

Editorial

**SPIRITUAL LEGACY OF
SAINT KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA**

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The life and mission of Kuriakose Elias Chavara was a song of praise for God's mercy, grace and the transformative power of the Holy Spirit. He believed that holiness is a response to God's initiative of love, and not attained by human effort alone. St Paul highlights that salvation is a gift of God's mercy, not human merit, and that through the Holy Spirit, we are renewed and called into a life of grace and hope (Tit 3:4-7). Chavara, a man of solid faith, deep trust and true love, had the awareness and conviction that his mission and ministry – ecclesial and liturgical renewal, founding of religious congregations, pastoral and catechetical initiatives, social and educational reform, serving the poor and the marginalized, spiritual renewal of families – were not his doing alone. He often reflected on them with a generous and grateful heart and his writings reveal a total reliance on God's grace and mercy, not personal glory. God's mercy worked through his willing heart that loved God and the humanity.

Chavara's legacy reflects a heart fixed not on worldly achievements and success, but on the Kingdom of God and therefore hope in eternal life should lead us to invest our talents as the good and trustworthy servants (Mt 25:20-23; Lk 19:16-19). As the Parable of the Talents sheds light, God values not just the success but the commitment, consistency and above all faithfulness in what has been entrusted to us, and the investment of the talents for the renewal of the families, communities, society and the Church. As in Chavara, the renewal begins with a humble heart open to the Holy Spirit, for he

was a man on whom there was an imprint of the Spirit that he could transform the lives by planting the seeds of God's love and truth. The constant awareness that salvation is the gift of God's mercy and love, unearned and undeserved, frees us from the pressure of performance, self-reliance or pride, but invites us to be humble servants with profound gratitude. "He saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy" (Tit 3:4).

Chavara invites and rather challenges us to experience the depth and intensity of God's unconditional love (Jn 3:16) and live renewed lives rooted and grounded in God's mercy and love (Eph 3:17). To phrase it differently, make the life a response to God's gift, self-gift in love, drawing nourishment and strength from, and being anchored in the love of Christ. Chavara's deep contemplative prayer life kept him rooted in Christ's love and his works of mercy grounded him in the Gospel values. Chavara wrote, "Love of God is the root; love of neighbour is the fruit." He reveals the very foundation of Christian spirituality as a way of life that flourishes only with being rooted in God's love through daily prayer and sacramental life; and expressed in actions that are natural overflowing of true love of God into love of others, especially the poor, the suffering and the marginalized. St John admonishes, "Whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen" (1 Jn 4:20). Chavara rooted himself in deep prayer and contemplation and the celebration of the Eucharist and bore fruit in the forms of multifaceted ministries he had undertaken for the renewal and wellbeing of the Church and the society. In other words, his life deeply rooted in the love of Christ inevitably blossomed in love towards his fellow human beings.

The present issue of the *Herald of the East* highlights the spiritual legacy of Kuriakose Elias Chavara. The volume has six articles and they are related to the theme. The authors, whose papers presented in this issue, deal in their own way, from differing perspectives, with the spiritual legacy of Chavara.

Annie Noel, in her article, explores the familial spirituality of Chavara who saw the Christian family as a sacred space of divine love and holiness, for he profoundly valued the family as a Domestic

Church, a place where faith is lived, love is embodied, and holiness is nurtured. Drawing inspiration from Trinitarian theology and the Holy Family, Chavara emphasized prayer, sacramental life, moral education, media discernment, and daily acts of charity as core pillars of family life. The saint advocates a home where every act becomes an occasion of grace. Parents, as primary educators, are called to model virtue, guide their children spiritually, and form homes that reflect the divine communion of the Trinity. According to Annie Noel, Chavara's vision is deeply pastoral and prophetic, urging families to transform ordinary life into a holy offering. Chavara makes a clarion call in today's fragmented world to make every Christian family a sanctuary of love, where God's presence is made real through unity, forgiveness, and sacrificial love.

