For Christianity, the age of authenticity is both a challenge and an opportunity. It is a challenge because it would result in a sharp increase in traditional religious belonging, as indicated by the trends in Europe, where people increasingly identify themselves as atheists, agnostics, or non-religious. It is an opportunity because the current situation cannot necessarily lead to the decline and demise of religion. Taylor observes that "The new framework has a strong individualist component, but this will not necessarily mean that the content will be individuating. Many people will find themselves joining extremely powerful religious communities."¹⁰ According to Taylor, two of the many ways in which the Church responded include Vatican II and the Charismatic movements."¹¹ Furthermore, understanding the nuances of dwelling and seeking helps respond to the age of authenticity.

2.2. Dwelling and Seeking in the Church

Dwelling and seeking are two modes of relating to the Church in contemporary society. Dwellers, in general, remain fully loyal to the Church, whereas seekers reserve their loyalty and search for truth on their terms. George F. McLean highlights this distinction by pointing to

⁸ Taylor, 303–4.

⁹ Taylor, 489.

¹⁰ Taylor, 516.

¹¹ Taylor, 513.

one of the disjunctions in the contemporary Church, as highlighted by Taylor, between “dwellers” and “seekers”: “the “seekers” who wish to realise in their life new, more personally authentic, ways of being Christian and Catholic vs “the dwellers” who feel that in the Church all is already clear, well defined and simply to be followed assiduously.”¹² Homogenisation of dwellers was a trend from the pre-modern societies to the first quarter of the twentieth century. However, this period overlooked the genuine questions raised by the seekers and oversimplified the complexities of religious practices. In the pre-modern society, “the church is at its best not when it is questioning, adapting and changing, but when it stands firm on its age-old answers”¹³ without much clarity and coherence. There were many converts to Catholicism in the twentieth century due to its unchanging or unwavering nature and placing itself as the only way to salvation. These aspects influenced the preceding dominance of spirituality revolving around seeking.

Seekers, displaying the essence of the age of authenticity, attempt to go beyond their present affiliation to religion and search for meaning and truth in their own terms to come in contact with the spiritual. The life of seekers can be compared to that of a journey, and their current status is provisional and temporary. Referring to Danièle Hervieu-Léger, Taylor clarifies the approach of seekers. There are two stages: the phase of search and the phase of conversion. The conversion phase is the culmination of the phase of search that a seeker undertakes.¹⁴

The Western cultural dynamics have been pivotal in understanding the rise of seekers. According to Taylor, this momentum began towards the end of the nineteenth century among the Western elites; later, it gathered a wide momentum by the second half of the twentieth century.¹⁵ According to Taylor, these aspects of seeking become part of the common sense for all other classes in the later phase. In general, the shift from dwelling to seeking is observed in a negative light, especially in opposition to faith. Moreover, this shift is marked as a step towards self-indulgence and self-absorption. However, Taylor calls this

¹² George F. McLean, “Disjunctions in the 21st Century,” in *Church and People: Disjunctions in a Secular Age*, ed. Charles Taylor, José Casanova, and George F. McLean (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2012), 1.

¹³ Taylor, “The Church Speaks - to Whom?,” 20.

¹⁴ Taylor, 17.

¹⁵ Taylor, 17.

momentum the path towards authenticity. Moreover, this path is accompanied by various trivialising developments, such as the growth and influence of consumer capitalism.¹⁶

The Church must not limit its focus on dwellers and remain open to seekers. Seeking is part of the long history of the Church. Taylor explains this by focusing on the aspect of mistrust displayed by seekers. Their identification as "spiritual and not religious" is one way of expressing this mistrust. This is because of two reactions, namely, the failure to grasp the necessity of the disciplines and the quick and definite answers given by the Church to certain questions without giving importance to the aspect of search. However, Taylor observes that the mistrust displayed by the seekers is unjust because the Church "has been a great source and site of seekers." He points to the examples of St Teresa of Avila, St Ignatius, St John of the Cross, St Francis de Sales, St Teresa of Lisieux and St Mother Teresa. Like the seekers of today, some of them had differences in opinion with the Church authorities and also experienced a passing phase of spiritual dryness. However, the crucial aspect of their seeking, which makes them different from seekers of today, is that they were strongly anchored in the Catholic Church. This anchoring cannot be seen in the seekers of the authentic age.¹⁷

One of the challenges the Church faces in contemporary times is engaging dwellers and seekers. Conservatives among dwellers and seekers could voice extreme views. Church's responses to diverse issues might not augur well with those occupying extremes of this spectrum. However, Taylor underlines the need to "reach out" to both groups to bring about "greater mutual understanding" and "mutual sympathy".¹⁸ For instance, as indicated earlier, the seekers could be made aware of the examples of seekers within the Church who, by being rooted in the Church, displayed the attitude of seeking, such as St Teresa of Avila and St John of the Cross.

