

## KENOTIC SPIRITUALITY OF KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA

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**Abstract:** This study explores the kenotic spirituality of Kuriakose Elias Chavara, a pioneer of Christian service in 19<sup>th</sup> century Kerala. Grounded in the Christian concept of *kenosis* -self-emptying love modelled after Christ - Chavara's life exemplifies total dedication to God and humanity. His deep spiritual commitment, humility, and altruism shaped his identity as a "man for others," reflecting Christ's own pro-existence. Chavara regarded service to humanity as service to God, emphasizing mercy, forgiveness, and social transformation. He founded educational institutions, promoted the dignity of the marginalized, and revitalized Syro-Malabar liturgical life. 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. In a world increasingly marked by individualism, his spirituality offers a countercultural model of

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Christian discipleship rooted in love, self-sacrifice, and faithful obedience to God’s will. As the Church faces modern challenges, the legacy of Kuriakose Elias Chavara remains a source of inspiration and renewal, urging the believers to embody Christ-like compassion and humble service.

**Keywords:** Kenotic Spirituality, Pro-existence, *Kenosis*, *Nishkamakarma*, Altruism, *Karma-yogi*

## 1. Introduction

The present scenario is increasingly characterized by individualism and ego-centeredness in social as well as religious realms. This is particularly true in this age of globalization and secularization with its marks of market economy and profit-orientation. Pro-existence, inter-personal relationship and altruism<sup>1</sup> are concepts that are being widely used in our times in order to emphasize and promote the need of an authentic and meaningful life in the world. The meaning of human existence as pro-existence is one of the leading thoughts that have a sway in the contemporary theological discussions. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, one of the leading theologians during the period of the Second World War, is generally credited with characterizing Jesus as the ‘man for others.’<sup>2</sup> The life of Jesus involved a radical kenosis and altruism so that his only concern was totally to be for others. Jesus is the embodiment of the ultimate and unconditional love of God, and in him there was no trace of egoism. Christ renounced his divine position and became human so that humans might become fully human.<sup>3</sup> In this article we delve into the various elements of the kenotic spirituality of Kuriakose Elias Chavara.

As we know the concept of *kenosis*, or the kenotic motif, is a basic tenet of Christian faith. God redeemed humanity by entering creation accepting the limitations inherent in human existence. Kenotic theology expresses a theological understanding of the self-emptying action of God, in Christ, in the incarnation. At times, kenotic theology has met with dogmatic issues. However, new paths have emerged within an

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<sup>1</sup>Altruism is a term used to describe a behavior characterized by acts with no apparent benefit for the individual who performs them but that are beneficial to other individuals. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/altruism>.

<sup>2</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Letters and Papers from Prison*, New York: Macmillan Company, 1953, Revised Edition in 1967.

<sup>3</sup> See my book Moly Thomas, *Christology in Context: Kenotic Perspectives*, New Delhi: Intercultural Publications, 2005, 214.

understanding of the sovereign freedom in the love of God. This includes an understanding of God as an excess of being, in freedom to love and suffering in Christ and absorbing the suffering of evil. This is the challenge that poses in theologizing the God of the cross.

In the letter to the Hebrews we read the purpose of the coming of Christ into the world, “a body you have prepared for me ... I have come to do your will, O’ God” (Heb 10:5-7)<sup>4</sup>. In a similar vein in the gospel according to John we read: “I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me” (Jn 6:38). Similarly during his prayer at Gethsemane Jesus said to his Father: “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet not my will but yours be done” (Lk 22:42).<sup>5</sup> Thus Jesus showed his readiness to do the will of the Father and committed himself to Father’s will. The meaning of these passages is clear from what happened on the night when he was betrayed with its climactic statements: “This is my body that is broken for you. And this cup is the new covenant in my blood. ...Do this in remembrance of me” (1 Cor 11:24-25). In Jesus Christ, God has become a God of human beings in a human way. As we have already noted, in the words of Bonhoeffer, Jesus the man-for-others unveils God’s pro-existence for human beings. According to Jacques Dupuis, Jesus Christ is the human face of God and in turn, he is the symbol and image of God’s personal dealings with the humankind.<sup>6</sup>

The focus and orientation of the entire humanity of Jesus was in terms of his altruism and pro-existence and he commanded his disciples to be at the service of others. “The image of God inscribed in the face of Jesus is that of a God who has freely chosen to empty God’s self (*Kenosis*) in self-giving. In Jesus, God has become ‘God-of-human-beings- in-a-human-way.’”<sup>7</sup> According to Pope Francis, the Gospel is the living “book of God’s mercy that must be continually read and re-read, that has many blank pages left. It remains an open book that we are called to write in

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<sup>4</sup>All biblical references are from The Holy Bible, The New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition, Bengaluru: Theological Publications in India, 2021.

<sup>5</sup> In the book of Psalms also we see the same eagerness of the Son of God to do the will of God “Here I am; in the scroll of the book it is written of me. I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.” Ps 40:7-8.

<sup>6</sup> Jacques Dupuis, *Who Do You Say I Am? Introduction to Christology*, Mary Knoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994, 170.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Xavier, *Mercy in Practice: Theological Reflections on the Life of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2016, 66.

the same style, by the works of mercy we practise. ... St Chavara is one of those who heard the invitation to continue the work of Jesus and to fill the blank pages of the 'incomplete' gospel with love and total commitment."<sup>8</sup> Today it is our duty to respond to the invitation of the Pope and continue the work of charity sharing in the problems of the people around and helping them. As he announced the year '2025' as the 'Jubilee Year' he requested us to be the pilgrims of hope where we observe that the signs of hope are becoming meagre around. Chavara was an apostle of hope who committed his life totally and made himself available to all, and hence he became the hope of the hopeless.