Ann Mary Madavanakkad, in her paper, expounds the spiritual treasures hidden in the *Chavarul* that offers pastoral directives to the families to form them Domestic Church. The document underscores the sacred nature of family, describing it as a reflection of the Most Holy Trinity and an image of heaven, where members are bound by mutual love, respect, discipline, and a shared pursuit of holiness. *Chavarul*, in its first part offers precepts for fostering a God-centred family life grounded in prayer, peace, and sacramental living, and the second part focuses on the holistic upbringing of children in faith and virtue. Madavanakkad highlights that Chavara's insights remain relevant in the contemporary contexts, addressing moral and spiritual challenges that threaten the unity in the family. He emphasizes the need of spiritual communion, unity of mind and heart, and bonds of blood and affection, after the model of the Holy Family and rooted in divine love. The *Chavarul* is a pastoral guide to safeguard the spiritual integrity of the Christian families.

Jojo Pareckattil, in his article, explores Chavara's life, writings, and enduring legacy, focusing on how he serves as a patron and spiritual companion for those seeking reconciliation with God. His personal devotion to confession, illustrated profoundly in his mystical poem *Ātmanutāpam*, reveals a life marked by deep contrition, humility, and divine longing. The article examines his theological insights on repentance, his Last Testament, and his pastoral letters, especially to the nuns at Koonammavu, which highlight suffering as redemptive and every breath as a prayer. Chavara's teachings underscore the

transformative power of sincere confession, not only as a means of personal sanctification but also as a way to restore the moral and spiritual integrity of the Church. According to Jojo Pareckattil, in an age losing its sense of sin, Chavara's life is a powerful reminder to the world, urging the believers to have spiritual renewal; for his personal sanctity and the writings are roadmap for the penitents, leading them towards divine mercy and inner transformation.

Grace Thomas, in her paper, explores the kenotic spirituality of Kuriakose Elias Chavara. Grounded in the Christian concept of *kenosis*, Chavara's life exemplifies total dedication to God and the humanity. His deep spiritual commitment, humility, and altruism shaped his identity as a "man for others," reflecting Christ's own pro-existence. His leadership was marked by servant-hearted humility, simplicity, and hard work, and he never sought for recognition, even while holding high office. Chavara lived a life of detachment, choosing poverty, enduring suffering with grace, and cultivating a deep Eucharistic devotion. His kenotic lifestyle was not theoretical but actively lived in solidarity with the poor, the sick, and the oppressed. According to Grace Thomas, in a world increasingly marked by individualism, Chavara spirituality offers a countercultural model of Christian discipleship rooted in love, self-sacrifice, and faithful obedience to God's will. As the Church faces various challenges, the legacy of Chavara is a source of inspiration and renewal, urging the believers to embody Christ-like compassion and humble service.

Peter Kochalumkal, in his article, delineates the characteristics of prayer in the *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, a collection of meditations. For Chavara, prayer was rooted in gratitude, humility, and an intimate friendship with God. His meditations reflect a deep sense of unworthiness and at the same time they are filled with gratitude for God's mercy. He emphasized sincerity in prayer with a pure heart that acknowledges one's weakness. His writings present prayer as a soulful dialogue with God, where the soul engages in conversation with God as if it were between the intimate friends. Chavara emphasized the necessity of self-awareness and repentance, as they are the first steps toward divine communion. He encouraged all to avoid even venial sins so that we might grow in spirituality. His meditations on Christ's Passion deepened his longing for

reconciliation, highlighting confession as the gateway to divine mercy. According to Peter Kochalumkal, the *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father* presents prayer as a total surrender to God's will, achieved through adoration, repentance, and trust; and Chavara spirituality offers a roadmap for the believers who seek communion with God.

Binoy Checkonthayil, in his paper, presents Chavara as a visionary whose life and mission embodied a harmonious integration of faith, justice and humanity. His contributions transcended the boundaries of religion, inspiring transformative change in education, social justice, and spiritual renewal. Chavara promoted comprehensive education at a time when caste and class barriers limited access to education. The activities of Chavara exemplified his belief in the integration of spirituality with active service, creating a legacy of holistic Christian living. Benoy Chekkonthayil affirms that Chavara dedicated his life to promote human dignity. His teachings on family values, ethical living and the interconnectedness of humanity offer guidelines for addressing the contemporary challenges, and lessons for building up a more equitable society.

Chavara's spiritual legacy urges us to live and love more deeply and serve more faithfully for the glory of God and the good of His people. Let the rootedness in Christ's love make us fruitful for the wellbeing of the Church and the society after the model of Chavara, a true son of the Church.