Furthermore, opportunities for better communication between seekers and the Church could be initiated. The seekers could be provided platforms to make them better heard than forcing them to obey. He gives the example of Taizé approach. It is characterised by giving importance to listening to the seekers and putting their search in perspective rather

¹⁶ Taylor, 18.

¹⁷ Taylor, 18.

¹⁸ Taylor, 21.

than providing them with predetermined answers.¹⁹ Open and deep engagement between dwellers and seekers can bridge the gap between their differing perspectives.

Taylor agrees that there are no simple solutions to permanently settle the deep-rooted differences between dwellers and seekers. It requires creative and dynamic frameworks of engagement. One way of exploring the possibility of a dynamic framework is to look beyond the West. Hence, in this paper, we shift the focus from West to East, particularly on the life, work, and mission of Kuriakose Elias Chavara.

3. Seeking and Dwelling in Chavara

Kuriakose Elias Chavara's life reflects various shades of dwelling and seeking. He was a seeker who was anchored in faith as a dweller. He epitomised the concept of 'dweller' in numerous ways. His ardent faith in God and deep commitment to the Holy Catholic Church made him a distinguished figure in the Syro Malabar Church. His humane touch embraced traditional religious understanding, making his dwelling unique and remarkable.

The spirituality of seeking can be traced to Chavara's life and mission. This seeking dimension became evident through exploring his spiritual life, efforts in the reunion movement, prudent discussions and deliberations with Bp Roccas, Melus, Denaha, and Antony Thondanattu, his forgiving attitude towards Mr Mathan Manjooran Kalpurakal, and advocacy for liturgical reform. We begin by examining the aspect of dwelling in his life, followed by an exploration of the dimension of seeking.

4. A Dweller Who Lived the Legacy of Prayer Experience

Chavara's deep prayer life reflects an essential element of his dwelling dimension. The deep prayer life of Chavara can be substantiated with a few testimonials. Fr Louis Manjummel OCD, who chose Chavara as his spiritual guide, distinctively mentioned St. Chavara's prayer life in his letters. The letter written by Fr Louis dated 12 January 1936 to Fr Merchili finds a vivid explanation of Chavara's prayer life. According to his description, Chavara spent his daily evening meditation for an hour in a

¹⁹ Taylor, 20.

kneeling posture with teary eyes, and Fr Louis further testified that it was a source of inspiration for the members of the monastery.²⁰

Personal encounters and testimonials further highlight Chavara's sanctity and the influence of his prayerful life. When Chavara was active in his ministries, Fr Varkey Muttathupadath, one of the students of Chavara, respectfully collected a few strands of Chavara's hair and preserved it in a relic. Later, he gave this relic to his nephew, Fr Joseph Muttahupadath, and after a short span of time, he handed over this precious relic to St Joseph's Monastery Mannanam in 1936. In his testimonial letter dated 08 September 1936, Fr Joseph Muttahupadath cherished the close encounter of Fr Varkey Muttathupadath, his uncle, with Kuriakose Elias Chavara and its influence in his own life.²¹ Bishop Mar Athanasius, the founder of Reformed Mar Thoma Church, had a deep connection with Chavara. He says, "In this country, who else than Fr Prior is likely to go to heaven? Holding on to his leather belt, I, too, shall endeavour to reach there." This statement of a non-Catholic prelate is a direct proclamation of Chavara's holiness.²²

The testimonies of Bp Marcelin OCD and Fr Leopold Beccaro further underscore Chavara's exemplary virtues and his role as a mediator of blessing in the Kerala Church. Bp Marcelin OCD testified to the uniqueness of Kuriakose Elias Chavara in his Malayalam work titled *Satyavedacharithram*. Bp Marcelin acknowledged the contributions of Chavara in fostering the faith life of the commoners, and he firmly mentioned that Chavara was the sole architect who was instrumental in bringing an abundance of blessings to the Kerala church.²³ Similarly, Fr Leopold Beccaro, the spiritual guide of Chavara, in his personal diary dated 3 January 1831, wrote, "He was exercising himself in the practice of all virtues, especially in the simplicity of heart, living faith, tender obedience, and devotion to the Most Blessed Sacrament, to the Bl. Virgin Mary and St Joseph."²⁴ Finally, Fr Leopold Beccaro concluded his

²⁰ Thomas Panthaplackal, *Chavarayachan Oru Rekhachithram* (Ernakulam: The CMI Secretariate for Evangelization and Pastoral Ministry, 2004), 103.

²¹ Panthaplackal, 102.

²² Thomas Kochumuttam, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2017), 8.

²³ Panthaplackal, *Chavarayachan Oru Rekhachithram*, 102.