## 2. Total Availability and Dedication

Life becomes meaningful when we live it fully for others. As a true follower of Jesus Christ, Chavara dedicated his life totally and fully for others. His life was both God and man-oriented, a man for the Other and for others, an altruistic person, not only for his own time, but for the people of all ages. His baptismal name 'Kuriakose' in Greek denotes 'one who belongs to the Lord.' Indeed, belonging to the Lord made him a compassionate person. He realized the mercy of God as the ultimate expression of his love. He was a person pertained to the Lord totally and completely so much so that on his death bed he could testify that he never lost his baptismal sanctity of union with God. His belonging to the Lord prompted him to work hard for Christ and for his Church. He was convinced that service to God is rendered through service to humanity.<sup>9</sup> He experienced the joy of belonging to the Lord. He was an exemplary model of divine intimacy. "Living in constant fellowship with Jesus remains as the fountain spring of the spirituality of Chavara. He ascended every day to the hand of the heavenly Father and descended every day to the needs of the people. He could grow vertically to the presence of God and horizontally to the needs of the people."<sup>10</sup> This

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Joseph Xavier, *Mercy in Practice*, 66.

<sup>9</sup> Discipleship is an invitation to witness Christ and to serve humanity. As a religious Saint Kuriakose was very much dynamic and sensitive to the surrounding world. "Religious life will continue to have meaning and therefore a future as long as it is directly involved in the critical issues of our time." Inigo, "The Response of Religious to Multi-Faceted Reality of India," CRI National Assembly Report, Chennai, 10-15 January 2000, 123.

<sup>10</sup> Augustine Mlavarayil, "Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara: A Fruit Bearing Branch of Jesus," *In Christo* 53 (2015), 61. See also K.C. Chacko, *Lead Kindly Light: A Voyage into the Sainly Life and Vision of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Kakkannad: A Bethrauma Publication, 2014, 17.

produced enormous energy to transform the world. Being touched by the Divine he could not but dedicate himself to God and his people and to serve them in a totally different manner in accordance with the sublime beauty and love he had experienced. He was an ordinary man with an extraordinary way of spiritual life, who spent long hours in front of the Holy Eucharist, before he could interact with the people, particularly the poor and the needy who came to him. It is to be noted that this is true in the case of everybody who was touched by God. When Holy Virgin Mary received the Word of God she went to the house of Elizabeth to be with her and to serve her (Lk 1:39-40).

Chavara was so grateful to God that every blessing he received from God was an incentive for him to commit himself for his brethren. The altruistic life of Chavara is an example for us to imitate and live our life meaningfully. This is very clear in the words of Archbishop Mathew Kavukatt, "He was a priest who dedicated himself to love and serve the Lord. At the same time, he committed himself totally with the same love, to love and serve humanity."<sup>11</sup> Chavara never projected himself and was always at the background or behind the curtain. His life was an inspiring and edifying story. From the very day he was ordained as a priest he devoted his whole life to God and worked piously for the social, cultural and educational uplift of his fellow beings. He advised and practised: "Days on which you have not rendered any good to others will not be reckoned with as days in your book of life."<sup>12</sup>

According to Chavara, spirituality is not being with God alone in the chapel but also reaching out to the needy in their difficulties. As Pope Francis reminded us we should go to the marginalized people, to the periphery, to those who are deprived of everything. He was always ready at the service of the children of God whenever they sought for his help. His charitable mind manifested in various ways and his selfless services were numerous. He was convinced that the aim of evangelization is the total transformation of people and the society. Therefore he started many pioneering apostolates which show his concern for the well-being of others. His contributions in the field of spiritual renewal, education, family apostolate and mass media were

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<sup>11</sup> Augustine Mlavarayil, "Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara: A Fruit Bearing Branch of Jesus," 61.

<sup>12</sup> Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Testament of A Loving Father*, ed., Thomas Panthaplackal, Kakkanad: Chavara Central Secretariat, 2014, n. 13.

motivated by the desire to see growth in others.<sup>13</sup> He extended his services even to those who were hostile to him. As a pioneer in many revolutionary and progressive activities, he had many enemies during his life time. But he was always kind and considerate to them. He was magnanimous enough to seek out those who tried to hinder his work or to humiliate him and promised all sorts of encouragements and co-operation in all their work. His charitable activities include social welfare, restoration of faith, and salvation of souls.<sup>14</sup> What prompted him to do so was his motto "God is my inheritance." He left everything, his dear ones and patrimony, and he resolutely held on to this determination till the end of his life.<sup>15</sup>

### 3. A Man of Universal Vision

Chavara's heart was so broad that he forgot himself and his needs, and even neglecting his own health he worked for the welfare of others. According to him, everybody is God's child and we belong to one family. The sense of this universal brotherhood made him work for the good of others. The social reforms and the mission he undertook, in view of the other, were indicative of his intimacy with God.<sup>16</sup> "It is this selfless service and self-gift to others that exalts humankind. Consecrated life has its relevance and worth in this self-sacrificing love. The greatness of consecration is this self-gift and availability."<sup>17</sup> Chavara was a man with a clean heart and pure conscience, and his life was the experience of divine compassion. As the Lord reminds us, "it is more blessed to give than to receive," (Acts 20:35) the leading principle of his life was to give everything whatever he received from God to everybody those who are in need. In the present context, people are interested in amassing wealth and everything for themselves but Chavara was a generous man who

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<sup>13</sup> Joseph Xavier, *Mercy in Practice*, 68-69.

<sup>14</sup> Magi Maria, "Challenges of the Social Apostolate as Followers of Blessed Chavara," *Herald of the East*, Vol. VI (2004), 100.

<sup>15</sup> Santhi Rose, "Behold the Man! The Person of Chavara in His Letters," *The Lord of Heaven & Earth: Chavara Studies in Honour of Fr. Lucas Vithuvattickal CMI*, Paul Kalluveetil & Paulachan Kochappilly eds., Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2004, 321.

<sup>16</sup> Sebastian Mullooparambil, "The God-Experience of Bl. Chavara," *The Lord of Heaven & Earth: Chavara Studies in Honour of Fr. Lucas Vithuvattickal CMI*, Paul Kalluveetil & Paulachan Kochappilly eds., Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2004, 266.

