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The Liturgical Contributions of Blessed Chavara

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The Liturgical Contributions of Blessed Chavara

Rev. Dr. Antony Vallavanthara CMI
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The Malabar Church is immensely indebted to Blessed Chavara for the promotion and preservation of its ancient liturgical traditions. The work of Blessed Chavara for the renewal of the Malabar Liturgy in the 19th century is a great landmark in the history of the Malabar as well as of the East Syrian Liturgy. But unfortunately, there is a mass of ignorance among the specialists of Malabar liturgy and among the general public about the liturgical contributions of Blessed Chavara. In recent past, certain people who pretend or profess that they are the prophets and promoters genuine Malabar and East Syrian traditions, seem to present Blessed Chavara as some one who never had any love for the traditions of his own Church. They tend to equate his liturgical contributions solely to the introduction of certain rites and rituals which he borrowed from the Roman liturgical traditions. On that score, they consider him or rather brand him as a promotor of romanization of the Malabar Liturgy in the last century. What we can detect at the root of this negative evaluation, is nothing but sheer ignorance of the facts of history and lack of acquaintance with the genuine historical documents related to Blessed Chavara's work for the renewal of the Malabar liturgy and his visions and dreams regarding the development and future of the Malabar Church. It is quite regrettable that the Malabar Church has not yet realized the value of the liturgical contributions of this great genius of all centuries. This article attempts to present two very important liturgical contributions of Blessed Chavara that will throw much light on the liturgical genius of Blessed Chavara and the greatness of his work for the renewal of the liturgy in the Malabar Church in the 19th century.

Blessed Chavara's basic concern was the renewal of the Malabar Church and the transformation of the society. That is what made him to launch many of his projects that he realized, like the founding the congregations, starting the schools or establishing the printing press. He very well realized that the renewal of the liturgy is the first step towards the spiritual renewal of the Malabar Church. Hence, when he was made the Vicar General of the Syrians (St. Thomas Christians) in the second half of the 19th century, he initiated a series of efforts for liturgical renewal. In all the liturgical renewal efforts, as Dr. Lucas Vithuvattickal CMI points out, the basic concern of Blessed Chavara was that "the liturgical celebration be made with decorum and solemnity so that it generates true devotion in the participants." Proper celebration and proper participation in the liturgical celebrations were the twin motives that prompted the renewal efforts of Blessed Chavara.

Proper liturgical rites and proper liturgical books were the basic needs for such a renewal of liturgy. Hence his attention was turned first to them. In this work he had to define the rites and prescribe texts for all liturgical functions. His work was in two lines. For the liturgical rites for which printed liturgical books existed, he prescribed and prepared the rubrics. For example the proper text for the Eucharistic celebration was already established and was available in the 1844 edition of the Missal. What was needed



for the proper celebration "with decorum, solemnity" and "unity in celebration" was the rubrics and instructions. To meet this need he prepared the Thukasa, the book of rubrics and instructions for the celebration of the Eucharistic. On the other hand, where liturgical books and rites were lacking, Blessed Chavara prepared them anew and prescribed proper rubrics for them. In this work he had followed two directions.

The first direction was one of restoration. Being a true son of the Syro-Malabar Church in love with its ancient traditions, the first step he took was of restoring the liturgical books according to the ancient traditions. That made him to launch the great project of the restoration and reorganization of the Malabar Breviary and the Office of the Dead.

The second direction was one of complementing. For example, the Malabar lectionary was already romanized and was fixed with the lectionary of 1775 and the Missal of 1844. Though well established, still it had many lacunae. Reading were lacking for certain feasts and other occasions introduced from the Roman tradition for which readings were not given in the missal. Blessed Chavara attempted to complement or fill in this lacunae by borrowing the readings from the Roman lectionary and prepared a complementary lectionary. A similar position complementing by borrowing texts or rites from the Roman tradition when certain rites or texts were lacking in the Malabar and East Syrian traditions. We have the examples of the office of our Lady, Rites for the Holy Saturday, the rites for the forty Hours Adoration which he introduced into the Malabar Liturgy by translating them into Syriac.

We find Blessed Chavara taking a third direction which in fact is a combining of the first two directions of restoring and complementing. The liturgical calendar was such an attempt. Influenced perhaps by the roman calendar and following its model he established the calendar integrating Anno Domini and the Malayalam Era on the one side and presenting side by side both the romanized Malabar Liturgical Year and the East Syrian Liturgical Year as it was lived in Malabar. Perhaps the way he realized restoration and complementing was through juxtaposition or preserving them side by side.

Here he was faced with two realities. On the one hand, we find his love for the ancient tradition and at the same time, he had to accept the actual existing reality of established romanised Missal and Lectionary. His love for the tradition prompted him to reorganize the breviary according to the ancient Malabar traditions and thereby restore the ancient liturgical year. However, he could not but accept the existing romanized liturgical year and feastal system established through Missal and Lectionary. Hence he has taken a position of restoring and complementing by juxtaposition. One is prone to think of the validity and rationale of Blessed Chavara's approach. We shall discuss it at the end of this article. Here let us learn more details about his actual work and contributions.