²⁴ Leopold Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara* (Mannanam: Postulation of the Cause of Bl. Chavara, St. Joseph Monastery, 2003), 17.

personal diary with a short prayer, "O holy and beautiful soul, pray for me."²⁵ These testimonials reflect the prayer life and dwelling spirituality of Chavara in its fullness.

4.1. Integrating Spirituality and Action

In contrast to the observations that clericalism and hierarchical structure alienate people of God from the Church, Chavara's life as a dweller blended spirituality and action, drawing people closer to the Church. Being a dweller, Chavara loved to practice his love for his Divine Master in his committed service, especially on the pastoral front. While he was serving as Vicar at Pallipuram, one night, he was informed that one of the parishioners, who was suffering from contagious smallpox, became severely ill and asked for anointing the sick. By considering the pastoral necessity, Chavara got ready to cater for the spiritual needs without any sort of hesitation. When people tried to stop him, Chavara said, "It is my duty and God will take care of me."²⁶ This incident indeed reveals how Chavara integrated his spirituality and action, even in the midst of life-threatening situations.

In his analysis, Taylor points out that overemphasis on authority is a reason for seekers to distance themselves from the Church. Very often, this overemphasis will lead to various scandals, and these scandals question the moral integrity of the Church. Chavara's moral integrity can be analysed in his effort to construct the Koonammavu convent. As directed by Chavara, Fr Geevarghese Thoppil went to different parishes and returned with Rs 400 as donations. However, under the guidance of Chavara, they were able to finish the construction of the convent with half of the amount, and Chavara instructed Fr Geevarghese to return the remaining sum of money to the donors.²⁷ This incident explores the moral integrity of Chavara in its fullness. Thus, Chavara, as a dweller, integrated spirituality and action.

4.2. A Dweller Who Stood for the Unity of the Church

As a dweller deeply rooted in the Church, Chavara exemplified a steadfast commitment to unity, dedicating himself to resolving Roccas schism (1861-1862). During this time period, the rebellion became public and out of 154 parishes, 84 fully and 30 partially followed Bishop Roccas.

²⁵ Beccaro, 17.

²⁶ Kochumuttam, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 7.

²⁷ Kochumuttam, 7.

Archbishop Bernardine Baccinelli, the vicar apostolic, the European missionaries and a few enlightened individuals helplessly watched this grave situation with pity. To address this schism, the Archbishop appointed Chavara as the vicar General for Syrian Christians in his letter dated 8 June 1861. In the patent order, the Archbishop wrote, "I hereby nominate you as the Vicar General so that you may administer, as regards the spiritual matters, the priests and laity of the Syrian churches under our jurisdiction."²⁸ To understand the selfless service of Chavara in containing Roccas schism, it is appropriate to refer to an excerpt from the diary of Fr Leopold Beccaro on 3 January 1871. Fr Beccaro wrote:

He has undergone immense hardships for the good of Christians of Malabar, especially during the time of schism of Roccas, when he, being appointed the Vicar General of Syrians, showed his extraordinary devotion to the Holy See. He fought day and night to arrest the spread of schism, from which he could save not less than 40 parishes. On this account, the Holy Father Pope Pious IX sent him a letter expressing his great satisfaction.²⁹

Similarly, he raised his concerns with His Eminence Alexander Cardinal Barnabo, then Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of Faith, expressing the need for native bishops. According to Chavara, the presence of native bishops will help Jacobites and other rebellious factions return to the Catholic communion. Therefore, as a dweller, Chavara's love for the unity of the Church seems evident in his mission, and these two examples prove this claim in fullness.

4.3. A Dweller with Humane Outlook

Chavara's life exemplifies a deep, humane outlook, where his inclusivity and compassion shaped his interactions and mission. The charisma of Chavara can be gleaned throughout his life and mission. According to Fr Leopold Beccaro, "he is greatly loved by the Vicars Apostolic of Malabar, the Gentiles and the Nestorians not excluded."³⁰ This testimony reveals the inclusivity of Chavara's personality. His humane outlook has been acknowledged by many. For instance, in the chronicles of Fr Varghese Parappuram, he mentions an incident at Koonammavu.

²⁸ "Beatificationis Et Canonizationis Servi Dei Cyriaci Eliae Chavara (Positio Super Miraculo)" (Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1977), 216, Dharmaram Library Archives.

²⁹ Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 17-18.

³⁰ Beccaro, 18.

