

Editorial

**SAINT KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA
HOLINESS OF LIFE**

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Editor-in-Chief

Life is a gift created by God, and the holiness of life is grounded in the truth that human life belongs to God. “God *created* humankind in his image and in the image of God he *created* them male and female he *created* them” (Gen 1:27). The poetic repetition of the word *created* three times highlights and emphasizes the intention. God willed human life, it is purposeful, and it has inherent dignity as it reflects God, the giver and owner of life (Deut 32:39). Life is holy as it is created, set apart and sustained by God and oriented toward Him. The image of God is expressed and celebrated in relationship. Just as God exists in relational fullness, human beings reflect God through communion, community and mutual love and charity; affirming the equality of dignity and at the same time acknowledging distinction. The fullness of the image or perfect image is revealed in Jesus Christ, for “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation” (Col 1:15). The humanity finds its true form in conformity to Christ (Rom 8:29).

Kuriakose Elias Chavara was convinced of the truth that every person bears God’s image. The conviction drove him to commit himself for the cause and concern for the poor, education of all, especially the less privileged and the marginalized of the society of his time, and several pioneering and frontier ministries for social transformation. Chavara also believed that prayer refines the image of God in human beings, for we find him taking recourse to prayer and fully immersed in it seeking God’s will always and everywhere. Chavara also knew the truth that the eucharist strengthens, deepens and nourishes the image, and charity reveals the image. Kochappilly captures the eucharist-centred life of Kuriakose Elias Chavara and delineates: “Kuriakose breathed in and

breathed out the Eucharistic Lord as his food and drink and tried to impart a mystic and poetic touch to the Christian life, marked by the intimacy with the Lord and the joy of the Gospel.”¹ Chavara promoted family prayer that faith is transmitted, character is formed and the divine image is matured. The intimacy and communion with God in prayer and divine liturgy demands deeds of service to our fellow human beings as well, because as pope Benedict XVI says “when we pray properly we undergo a process of inner purification which opens us up to God and thus to our fellow human beings as well” (SS 33).²

Chavara urged everyone to live the gift of life with reverence, gratitude and communion with God, consecrating, celebrating and offering it to God through prayer and worship and thus growing in the holiness of life. Chavara shares his experience in a poetic form:

Nourishing his soul, he was tutored in paths
Of virtue; to assist at the Holy Qurbana
Gently taught to tread the ways of holiness;
To shun all evils that’d retard his onward march.³

Later with a deep personal divine experience, Chavara addressed the members of the newly founded community:

Beloved brethren, this humble community of ours is not founded by humans but by God Himself. He has founded it miraculously; you are all witnesses to the truth that God has nurtured and brought it up. Hence, persecution by humans rejection or obstructions by creatures cannot destroy it. But one thing can annihilate it, that is, if we forget the meaning of our call, forsake the responsibilities of our religious life and fail in humility, obedience, charity, religious discipline and genuine devotion and are satisfied with appreciating them in words and not in deeds.⁴

¹ Paulachan Kochappilly, “Kuriakose Elias Chavara: A Pastor with the Sense of Mystery and the Experience of the Divine,” in Naiju Jose Kalambukattu, ed., *Kuriakose Elias Chavara: Pastoral Perceptions and Catechetical Initiatives*, Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications & Kochi: Chavara Central Secretariat, 2025, 56.

² Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Spe Salvi* Saved by Hope, Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2007.

³ Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Compunction of the Soul*, I, 137-140, trans. Mary Leo, Mannanam: Committee for the Cause of Blessed Chavara, 1989.

⁴ Kuriakose Elias Chavara and Leopold Missionary, “A Circular Letter Addressed to All Members of the Congregation Written on 1 July 1869” quoted from

The present issue of the *Herald of the East* highlights the holiness of life 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 sanctity of life of Chavara for whom holiness of life was not an abstract concept but active, concrete way of living and engaging with God and His people, especially the poor, for as Pope Leo XIV affirms, "Love for the Lord, then, is one with love for the poor" (DT 5).⁵ Hence Chavara never retreated from reality's harsh truth, but faced them engaging with actual suffering and concrete problems of the people in the society. Thus, weaving together prayer and action, contemplation and action or the engagement with the harsh realities of life, personal and communitarian growth in perfection, Chavara reached the zenith of sanctity or holiness of life. He could boldly yet humbly confess: "I feel that by the grace of God, the sanctifying grace I received in the holy baptism has never been lost to me at any time."⁶ As his baptismal name 'Kuriakose' denotes, he always belonged to the Lord.