<sup>17</sup> Shanthi Rose, "Behold the Man! The Person of Chavara in His Letters," 320.

gave up everything for others. The Scripture says, "Those who are generous are blessed, for they share their bread with the poor" (Prov 22:8). Moreover, the Gospel tells us to give in abundance "take heed what you hear: the measure you give will be the measure you get, and still more will be given to you" (Mt 4:14). Therefore he imparted in abundance the gift of divine love and compassion to his brethren without any reserve. At the time of his beatification in February 1986 Pope John Paul II rightly said:

See the innumerable charism and activities came upon from his [Chavara's] dynamic leadership and deep spirituality. Schools, seminaries, printing presses, public awareness centres, religious instruction centres, etc., have all come up from that multifaceted charism. He has compiled and improved the Syro-Malabar Liturgy. He could popularize the devotions to the Holy Eucharist and the Holy Family throughout Kerala. Understanding the importance of the role of families in the Church and society, he exhorted and strengthened the Christian families through his writings and sermons.<sup>18</sup>

Chavara was convinced of the fact that our life is a gift from God and it should be freely spent for the good of others. The fulfilment of one's life depends on this conviction. He shared everything he had at his disposal with others. It is sure that he literally practised what Saint John says in his first Letter Chapter 3:18: "Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action."

#### 4. Attitude of *Nishkamakarma*

One can be a *karma-yogi* by doing *nishkamakarma*, selfless service to God and humanity.<sup>19</sup> Doing service to others without expecting anything in return is called *nishkamakarma*.<sup>20</sup> In other words, it is to do one's duties

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<sup>18</sup>Augustine Thottakara, "Saint Chavara, A Karma-Yogi: A Paradigm of the Mystic of Active Ministry," Keynote Address delivered on the Workshop on Theological Studies on Saint Kuriakose Chavara (29-30 June 2019, CMI Prior General's House, Chavara Hills).

<sup>19</sup>Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Kakkanad: Chavara Central Secretariat & Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2017, 154-155. See also Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2008, 324.

<sup>20</sup>This is what Jesus meant as he said, "When you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, 'we are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!'" (Lk 17:10). Chavara was such a person who was disinterested or not concerned about the fruits of his actions.

without attachment, renouncing sense passions, detaching oneself from selfish motives and with an attitude of indifference to the outcome of the actions. It can also be said that doing duties without any desire for the fruits thereof is known as *nishkamakarma*. It is the means for liberation. What is renounced here is not action, but only the attachment to it. Thus *nishkamakarma* is not abstaining from action. But abandonment of selfishness is the essential condition for entering the path of action. A seeker has right only to do his duties and that he should not aspire for the results. This was the spiritual path earnestly and bravely followed by Chavara during his earthly sojourn. He gave credit to God for all his successes and achievements that made him humble and free of attachments. This is the defining mark of a *karma-yogi* which shows his spiritual maturity and it was his personality trait. His attitude was like St John the Baptist who said, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (Jn 3:30). “His deep sense of humility and detachment was unparalleled, as it was clear from the concluding words of the letter of Vicar Apostolic Baccinelli to the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of *Propaganda Fide* dated 15 June 1861.”<sup>21</sup> He recommended Chavara to be consecrated as the auxiliary bishop but his comment was that he might not accept it because he had taken the vow of humility, and even if he had not taken that vow, he would not accept such a character and dignity without a formal command. Service without expecting anything in return was the characteristic mark of Chavara.

#### 4.1. A Man of Concern and Compassion

Chavara was a man with a passion for God and a passion for humanity. This led him to be the pioneer of many innovations in the field of spiritual, educational, and social reforms. His contributions in these areas show his concern for the well-being of others. After the foundation of the Congregation for women he said, “Almighty God, I believe that you allowed me to live so long so that I may be able to see this and feel all the more obliged to you. Greater praise be to you and now forever.”<sup>22</sup> Chavara was grateful to God for making him an instrument in accomplishing this great event. He stood as a champion for the cause of

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<sup>21</sup> Thomas Kochumuttom, “A Contemplative in Action,” Paul Kalluveettil and Paulachan Kochappilly, eds., *The Lord of Heaven & Earth: Chavara Studies in Honour of Fr. Lucas Vithuvattickal CMI*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2004, 138.

<sup>22</sup> *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara*, Vol. I, *The Chronicles*, trans. P. J. Thomas, Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Bl. 1990, 117.



women, the downtrodden, the oppressed, the marginalized, the poor, the Dalits, etc. His contributions for the liberation of these people were noteworthy. He took pain to bring the 'untouchables' to the mainstream of the society and rendered them opportunities to get educated. The seeds that he sowed in these fields bear lasting fruits even today.<sup>23</sup> He followed Jesus Christ in serving others. The basis of his ecclesial service was that he willingly submitted himself to become a perfect instrument in the hands of God. Thus he acted and responded being fully available and responsive to the will and plan of God.<sup>24</sup> His life was a manifestation of God's love, concern and compassion. He was a father to all and everybody could relate with him easily. In his dealings with the people, he could radiate loving presence of the fatherly figure of God.

#### **4.2. A Servant Leader**

Chavara had a clear vision of an ideal superior and in this regard he was indeed ahead of his time. The unity and well-functioning of the community depend much on the superior. The Second Vatican Council restored the concept of service as the major characteristic of leadership in the Church and effected a paradigm shift, away from "triumphalism, clericalism and juridicism."<sup>25</sup> The Church was presented by the Council as an instrument of Christ's service. Hence authority in the Church should be understood primarily as service. True authority derives its power from the crucified Lord. Hence any authority is meaningless unless it is supported by the example of the humble, poor, weak and servant Jesus. Moreover, authority must be exercised diaconally as Jesus did, with due respect as between brothers and sisters and not as between lords and subordinates.<sup>26</sup> All the leaders must realize the teaching of the Lord that greatness is not in the rank or position but in service. He makes it clear that love is the basis of true leadership and it must be issued in service.<sup>27</sup> Chavara imbibed the mind of the Council almost a century

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<sup>23</sup> Sergius, "Relevance of Blessed Chavara Today," *Herald of the East*, Vol. VI, 3 (2004) 32.