It was in the context when the uncle priest of Fr Scaria Kalathil fell ill, and on his deathbed, he expressed his desire to see Fr Scaria. Fr Leopold, the novice master, was against Fr Scaria's visit to his uncle; nevertheless, Fr Chavara supported Fr Scaria's visit by considering the urgency. Since it was the time of the superiors' meeting at Koonammavu, Fr Leopold insisted on secret voting to make a unanimous decision. When they began to cast votes, Fr Leopold raised a black pellet between his fingers and showed it to all so that all may follow his path. When Fr Chavara's turn came, he raised a white pellet and showed it publicly. The superiors were in a dilemma and requested that they discuss and reach a consensus. However, Fr Leopold was insistent on voting. When the ballot box was opened, Leopold was surprised to see that all the votes, except for one, were white.³¹

These two testimonials reveal Chavara's personal charisma, which is oriented towards a humane outlook. Moreover, Chavara's efforts in the establishment of schools devoid of caste barriers, spreading the good news to the people in the peripheries, and innovative efforts to uplift womanhood in society can also be inferred as the culmination of the above-mentioned outlook. Thus, we can firmly classify Chavara as a dweller with a humane outlook.

5. Unravelling the Spirituality of Seeking in Chavara

The spirituality of seeking in Chavara can be explored by dividing his spiritual life into three phases. The first phase marks his close encounter with Jesus. In this phase, the main points of discussion are his spousal mysticism and union with the divine. The second phase is identified as radical self-consciousness and a call to repentance. This period is marked by interiorisation, reflection, and radical *metanoia*. The final phase is the period of realisation.

5.1. Close Encounter

Chavara's mystical experience is deeply rooted in Carmelite spousal mysticism. Thomas Kochumuttom CMI observes that Chavara's mystical experience revolves around Carmelite mystical pattern, i.e., spousal mysticism, where the relationship between God and human beings is understood in the spiritual realm, but explained in the context of real marriage, mutual commitment, so on and so forth. In the *Compunction of the Soul*, Chavara uses the term '*kanakenam*', which

³¹ Kochumuttam, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 77-78.

literally means 'I long to see.' This terminology, indeed, explains his intensity of love for Jesus.

Moreover, the spousal mysticism in Chavara became explicit in his letter addressed to the mother superior and the entire community at the Koonammavu convent. He Chavara wrote, "Above all, learn the art of loving Jesus Christ. Stay constantly in His presence. Walk along with him. Converse with Him continuously. When you feel attached to any other object, the loving Lord turns His gaze on you and asks you: "Look at me! ... He whispers to you: "You must love me."³² In 1869, Chavara wrote another letter during the days of 40 hours of adoration at Koonammavu; there he wrote, "the adoration you give to your divine spouse Jesus Christ from the corner of your convent is most pleasing to him. I have seen with my own eyes that the palanquin in which the queen was travelling was covered on all sides with a thick curtain to hide her from human gaze, if so how demanding would be your Divine Spouse ... I feel a holy envy at your immense good fortune ... Oh queen and spouses of our Lord and King Jesus Christ, the state of life you have embraced is indeed praiseworthy. The terrestrial empresses will feel jealous of you."³³ Thus, these two references point towards spousal mysticism in Chavara's works.

Similarly, Chavara's mystical experience can be further traced in certain sections of *Compunction of the Soul*. Chavara did not directly mention his authorship in the book *Compunction of the Soul*; nevertheless, Rev. Fr Zacharia Kalathil, Fr Mathai Palakunnel, Fr Varkey Parappuram and Leopold Beccaro identified Chavara as the author of this mystical narrative.³⁴ Out of his intense mystical experience, Chavara wrote:

God of unbounded kindness, Holy Lord
O Sea of Mercy, of mighty depth unfathomed
You did look on me with tender care

³² Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara: The Letters*, ed. Lucas Vithuvattickal and K. C. Chacko, trans. Mary Leo, vol. IV (Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Bl. Chavara, 1990), 82.

³³ Chavara, IV:76.

³⁴ Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara: Compunction of the Soul, Dirge (Pana) and Anasthasia's Martyrdom*, trans. Mary Leo, Sheila, and Sergius, vol. II (Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Bl. Chavara, 1989), xii.

And Tended me with unstinted love.³⁵
 Lord of Mercy, the son of God
 His glorious splendor, I long to see
 The foundation of mercy, God incarnate
 Who, the ugly form of man assumed
 To uproot him from the slush of sin
 The Redeemer of humankind,
 I long to see.³⁶
 Oh, Lord! I gaze at Your most beautiful
 Lotus-face with single-minded love.³⁷

Come and take over my soul, O Lord, my heart is ready with its doors wide open to receive you. Reside in my soul as you sat on the lap of your mother. Remember, Lord, how happy you were in the embrace of these memorable days, Lord, hearken to her supplication on my behalf.³⁸

My God, my Love, my Master oh, was it
 Your thirst is insatiable to redeem mankind ...
 O Cross, Beloved, open your arms wide
 And in your living embrace quickly close me.³⁹

In the above-cited passages, Chavara's intense God experience, especially his providential trust in the tender loving care of God, can be inferred undoubtedly. From these observations and analysis, one may collectively conclude that Chavara integrated and applied his mystical experience in his daily life.