Jisi Maria CMC in her article explores the close connection between pope Leo XIV's Apostolic Exhortation *Dilexi Te* and the life and mission of Chavara, and affirms that true Christian discipleship is realized through compassion and solidarity with the poor. Jisi Maria highlights Chavara's pioneering efforts in education, social justice, women empowerment, and service to the marginalized in the socio-religious context of the 19th century in Kerala. Through initiatives such as free schools, charitable associations, and the founding of the religious congregations, he transformed faith into action. According to Jisi Maria, Chavara's life stands as a witness to *Dilexi Te*'s call to embody Christ's love and mercy through concrete acts of compassion and justice.

Biju Karukappallil CMI in his paper titled "Saint Chavara as New Moses: The Longing to See God in *Atmanutapam* and the Fulfilment of the Desire of Moses" examines the theme of 'longing to behold God', drawing from Moses' plea in Exodus 33 and its fulfilment in the Transfiguration. It draws parallels with Chavara's poem *Atmanutapam*,

Complete Works of Kuriakose Elias Chavara, Letters, Vol. IV, trans. Augustine Keemattam, Kochi: Chavara Central Secretariat, 2000, 102.

⁵ Pope Leo XIV Apostolic Exhortation *Dilexi Te*. https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/apost_exhortations/documents/20251004-dilexi-te.html; accessed on 17.02.2026.

⁶ *The Chronicles of Koonammavu Convent*, Vol. II, 13.

highlighting how this longing is satisfied through the Incarnation, compunction, and contemplative prayer. According to Karukappallil, *Atmanutapam* took forward the prayer of Moses within the context of 18th century Kerala Church. In perceiving Christ as Incarnate Mercy, Chavara attained what Moses sought, extending an invitation to all generations and to all of us to ascend a renewed Tabor and encounter divine compassion. In the paper, Chavara is presented as a new Moses, leading the Indian Church and consequentially the universal Church toward a deeper encounter with Christ's mercy.

Pradeepa Kulangara CMC in her article expounds the spiritual discernment in the life and writings of Chavara. Rooted in the Christian tradition and enriched by the insights from the Scripture and the mystics, discernment is presented as both a divine gift and a personal responsibility – an inner movement that leads to knowing and doing God's will. Pradeepa highlights how Chavara's capacity for personal and communal discernment enabled him to respond wisely to ecclesial crises, such as the Roccas Schism, and to foster renewal within the Church. In an age marked by confusion and superficiality, his life stands as a luminous model of true discernment that flows from a heart attuned to God's will and animated by love, humility, and fidelity to the Spirit.

Jose Kuriedath CMI's article is an investigation into the unique nature of Chavara's social apostate and the vision behind his several initiatives in this area. With the available evidence, Kuriedath makes an effort to examine its strength and weakness from theological and sociological point of view. The multi-faceted personality of Chavara is examined to see how his social vision and mission were shaped by his personality, and the author analyses how the spiritual power became an effective source and instrument to motivate Chavara and his colleagues to involve themselves in the society of the 19th century and bring about transformation in various fields.

Kochurani Joseph explores the concept of family as the basic unit in the Church and the society. She observes the challenges of the modern families, and hence the need of proper orientation and pastoral care. The article is based on the Chavara-lecture given in DVK, Bengaluru in 2018. The first part focuses on the changes occurred in Indian family culture due to globalization and migration. The second part deals with the insights from the *Chavarul* and other papal teachings on family. The third part analyses the impact of the changing role of women from homemakers to bread-winners. Kochurani affirms that the family has to grow into a school of life, sanctity and communion.

Joy Philip Kakkanattu CMI launches a series of short write-up on Chavara's biblical musings, for anyone who engages with the writings of Chavara discerns his profound reliance on the Bible as the wellspring of his thoughts. Whether in poetry or prose, his works are richly imbued with biblical citations, allusions, metaphorical comparisons, intertextual echoes, etc. Kakkanattu goes through the works of Chavara to identify the manifold ways of employing biblical images and insights, and he begins with the *Compunction of the Soul*.

Chavara, whose life was an excellent commentary of the Scripture and compelling and convincing testimony of love for the Lord and love for the people, challenges the readers "to rekindle the gift of God" (2 Tim 1:6) and strive for the holiness of life.