<sup>24</sup> Mathew Thenamkalayil, "The 19<sup>th</sup> Century Kerala Church and the Leadership of Bl. Chavara," *Herald of the East*, Vol. VI (2004), 125.

<sup>25</sup> Joseph Comblin, *The Meaning of Mission: Jesus, Christians, and the Wayfaring Church*, translated by John Drury, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1977, 69.

<sup>26</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Church, Charism and Power: Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church*, translated by John W. Diercksmeier, London: SCM Press, 1985, 61.

<sup>27</sup> Moly Thomas, *Christology in Context*, 240.

before. As Pope Francis said, he was a shepherd who had the ‘smell of the sheep.’ He was well aware that authority was for humble service and he considered himself a servant leader who never acted arrogantly or arbitrarily.

God was the focus and sum of all his activities and his rule was therefore a conscious effort to share the love of Christ more by example than by precept. Holding the position of authority for twenty five years, as Prior and Prior General, he never made his term a burden or infliction on the community. He was always calm and quiet and characterized by a smile that penetrated everybody’s heart. He secured the confidence of all by love and kindness.<sup>28</sup> He was a concerned, understanding and paternal superior, loved and respected by all. There were many instances of his care and concern towards the subordinates. One of the examples of his tender love for the members is found in sending to the monasteries the special, sweet, delicious mango which he had received from someone. He wanted that this rare variety of mango to be planted in the compound of every monastery and be called ‘our memory.’ And they complied with the desire of Chavara and the mango was eventually called as ‘*Prior Manga*’. Similarly he sent the chillies which he had grown in a pot at his window to the sisters in honour of the Mother of God.<sup>29</sup> Indeed he was a fruit bearing tree and he was generous enough to share everything with everybody. His love and concern towards the community of sisters he founded in Koonammavu was obvious. As Patriarch Jacob had a greater love for his younger son Benjamin, so also Chavara loved the sisters, and brought them up with special care and protection, providing for all their needs, as a mother takes care of her children.<sup>30</sup> He used to address his confreres as *sahodarankal* or *kutappirappukal* (those born of the same womb/mother). In the testament he even calls them as *priyamulla-kunjunkal* (beloved little children). In many of his letters also he addresses them likewise.<sup>31</sup> He was so much concerned about his spiritual sons and daughters that he was always sensitive to their needs.

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<sup>28</sup> Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 148.

<sup>29</sup> CWC, Vol. IV, *The Letters*, trans. Mary Leo, Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Bl. Chavara, 1990, VII/8, 84.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Kochumuttom, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Mumbai: St Paul’s Publications, 2014, 78.

<sup>31</sup> CWC, Vol. IV, *The Letters*, VII/2, VII/6, VII/7 and VII/11.

### 4.3. Spirit of Love and Forgiveness

According to Chavara, Christian love is forgiving love. Even though one is doubly insulted, one should not retaliate, but tolerate, forgive and be generous to the offender. His concern for the poor is clearly expressed in the letter he wrote to the people of Kainakari Parish. We can find such expressions in his writings, especially in his last two exhortations – *Nalla Appante Chavarul* (1869) and *Chavarul* (1870). Here he invites his readers to transcend their selves through heroic love and charity.<sup>32</sup> He encourages his confreres not only to love but also to help even one's enemies as the expression of Christian charity. He opines that, "even animals are capable of wreaking vengeance on those who cause pain and displeasure to them. To be un-affected by such ill-doings and to forgive them completely is a mark of great strength and prudence."<sup>33</sup> It is important to note that he is able to see the wrongdoers not as enemies, but as persons who need his support and helping hand. Such an attitude would help the transgressors to recognize their mistakes and, it offers them opportunities to return and be reconciled with dignity. It is more than just forgiving and forgetting. Moreover, here mercy takes the form of empathy that tries to see the other person's perspective.<sup>34</sup>

In order to love one's enemies one should rise above the natural feelings and love the person from the supernatural perspective of faith and consider all as children of God. Therefore, forgiving love is the real Christian love. He practised this kind of love and wanted his followers also to practise such a love.<sup>35</sup> For example, when intruder bishop Roccas decided to return to his country after the excommunication he was greatly in need of some money for his return journey. Then Chavara out of his generosity reached out to help him by providing his travel expenses. He treated him very friendly without having any grudge towards him. He had a special grace to forgive others and he always tried to reconcile with his adversaries. In the same manner, he treated the trouble makers, Fathers Antony Kudakkachira and Antony Thondanat (Audiso). He was very generous towards them and even

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<sup>32</sup>Joseph Xavier, *Mercy in Practice*, 25-26.

<sup>33</sup>CWC, Vol. IV, *The Letters*, X/6, 104.

<sup>34</sup>Joseph Xavier, *Mercy in Practice*, 29.

<sup>35</sup>Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 67-68.

relieved them from the punishments imposed upon them by the bishop.<sup>36</sup>

#### 4.4. A Life of Simplicity and Hard Work

A religious who professes the vow of poverty should not refrain from hard work. He/she should not be exempted from the universal rule of work, rather should work hard at least for their own livelihood. The first command of the Creator: “By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread” (Gen 3:19). In the words of Saint Paul, “Anyone unwilling to work should not eat” (2 Thes 3:10). Taking the advantage of the hard work of the rest of the community would be an injustice. By refusing to work hard, one turns out to be a parasite in the community. One should also support those members of the community who are unable to work. Hard work is the sign of poverty which the religious should certainly bear in mind. The religious should help the poor around them not merely by distributing what they receive from generous people, but also from the fruits of their own hard work. It is mandatory that the religious should bear the sign of poverty, namely, hard work, and share the lot of the poor people.