5.2. Self Consciousness

Delving deeper into Chavara's writing reveals that the intense encounter of Chavara with Jesus enabled him to have concrete self-awareness. In this phase, he identified and audited his current status of the soul with a sense of openness and humility. This inclusive analysis and its depiction

³⁵ Chavara, II:2.

³⁶ Chavara, II:17.

³⁷ Chavara, II:22.

³⁸ Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara: Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, ed. J. Chirayil and George H. Ambooken, trans. Jose Chittilappilly, vol. III (Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Bl. Chavara, 1990), 22.

³⁹ Chavara, *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara: Compunction of the Soul, Dirge (Pana) and Anasthasia's Martyrdom*, II:65.

made Chavara affirm his sinful nature. Chavara wrote in his *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*:

I deem not myself worthy to reach high degrees of prayer and sanctity. As I am a great sinner with a heart impure and opaque without virtues of cleanliness and modesty. I realise that I am not worthy to receive the spirit of contemplation and attain to perfection ... Unworthy as I am God so designed that I also become in spirit a child of St Theresa ... Here I come before you, Oh my Heavenly Father, with a heart full of repentance ... O my Father dear! I cast myself on my knees before your throne of Mercy. I am bent on clinging to your pierced but live feet until you speak to me words of forgiveness ... O my God! A great sinner I am, I am struck with fear to enter this chapel, the abode of your presence.⁴⁰

Though a sinner, my unworthiness, he redeemed O wonder of wonders.⁴¹

Alas, my Lord! God of love and goodness,
Joy and peace, since from me have fled
My heart sore-pressed with sorrow and pain; I felt
I was no more the privileged child of God.⁴²

Chavara integrates the aspects of holiness and repentance. He uses this integration as a pathway for leading a virtuous life. This integration reflects his personal growth in his mystical union as a seeker. This will become clearer in the next phase when he mentions baptismal grace and innocence.

5.3 Period of Realisation

The integration of holiness and repentance expresses a unique path that Chavara lived. When it comes to the final phase of his life, especially on his deathbed, Chavara, with his full knowledge, affirmed with clarity the depth of his spiritual life. According to *Positio*, submitted in 1977, the last parting words of Chavara are as follows:

⁴⁰ Chavara, *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara: Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, III:1-9.

⁴¹ Chavara, *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara: Compunction of the Soul, Dirge (Pana) and Anasthasia's Martyrdom*, II:5.

⁴² Chavara, II:5.

Why are you weeping? Man, whoever he may be, has to die one day. By the grace of God, I have been keeping in mind this moment ... My pious parents in many ways impressed on me great regard for the Holy Family; Jesus, Mary and Joseph. (*By pointing his hands towards the portrait of the Holy Family, he continued*) By the grace of God, I dare say that with their help I never had experienced an occasion where I was deprived of grace received in baptism.⁴³

To validate the references that have been taken from *Positio*, an excerpt from the diary of Fr Leopold Beccaro seems to be highly reliable. Fr Beccaro wrote, "Today, on January 3, 1871, Tuesday at 7.15 in the morning, Fr Cyriac Elias of Holy Family, the first Prior, died after a life of great innocence. He could declare before his death that he had never lost the baptismal innocence. He was exercising himself in the practice of all virtues, especially in the simplicity of heart, living faith, tender obedience, devotion to the most Blessed Sacrament, to the Bl. Virgin Mary and St Joseph."⁴⁴ In the second phase of radical self-awareness, Chavara's seeking spirituality enabled him to integrate the aspects of holiness and repentance. This integration paved the way towards the third phase- the period of realisation. However, Chavara also showed his personal relationship with the Holy Family, which helped him to tread beyond the aspects of the sinful conscience, which we see in the second phase. In this phase, Chavara was sure he did not lose the baptismal grace throughout his life. It becomes evident through these two references, and it also points out that his staunch seeking nature to be united with his Divine Master guided him to look beyond the temporalities and limitations of his life.

6. A Seeker Who Exemplified the Path of Forgiveness

Chavara exemplified the legacy of forgiveness practised by Jesus, his Divine Master. His life shows the path in which one has to deal with seekers who are hostile and indifferent. The perfect example can be traced to Chavara's attitude towards Mr Mathan Manjooran Kalpurakal of Muttuchira parish. In his testament to the members of the congregation, he requested the members of the community to cater for the needs of Mr Mathan Manjooran, who was the steward at the St Joseph's Monastery, Mannanam. Mr Mathan Manjooran

⁴³ "Beatificationis Et Canonizationis Servi Dei Cyriaci Eliae Chavara (Positio Super Miraculo)," 548.