The poor have not only to work hard but also to face all the associated ordeals like humiliations, rejections, denial of rights and so on. This was true in the bitter life experiences of the Fathers during their prolonged effort to set up the press. The motivating force behind it was the love for and loyalty to the Church, thereby to strengthen and ensure her wellbeing. They had to work hard for the realization of this project for three long years. For this purpose, they had to undertake difficult and long journeys. It was a tiresome business because those days there were no good roads and comfortable vehicles and communication facilities as today. Sometimes the climatic conditions were also not favourable. In spite of all these adverse factors and even health problems the Fathers undertook frequent journeys to fulfil their goal. Moreover, they had to undergo all sorts of humiliations and embarrassments, they had to take time and be patient, sometimes their faith in God was tested and tried, they had to depend on so many people, and beg for money and sometimes they were rejected and disgraced. However, they did not lose heart or give up their trust in God or stop seeking help from people.

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<sup>36</sup>Jose Eroorickal, *Mystical and Missionary Spirituality of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2014, 175.

Finally, with God's blessing and the cooperation of generous people they realized their goal.<sup>37</sup>

## 5. Identification with the *Kenosis* of Christ

According to Chavara, in order to be conformed to Christ who emptied himself and became poor for our sake, and identified with the suffering humanity, one should live a life of humility. As part of the self-emptying, he has taken humility as the fourth vow. Following the life example of Jesus, Chavara, throughout his life in all his various endeavours, was alert and remained on the right track of redemptive *kenosis*. His holistic understanding of life and ministry took a two-dimensional practical understanding of the commandment of God, namely, love of God and love of neighbour (Mt 22:37-39).<sup>38</sup> Two aspects of the self-emptying act of Jesus are suffering leading to the crucifixion and the mystery of the Holy Eucharist.

In the meditations of Chavara, we find a passion for Jesus and the crucifix has a prominent place. He meditated on the crucified Jesus for long hours before the Holy Eucharist with his eyes filled with tears. He considered his own soul as the bride and the crucified Jesus as the spouse in the bridal chamber of Calvary. He always depended on the crucified Jesus in his days of suffering and mental agony. "It is his contemplation on the crucified Jesus that enabled him to find meaning in times of trials and tribulations."<sup>39</sup> He could overcome all the troubles and he was constant in following Jesus in his experiences of self-abandonment. As Jesus became the bread to satiate the hunger of the people, so also Chavara became the source of love and compassion for those whom he met. The Holy Eucharist was his source of strength to serve and work for his people. He was convinced that God's will always be done, and God loves us so much that he cannot remain passive without involving in the lives of his fellow beings.

### 5.1. Kenotic Experiences in the Life of Chavara

Suffering is part and parcel of the life of every human being. When one accepts sufferings as a participation in the sufferings of Christ, it becomes conducive to his/her salvation and sanctification and partaker

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<sup>37</sup> Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 160-161.

<sup>38</sup> Mathew Maniampra, *Psycho-Theological Paradigms in Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Kochi: Chavara Central Secretariat & Bangalore; Dharmaram Publications, 2019, xx.

<sup>39</sup> Shanthi Rose, "Kuriakose Elias Chavara: *A Bes Rowma*," 113.

with Jesus for the salvation of others. When one accepts suffering with this vision, it becomes an experience of love.<sup>40</sup> "It is not a question of the person having so many extraordinary experiences of God, but being able to convert every little experience of life into a God-experience. This contemplative character of the person is proved beyond doubt in the face of painful experiences, as it happened in the case of Chavara."<sup>41</sup> He could do it because of his deep God experience and he accepted everything from God with a faith vision.

At a young age in his priestly career, he was affected by rheumatic fever, that was a constant companion of his life till his death. Moreover, during his life time he had to undergo numerous physical illnesses and sufferings. In all his sufferings, bodily as well as mental, emotional, or intellectual, he could recognize the will of God and he submitted himself to it. "He bore his sufferings with manly courage and attitude of a spiritual man. Hence his sufferings and problems are seen today as precious treasures of gold. The grain of wheat falling to the ground has to die to produce a harvest."<sup>42</sup> More than the bodily pains what could have affected him most were his mental sufferings. For example, his loving parents stood in the way of his divine call in the beginning, his parents and the only brother died due to the epidemic in the region, the family itself became an orphan by the death of his parents and brother, etc. In this context, his uncles concerned about the family's lineage, took him back from the seminary and strongly advised him to give up priestly studies and take charge of home affairs. At this crisis situation, he turned to the all sufficing God and we find him on knees before the blessed sacrament with full trust in the divine providence and he held on to his motto: "The Lord is my chosen portion" (Ps 16:5) which he had taken as he received tonsure in 1818 from the then Bishop Peter Alcantra of Varapuzha. It implied his detachment from all that is not God. This was the guiding force all throughout his life and it is to be seen as a key to his whole life. Thereby he decided to follow the Lord, accepting the sorrows submitting to the will of God and dedicating repeatedly to the Mother of God.

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<sup>40</sup> Thomas Panthaplackal, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara: Great Soul of India*, 19.

<sup>41</sup> Thomas Kochumuttom, "A contemplative in Action," 136-137.

<sup>42</sup> Dais Maria, "If the Grain of Wheat Falling to the Ground Dies..." Elizabeth William & George Zachariah, Editors, *The Legacy of St. Chavara*, Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2014, 111.

Chavara had a very humiliating experience from his own parishioners and parish priest, when the traditional official entry to the church after receiving the tonsure was denied due to certain misunderstanding. This was a customary practice of the seminarian visiting home and the home parish - and a solemn reception, in his case, the parish of Chennankari. The parish priest, members of the parish council and the parishioners welcome the seminarian in the parish and thereafter grand celebration hosted by the family of the seminarian. But instead of giving him a warm welcome he was refused entry into the parish church. The probable reason behind this rejection was that he went to the seminary without the knowledge and permission of the parish council. The existing custom was that the parish council takes the decision and inform the *Malpan* in charge of the seminary. One who wishes to join the seminary should get the *desakuri*<sup>43</sup> or formal approval from the parish *Yogam*. But in the case of Chavara, he was directly recruited to the seminary by Fr Palackal and he forgot to inform this in the parish. All these happened unintentionally, but the parishioners were not happy with it. Chavara was ignorant of it and it was a self-emptying and humiliating experience for him. Those who follow Christ have to face sufferings, humiliations, trials and tribulations (Sirach 2:5). All glory comes from these troublesome experiences.

The relatives were very much angry on the incident, but Brother Kuriakose being a man of God, pacified them and took them to the Holy Cross church at Alappuzha where the ceremony was conducted. Afterwards instead of keeping any grudge towards them he, by his own initiative visited the parish priest of Chennankari, stayed with him and had meals with him. Later on he donated to this parish church a beautiful statue of St Joseph, which he received as a gift from Europe.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> The recommendation of the *yogam* or the parish assembly of the local representatives and the local clergy. Usually, it is the parish assembly that selects the candidate for the priesthood and they had also certain responsibilities during the period of training in the seminary, e.g., to meet the expenses of his studies. But in the case of Kuriakose it was met by Fr Palackal. The candidate also had certain rights, i.e., to get a share of the *pasaram*, after he had received the sacred orders. Kuriakose had difficulties to get this share may be because he was not promoted by the parish *yogam*. See Mathias Mundadan, Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara, 54.

<sup>44</sup> Thomas Kochumuttom, "Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara: A Man of God's Thoughts," *Herald of the East: Dharmaram Journal of Chavara Studies*, Vol. 10, 1 (2014) 49-50.

More than that he decided to go to that parish for the parish feast every year and deliver the sermon and he fulfilled it until his death. In his life he never mentioned about this rejection experience. Moreover, he considered the parishioners as his own people, and addressed his parting message called 'Testament of a Loving Father' to the members of Kainakary parish, which was originally part of Chennankari.<sup>45</sup>

Another incident was at the time of his ordination which was decided to take place sometime around the feast of the Holy Cross on 14 September 1829. Deacon Chavara and other deacons of the vicariate with their *Malpans* arrived at Varapuzha for the ceremony. But displeased with the quarrel between the *Anjoottikkar* (Five-hundreds) and *Ehzunoottikkar* (Seven-hundreds) Bishop Mauritius Stabilini, cancelled all the programmes and decided to return to Rome. So the ordination was cancelled. One can easily understand the mental and spiritual agony he had undergone during this period. Later the ordination was conducted on 29 November 1829 in Arthunkal parish.<sup>46</sup> He might have had so much distress on this occasion of the indefinite postponement of his ordination for which he had come from a distant place with all the preparations. But there was no indication of any complaint from his part. All of them cooperated with their *Malpans* wholeheartedly and pacified the prelate and resolved the crisis in an edifying manner.

## 5.2. A Man of Humility and Detachment

Chavara was a man of many eminent qualities both inborn and cultivated, of both mind and heart. Being born in a noble family of exemplary parents he inherited so many natural virtues like goodness, piety, righteousness, uprightness, integrity, honesty, probity, decency, etc. As Fr Kuriakose Porukara commented, Chavara from his childhood onwards excelled in humility, pleasing manners, modesty, piety, intelligence and eloquence and he was loved by both God and people.<sup>47</sup> He was a shining example of the virtue of humility, which is not a discounting of reality but a confession that all glory and honour are due only to God Almighty. In order to be conformed to Christ who emptied himself (Phil 2:5-8), and became poor for our sake (2 Cor 8:9), and identified himself with the suffering humankind, one should live a life

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<sup>45</sup> Thomas Kochumuttom, "Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara: A Man of God's Thoughts," 50.

<sup>46</sup> Thomas Kochumuttom, "Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara: A Man of God's Thoughts," 51.

<sup>47</sup> Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 449.



of humility.<sup>48</sup> As part of the self-emptying he has taken humility as the fourth vow and he dedicated himself to God as an *agathi*<sup>49</sup> and he was determined that there should not be anyone more humble than himself. His confessor and spiritual director Fr Leopold says: "It is more proper to say about Fr Chavara that he did these virtuous things more by his sanctity and good example than by his advice and authority. He commanded the obedience and respect others by himself being humble, charitable and obedient to his superiors."<sup>50</sup>

Chavara was never influenced by any worldly attractions of praise, prestige, position, name and fame. He was a man of profound humility, assuming always a low profile, self-effacing and never showy or presumptuous. He never sought for any position or dignity in the Church and in the congregation. He adhered to this all throughout his life.<sup>51</sup> Fr Leopold who had high appreciation for his God-fearing habits, detachment from the world, and the spirit of service, said: "He was detached from all disorderly affections for earthly things and persons, which was all the more true in the last days of his life."<sup>52</sup> According to Chavara, asceticism was a means to get closer to God. Through penance and sacrifice he tried to attain a complete obliteration of self-centredness and freedom to serve only the Divine Master. "This was his life style – a life of detachment, freeing the soul from everything that could come between itself and God, a life style contrary to the modern way of total self-centredness."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Thomas Kadankavil, *Chavara: A Multidimensional Saint*, Kottayam: Deepika Book House, 201.

<sup>49</sup> It literally means 'having no means to live.' The religious vow of poverty means to have no possessions of one's own so that for anything and everything one depends on God's providence and the people's charity. That is to renounce freely the right of private property and surrender the right of ownership of all things of monetary value. Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 139.

<sup>50</sup> Valerian Plathottam, *The First Indian Saint: Blessed Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Revised New Edition, Mannanam: Sanjos Books, 43.

<sup>51</sup> Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 464-465.

<sup>52</sup> Leopold Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, translated from Malayalam and re-printed by the Postulation of the Cause of Bl. Chavara, Mannanam: St. Joseph's Monastery, 2003, 8.

<sup>53</sup> Shanthi Rose, "Kuriakose Elias Chavara: A Bes Rowma," 111.