⁴⁴ Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 17.

misappropriated some property of the monastery, and the civil court punished him. In retaliation, he filed a criminal case against Chavara in the criminal court of Alappuzha. After hearing both parties, the court dismissed the case filed by Mr Mathan as fraud.⁴⁵ This instance reveals the forgiving nature of Chavara.

Chavara's forgiving nature was further demonstrated in his dealings with Bp Thomas Roccas, who plotted against him and his monasteries but, was ultimately met with patience, assistance, and kindness even during a time of schism. Similarly, Bp Thomas Roccas threatened Chavara in various ways, and the supporters of Roccas plotted plans to take over Mannanam and Elthuruth monasteries by force to make his residences. This rivalry became clear with the letter written by Bp. Roccas dated 24 June 1869. In this letter, he abused Chavara and threatened him with excommunication and expulsion from the monastery.⁴⁶ Similarly, in the chronicles, Chavara described a circular published by Bp Roccas in the churches stating, "As the Prior and the inmates of the Monastery had insulted us and our father, the Patriarch, who had sent us, they were now in spiritual danger. As it is our duty to inform you of this so that you will not fall into eternal perdition by lending your ears to their evil councils."⁴⁷ According to Chavara, this circular had a tremendous impact, and people belonging to Protestant and Jacobite churches were in the forefront to humiliate and challenge Chavara and his supporters in various ways. Moreover, two priests and some deacons left the monastery to follow the charisma of Bp Thomas Roccas.⁴⁸ Even in this disturbing context, Chavara did not hold grudges towards Bp Roccas. Towards the end, a much-awaited response from Propaganda Fide revealed that Bp. Thomas Roccas reached the territory of Varapuzha without the due consent of the Holy See. After due consideration and counsel, Bp Roccas expressed his willingness to leave the country, and Chavara was instrumental in providing helping hands for his safe and sound return journey. Moreover, Chavara waited

⁴⁵ Chavara, *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara: The Letters*, IV:73.

⁴⁶ "Beatificationis Et Canonizationis Servi Dei Cyriaci Eliae Chavara (Positio Super Miraculo)," 220.

⁴⁷ Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara: The Chronicles*, ed. K. C. Chacko et al., trans. PJ Thomas, vol. I (Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Bl. Chavara, 1990), 86.

⁴⁸ Chavara, I:86.

patiently for hours in the harbour till the ship left.⁴⁹ This incident reveals his forgiving nature, even to those who intentionally tried to harm him in the midst of the schism.

Chavara's ability to forgive and reconcile is exemplified in his efforts to rehabilitate Fr Anthony Thondanat, a leader of the Roccas faction. Fr Anthony went to Mesopotamia and got him consecrated by the Nestorian Patriarch Simon Ruben XVIII and returned to Kerala as Archbishop Abdisho. After his arrival, he was not cared for by anyone, and he had no means to live. To add to the misery, he fell ill and was suffering from other age-related ailments. In this situation, Chavara explored the possibility of reconciliation by arranging a meeting at the neighbouring Church, i.e., situated in Fort Kochi. With the consent of the Archbishop, Chavara accommodated Fr Anthony in St Joseph's Monastery, Mannanam, where Fr Antony made a spiritual renewal with the guidance of Chavara. Later, Fr Anthony was appointed Vicar of Edamattom, Vilukumadam, etc. The act of forgiveness and courtesy exhibited by Chavara are the best ways to develop, especially in addressing seekers who remain hostile towards church authorities.⁵⁰

7. A Seeker with Inclusive Vision

Chavara's inclusivity in regaining seekers to the Catholic fraternity becomes more evident with his efforts and prospects in initiating the reunion movement. His efforts for the reunion movement are visible throughout his writings. To have a smooth transition of Jacobite brethren to the Catholic faith, he envisaged the need for native bishops belonging to these Syrian communities. He addressed this need in his letter to His Eminence Alexander Cardinal Barnabo, then Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of Faith. After giving a befitting introduction to the crisis among the Syrian and Latin Christians, he raised an amicable solution to address the issue. Chavara wrote:

Hence, Your eminence, I am placing before you a suggestion which I consider good. It is good to have two bishops here; one for the Latin Church and other for the Syrian Church. Then their longing to have a bishop of their own will cease. Then gradually their relationship with Babylon will end ... This would be very opportune and useful. There are also many non-Catholics in our midst who are our own kith and

⁴⁹ Kochumuttam, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 66.

⁵⁰ Kochumuttam, 66.

kin, now known as Jacobites. The above solution will help them renounce schism and return to the unity of the Catholic fold.⁵¹

Concerning this letter, Chavara's authorship is often doubted due to the lack of a signatory note in the copy of the letter available in Mannanam. However, Fr Varghese Parappuram and Fr Mathai Palakunnel mentioned vividly this letter that is addressed to the Roman Pontiff and the Prefect of the Congregation of Propagation of Faith in their respective chronicles.⁵² Similarly, there are also proofs to show that the letter has been sent through Fr Leopold, who accompanied Archbishop Leonard on his visit to Rome in 1869.⁵³ Moreover, Bp Louis Pazhyaparambil, in his book '*An Account of a Most Important Period in the History of the Malabar Church*' reiterates Chavara's authorship of the above-mentioned letter. Therefore, it becomes clear that Chavara was open enough to accept and reach out to those seekers who abandoned catholic faith due to their ignorance.

Similarly, Chavara's heart was always open to doing missionary activities across the land. Concerning this Fr Thomas Panthaplackal refers to the chronicles of St Josephs' Monastery, Mannanam, where he traces a few instances in the life of Chavara and his companion took firm steps to baptise more than 100 people at a time. Apparently, this zeal for souls makes Chavara instrumental in founding catechumenates and schools together.⁵⁴ Thus, Chavara held an inclusive vision towards the nourishment of the mission of his Divine Master with an open heart. Furthermore, this openness is directly pointing towards his attitude to gain seekers for the kingdom of God.

8. Chavara: A Seeker who integrated Dialogue and Communion

There are various instances in Chavara's life where he employed the aspects of dialogue and negotiations effectively. Before the arrival of Bp Thomas Roccas, Denaha Bar Johan, a Chaldean priest, arrived in Kerala without due permission from the authorities. He also pretended to be the legitimate bishop, and thus, he successfully alienated the faithful from the administration of Varapuzha Vicariate. Once, he came to St Joseph's Monastery, and his sole intention was to win over Chavara and his community with his side. However, Chavara listened to him

⁵¹ Chavara, *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara: The Letters*, IV:14.

⁵² Panthaplackal, *Chavarayachan Oru Rekhachithram*, 14.

⁵³ Chavara, *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara: The Letters*, IV:12.

⁵⁴ Panthaplackal, *Chavarayachan Oru Rekhachithram*, 15.

patiently and expressed his disapproval explicitly. As it was late, as a matter of courtesy, they served him a good supper and gave him accommodation at night.⁵⁵ Chavara was sure that Denaha Bar Johan had an evil intention, especially to gather Chavara's support; however, he negotiated with Dehna constructively and explicitly expressed his unwillingness to join their front. Thus, Chavara showed negotiations and dialogue as a sublime way to deal with seekers who have gone astray.

Secondly, when there was a crisis in the Anackal parish, the chief of the parish approached Fr Chavara and sought his presence to rectify the issue. During those days, Chavara was staying at Koonammavu and he had severe age related ailments. However, barring all those age-related issues, Chavara settled the issues at Anackal parish with due negotiations and dialogues.⁵⁶ Thirdly, his willingness to have a dialogue with Fr Anthony Thondanat, who opposed him vehemently during the Roccas schism, can be traced as his willingness to accept and consider seekers who went astray in their spiritual quest.

9. Chavara: A Farsighted Visionary Seeker

Chavara was concerned about the ordinary faithful and their faith experiences. In this regard, he expressed his concerns about the lack of learned leaders in the Church. His vision for organised seminaries and convents in the Syrian rite can be seen as the outcome of this genuine concern. As the Vicar General of Syrian Christians, he wrote various letters and circulars concerning this topic. The circular dated 25 March 1850 set forth his vision in a clear and lucid manner. Chavara wrote:

St Ephrem, a Doctor of the Church, teaches that the second source of enlightenment is learning (knowledge). Just as without eyes one cannot see the material things of the world, so also without knowledge it will be impossible for us to see or understand the reality of the world that is above and the Lord lies therein ... Our Lord himself has taught that if the blind leads the blind both will fall into the pit ... To make up for this deficiency, it is decided to erect a seminary in a convenient place as agreed to buy, especially by our bishop.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Kochumuttam, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 65.

⁵⁶ Kochumuttam, 5.

⁵⁷ Chavara, *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara: The Letters*, IV:96.