### 5.3. Humiliating Experiences

There were many instances in the life of Chavara illustrating his deep sense and practice of humility. He was one of the three students who were sent to the Latin seminary to study Latin language. But being Syrians they were denied permission to sit in the same class with the Latin Rite students and therefore he was brought back to Pallippuram. It was an incident of disgrace, waste of time and money, and it caused the three students even to forget the Syriac language they had learned. But he gracefully accepted the humiliation, and did not keep any ill feeling towards anybody involved in it. Likewise "he bore with equanimity the rejection at the hands of the people in the press at Kottayam where he went twice to see and learn the workings of a printing press."<sup>54</sup> As we have already noted when he was appointed as the vicar general for the Syrian community of the vicariate of Varapuzha, the archbishop had to order him under obedience that he would accept the position. It was indeed the highest position a Syrian of that time could achieve. Thus he became the first among the Syrians to be officially in the church's administration, in those troubled days of Roccas schism and he did his duties perfectly well to the satisfaction of all including the Holy See; and even Pope Pius X sent a personal letter of appreciation to him. However, it is surprising to note that he never mentions or signs any of the documents with the title of vicar general.<sup>55</sup>

Another occasion of proving his humility was the practice of obedience as a sure means of discerning the will of God as well as the only mark of consecrated life. In his testament he states: "The significant mark of a true religious is total negation of their self-will and perfect obedience as though he had no eyes nor ears of his own. One who possesses such virtue is a true religious."<sup>56</sup> Chavara and all the founding fathers practised this kind of obedience and according to them "an order from the local ordinary is God's will, which, therefore, should unconditionally be obeyed." He narrated some of the events that hurt his feelings when he was humiliated by the authorities. Monsgr. Francis Xavier, the successor of Bishop Aurelius, was not in favour of the activities of the three fathers and the plan of religious community

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<sup>54</sup> Thomas Kochumuttom, "A Contemplative in Action," 137.

<sup>55</sup> Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 222.

<sup>56</sup> *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara, Vol. IV, The Letters*, Rev. Lucas Vithuvattical CMI & Chev. K.C. Chacko, eds., Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Bl. Chavara, 1990, 70.

because he was misled by some of the priests. The Bishop assigned them with new responsibilities that really affected their future plans.<sup>57</sup> Chavara was transferred from Mannanam to Pallipuram during the construction of the monastery at Mannanam and Fr Porukara, the backbone of the whole project was transferred to Kayamkulam as the parish priest. It was a great blow to their future plans. Chavara approached the archbishop and humbly explained the matter and begged to reconsider the order of transfer, but the archbishop was not willing to accept. Then he obeyed it without any hesitation.<sup>58</sup> "To submit without a word of protest to the will of God, how much Fr Chavara must have suffered, how much sacrifice he must have made!"<sup>59</sup> For him it was sure that often the will of God is given through human agents and he was confident that he belonged to the Lord and that he was only an instrument in the hands of the Lord to execute it. He trusted in the Lord and the Lord offered his servant an opportune time to continue the work.<sup>60</sup>

Once when the archbishop reproached him severely for no fault of his own; he did not protest, but graciously accepted the accusation as a paternal correction and was grateful to the prelate for not punishing him. Likewise there were many incidents which thoroughly tested and proved the spirit of obedience and humility of Chavara and the founding fathers. They had to wait patiently almost 25 years for the canonical approval of the congregation. After the formation of the Mannanam community, although it had all the requirements of the canonical approval, they had to wait long indefinitely for the approval without any apparent reason.

It was not an easy task and it was a hard time of stress and strain for Chavara. "On several occasions and in several ways he requested the bishops for it [canonical approval]".<sup>61</sup> In 1850 according to the direction of Archbishop Martini he submitted to him a petition but there was no

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<sup>57</sup> Jose Eroorickal, *Mystical Missionary Spirituality of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 177.

<sup>58</sup> Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 223-224.

<sup>59</sup> Dais Maria, "If the Grain of Wheat Falling to the Ground Dies..." 110.

<sup>60</sup> George Kaniarakath, "'The Lord is My Portion' (Ps 119:57): A Key to the Spirituality of Bl. Chavara," *The Lord of Heaven and Earth: Chavara Studies in Honour of Fr. Lucas Vithuvattickal CMI*, Paul Kalluveetil & Paulachan Kochappilly, eds., Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2004, 256.

<sup>61</sup> Leopold Beccaro of St. Joseph, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 8f.

response. Again in 1855, Chavara presented to Archbishop Bernardine the rule of life practised in Mannanam. Instead of giving them approval the archbishop imposed on the community the Carmelite rule without much change. The way of life and spirituality they had spontaneously developed were ignored. Chavara presented to the archbishop their observations and request for adaptations of rules to their reasonable needs and honoured traditions but he mercilessly refused everything. As a mediator between the community and the archbishop, Chavara had to suffer a lot. All the proposals were rejected, he was humiliated and questioned by the archbishop. It was a self-emptying experience for him. The Congregation had to put on a habit that was not originally designed for them.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, by affiliating the Congregation to the Carmelite Order, as their Third Order, the Prior, Chavara, lost his authority. When the Congregation juridically came under the Superior General of the Discalced Carmelites, even the founders of the Congregation lost their identity, privileges, and autonomy. The Superior General of the first Order became the legitimate authority who governed the Congregation through his delegate. Many of the members of his religious family were quite unhappy about this change of authority. However, Chavara as a man of sanctity and humility, accepted it as coming from the hands of God.<sup>63</sup> All of them tolerated, forgave and cooperated with the authority. Chavara could see the divine providence in all these, and he stated it in his Testament: "Dear children, due to the special grace of God we have been called as Carmelites, the most dear to the Mother of God. But we are most certainly convinced that this has been not according to the counsel of men but according to the counsel of God."<sup>64</sup> The archbishop refused to mitigate and adapt the rule to the local conditions and needs and the honoured Syrian traditions and the founders' ideals. For some of them the proposed rules and regulations were too hard and many of the members opted out without making profession of religious vows. Although Chavara informed the archbishop about this unfortunate development, his response was rather disgusting: "Only those of good will and determination need to be admitted. Don't worry about the

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<sup>62</sup> Thomas Kochumuttom, "Blessed Chavara: A Man in God's Hands and Moved by God," 78-79.

<sup>63</sup> Jossy Veliyan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara: The Founder of the Women TOCD*, 206-207.