This passage gives clarity on Chavara's vision in the establishment of the seminary at Mannanam. Similarly, he had a pressing reason for the establishment of the convent at Koonammavu. Chavara opened the chronicles of Koonammavu in the following manner:

People in Malabar had true faith from the ancient times. But there was no monastery or convent. They had heard a lot about virtuous life but there were no living examples. Men could become priests and thus be celibates. But women, even if they were willing to observe virginity, had no option but to marry and lead a worldly life. As there were no means to do it, they had been remaining in this plight for long.⁵⁸

Chavara affirmed that treading the path of holiness is the pertinent reason behind the establishment of the convent at Koonammavu. Similarly, in an excerpt from the diary of Fr Leopold Beccaro, he wrote, "He founded the convent of the nuns after undergoing many hardships."⁵⁹ Moreover, in the first biography on Kuriakose Elias Chavara written by Fr Leopold Beccaro, he wrote, "It was his great desire to start a religious house for women with the main intention of making it a safe place for the girls of Malabar to live their religion as good Christians and to learn spiritual things (*Vedakaryangal*)."⁶⁰ These references clearly state that his vision and concern for the Church seem to be the primary reason why Chavara underwent a lot of hardship in establishing the convent at Koonammavu. Fr A. Mathias Mundadan CMI, in his book titled *St Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, cited the chronicle of Koonammavu convent, which stated:

Our Father gave us four books printed both in Latin and in Malayalam ... Fr Prior often came and taught us how to read and write Latin ... On 12 February 1870 Fr Prior came to the parlour ... he had brought with him a small Latin book of the office of the Bl. Virgin Mary ... He read out to us a part of it and told us to read and start saying these prayers. He then added, "This was my aim in teaching you Latin."

The last statement of Chavara reveals his secondary objective in establishing the convent—the empowerment of womanhood. During those days, women were rarely sent to schools and other institutions;

⁵⁸ Chavara, *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara: The Chronicles*, I:193.

⁵⁹ Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 17.

⁶⁰ Beccaro, 12.

nonetheless, Chavara attempted to teach them classical languages. This reveals that he envisaged the prospects of women's empowerment in the days to come. Thus, the systematic establishment of seminaries and convents was the lasting solution he devised to address the challenges and problems of the Church in the days ahead.

Similarly, Chavara's involvement in reforming liturgical texts, efforts to impart education irrespective of caste distinctions, establishment of the printing press for the greater good, establishment of *tapasbhavanam*, and social concern for the poor and downtrodden seem to stem from his people-oriented vision. Thus, Chavara's life reflects the heart of a true seeker, one who blazed his own trail by transcending the confines of mere dwelling and embracing an inclusive vision rooted in faith.

10. Conclusion

The life and mission of Chavara, when analysed through Taylor's framework of dwelling and seeking, offer valuable insights for the Church to respond to the complexities of engaging dwellers and seekers. First, instead of a mutually exclusive approach, Chavara embraces a 'both/and' approach to dwelling and seeking. His life demonstrates that these orientations are not mutually exclusive. His life of deep prayer and enduring loyalty and commitment to the Church, the hallmark of a dweller, was seamlessly integrated into the action, such as in the reunion movement and engaging those who challenged and opposed the Church, such as Bishop Roccas. The spiritual path he explored and experienced has unique characteristics which did not lead him away from the Church but strengthened his visionary engagement within and outside the boundaries of the Church. Second, Chavara's approach to engaging with those with different views highlights the importance of dialogue and understanding. For instance, even after facing stiff opposition and threats, he negotiated prudently with Denaha Bar Johan and engaged patiently with Fr Anthony Thondanat. This resonates with Taylor's call for "greater mutual understanding" and "mutual sympathy" between dwellers and seekers within the Church.

Third, forgiveness and compassion are central to Chavara's pastoral approach. He forgave Mr Mathan Manjooran, who took him to court and even offered support to Bishop Roccas during his departure, demonstrating his compassionate and forgiving nature. Notably, he provided accommodation and spiritual guidance to Fr Anthony Thondanat, which eventually resulted in his reinstatement after the

latter's return from joining the opposing faction during the Roccas schism, highlighting his commitment to pastoral care for those who have strayed from the Church. Fourth, Chavara advocated for social justice and inclusivity beyond a traditional dweller paradigm. This is evident in his efforts to establish schools open to all castes and religions, as well as his initiatives for women's empowerment through education and the founding of convents. His actions echo the call for a people-oriented vision that Taylor associates with "seeking" spirituality.

Finally, Chavara underscores the need to cultivate visionary leaders who are rooted in the Church and open to the needs of the faithful. The key role he played in founding religious congregations for men and women and establishing seminaries recognises the need for spiritually formed, academically informed, and socially sensitive leaders, including women. He also led the reform of liturgical texts, established printing presses for broader reach, and showed concern for the poor and downtrodden. This approach stands in contrast to a spiritually and socially insensitive authority, which leads to the alienation of seekers from the Church.

Chavara's life and mission offer insights that enable the Church to meaningfully respond to challenges and explore opportunities presented by dwellers and seekers. By embracing the Chavara model of a "both/and" approach, fostering dialogue, emphasising forgiveness, advocating social justice, and cultivating visionary leadership, the Church can foster a vibrant and inclusive community of faithful.