<sup>64</sup> *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara*, Vol. IV, *The Letters*, 99.

dropouts. I shall pray for the remaining few!"<sup>65</sup> The withdrawal of 11 candidates at final stage from making the profession of religious vows, the affiliation of the Congregation as the Third Order of the Carmelites Discalced, the humiliations and the insults at the hands of the supporters of Bishop Roccas, his transfer from Mannanam to Koonammavu where he had been about 35 years, the occasions when his close associate and spiritual director Fr Leopold apparently disregarded him were distressing experiences for Chavara.<sup>66</sup>

#### 5.4. Kenotic Personality

The exemplary life of Chavara was indeed a model for everyone. He was magnanimous to count others greater than himself. He had great reverence and love towards Fr Leopold, and sought his suggestions in matters he was not clear. As already mentioned, the life and spirituality of Chavara could be summarized in the biblical verse, "The Lord is my chosen portion" (Ps 16:5; Ps 119:57). As his name signifies, when he declared the Lord to be his portion, it meant a radical and close following of Jesus (Mk 10:28; 1:8; Lk 5: 11). Moreover, it is becoming like Jesus always seeking the will of the Father. He states, "Oh my God! You are my love, my joy, and all my fortune. If not in you, how could I live my life? You are my breath, my food and my drink. What a solace have I in You!"<sup>67</sup> It is a full and complete abandonment of oneself to the Lord in faith and trust. It is to love the Lord for his sake alone, that is to say, a genuine and disinterested love and commitment. Such a person is neither attracted to any rewards nor detracted by pains. It is the creator himself the guarantor and sustainer of those possessed by him.<sup>68</sup> It is a new orientation in life, a reversal of the accepted values by denying one's self to have life, those who desire to be first will be the servant of all; and the meek will inherit the land. The Lord has brought down the powerful and lifted up the lowly (Lk 1:52). Thereby the Lord becomes one's portion forever. It is a turning towards Jesus to the point of denying one's being and having, everybody and everything, in short whatever

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<sup>65</sup> Valerian Plathottam, *The First Indian Saint: Blessed Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 18.

<sup>66</sup> Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 224.

<sup>67</sup> *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara*, Vol. II, *Atmanuthapam* (Malayalam), translated by Mary Leo, *Compunction of the Soul*, Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Bl. Chavara, 1989, 2:141-146.

<sup>68</sup> George Kaniarakath, "'The Lord is My Portion' (Ps 119:57): A Key to the Spirituality of Bl. Chavara," 252.

possessions one has on the earth.<sup>69</sup> He/she is filled with gratitude towards God and for such a person as Saint Teresa proclaims God alone suffices. As Jesus the Son of God 'who emptied himself and took the form of a slave (Phil 2:7) and humbled himself, becoming obedient even to death,' death on the cross' (Phil 2:8), Chavara was always ready to come down to the level of a servant to fulfil the mission entrusted to him following the footsteps of Jesus.

When Chavara stated the Lord as his portion it was very much significant in his life, as he lost everyone dear to him very early in his life. As it is written "I have come to do your will" (Heb 10:9), from his childhood he was always enthusiastic to fulfil the will of God. His whole life and mission revolved around this guiding principle. He was a man of manifold activities like spiritual guidance of the people entrusted to his care, administration of temporalities, administration of the Church and the Congregation, new foundations of monasteries, etc. But all these flowed from the sensibility and sensitivity, "The Lord is my portion", nothing else really counted. It meant a total and radical detachment from everything that does not pertain to God and total attachment to the love of God. The Lord as his portion, he could declare confidently at the end of his life that he never lost his original sanctity.

Fr Leopold had always the spirit of arrogance and superiority complex, which is characteristic of the missionaries of that time, sometimes failed to give due respect and recognition to Chavara. A lucid example of it can be noticed in delaying the admission of Sr Clara, a Syrian candidate. Chavara knew her well for years, had already tested, interviewed and approved her willingness and readiness to join the community to be inaugurated and at his decision she had arrived in Koonammavu well-prepared with all the required things on 11 February to join the new community. But Fr Leopold, only because of the fact that he had not personally tested and interviewed her, refused to admit her in the same day along with others. Then after testing and interviewing her personally, Fr Leopold admitted her only on 14 February. He could have trusted and respected the wisdom, experience and holiness of Chavara. This caused great 'sorrow and disturbance' not only to Sr Clara and her people but also to Chavara himself.<sup>70</sup> For him it was an

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<sup>69</sup>George Kaniarakath, "'The Lord is My Portion' (Ps 119:57): A Key to the Spirituality of Bl. Chavara," 257-258.

<sup>70</sup>Thomas Kochumuttom, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 328. See also *The Chronicles of Koonammavu Convent*, Volumes I & II, 26.

experience of humiliation and even a public insult. "But he and all those who were under his guidance kept 'holding firmly on to obedience', in a spirit of faith."<sup>71</sup> He accepted it without any complaint and in a spirit of dignified obedience.

## **6. Conclusion**

Following the path of *kenosis* is surely not an easy task, but the life of Chavara shows that it is possible and that will be life giving both for oneself and for others. It calls for greater intimacy and identification with the Lord, *kenosis par excellence*, which is the goal of all discipleship. The mission of the Church is evangelization and in fulfilling it our focus shall be the Lord, never ourselves. Our mission is to witness to the love of God among the whole human family. The life, spirituality, ministry and other significant contributions of Chavara enabled the Syro-Malabar Church to keep up her own apostolic faith and traditions, and to renew her life according to the signs of the times. However, today, when the Syro-Malabar Church traverses through a critical period of troubles and tribulations and is in need of renewal, an overview of his life, spirituality, insightful teachings and contributions are very much relevant since the Saint was a strong pillar and mirror who initiated and guided the formative period of the Malabar Church in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a crucial time in her quest to regain her identity and autonomy, while keeping intact the unity of the Universal Church. He was a faithful and Spirit-filled son of the Malabar Church who emptied himself in order to make him available for others.

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<sup>71</sup>Thomas Kochumuttom, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 328.