The Liturgical Works of Blessed Chavara

Blessed Chavara had taken utmost care for the proper preparation of the liturgical



structural ortion it follows the ancient East Syrian tradition. However, in its organization of the commemorations we find the influence of the romanization that began in the Synod of Diamper and culminated in the two editions of the Thakasa in 1774 and 1844 and the Lectionary of 1775.

The volume consists of three sections, the first section contains the Psalms and the hymns of Moses. The second section contains the order of the different offices Ramsa, Suvaya, Lelya, Sapra and Kuthaya with the common for the Sundays and week days with the variations of the pair and impair weeks. The fourth section is the Hudra part of the volume and contains the prayers for the Sundays, Feasts and Commemorations and the ordinary days that come within it.

The following are the three sections of the book.

Section 1.

Pages 1-249	The Psalter: 150 Pslams and the Hymns of Moses
Pages 259-252	Prayers before the Canonical Offices

Section 2. The Common of the different Offices

Pages 253-276	Office of Ramsa
Pages 276-282	Office of Suvaa
Pages 282-309	Office of Lelya
Pages 310-331	Office of Sapra
Pages 332-338	Office of Quthaya

Section 3 Ordinary for the seven days of the week

Sundays

Pages 348-365	Lelya of Sunday
Pages 365-372	Qala d'Sahara
Pages 373-384	Sapra of Sundays

Mondays of the Weeks

Pages 385-389	Ramsa of Mondays of the Pair week
Pages 390-398	Ramsa of Mondays of the Impair week
Pages 398-407	Lelya of Mondays
Pages 407-412	Sapra of Mondays

Tuesdays of the Week



Pages 413-417	Ramsa of Tuesdays of the Pair week
Pages 417-425	Ramsa of Tuesdays of the Impair week
Pages 425-434	Lelya of Tuesdays
Pages 434-439	Sapra of Tuesdays

Wednesdays of the Weeks

Pages 440-448	Ramsa of Wednesdays of the Pair week
Pages 448-459	Lelya of Wednesdays of the Pair week
Pages 459-463	Sapra of Wednesdays
Pages 463-467	Ramsa of Wednesday of impair week
Pages 467-475	Lelya of Wednesday of the Impair week

Thursdays of the Week

Pages 475-479	Ramsa of Thursdays of Pair Weeks
Pages 479-487	Ramsa of Thursdays of Impair Week
Pages 487-899	Lelya of Thursdays
Pages 499-503	Sapra of Thursdays

Fridays of the Pair Week

Pages 503-506	Ramsa of Fridays of Pair Week
Pages 506-509	Ramsa of Friadays of the middle week
Pages 509-517	Ramsa of the Fridays of the Imprair week
Pages 517-526	Lelya of Firdays
Pages 526-531	Sapra of Fridays

Saturdays of the Week

Pages 531-534	Ramsa of Saturdays of the Pair Week
Pages 535-541	Ramsa of Saturdays of the Imprair Week
Pages 541-550	Lelya of Saturdays
Pages 550-554	Sapra of Saturdays

Section 4: Choices for the Commemorations

Pages 554-558	Commemoration of many martyrs
Pages 558-559	Commemoration of one martyr
Pages 559-559	Commemoration of Virgin and Martyr

Commemoration in the month of January

Pages 563-565	January 13: Marios, Martha and Audipas
Pages 565-566	January 23: St. Emaranthina, Virgin and Martyr
Pages 566-568	January 26: St. Agnes



Commemoration in the month of January

Pages 568-569	February 3: St. Bailius, Bishop and Martyr
Pages 569-571	February 6: Dorethea, Martyr and Virgin
Pages 571-572	February 8: Apolonaia, Virgin and Martyr
Pages 572-573	February 14: St. Valentine, Martyr
Pages 573-574	February 15 Faustine and Jolita, Martyrs
Pages 574-575	February 18: Simeon Bishop and Martyr
Pages 576	Suraye Dilanaya: Suraye of choice

Section 5. Hudra

Payers according to the Liturgical Periods
Those of the Times (Dilanaye d'Sauna)
(577-936)

There is no subtitle for the periods of the Liturgical Year as “of the Period of Annunciation”, or “of the Period of Nativity” or “of the period of Epiphany”. In this section. Simply the first Sunday of Annunciation is given followed by the second etc. But for the facility of distinguishing we have given these subheadings

Period of Annunciation (Suvara)

Pages 577-585	First Sunday of Annunciation Ramsa p.577 Lelya p.579 Qala d'Sahara p.583 Sapra p.584
Pages 585-597	The first Week of Annunciation Monday of the Pair week p.585 Tuesday of the Pair week p.588 All the Wednesdays the ordinary is celebrated Thursday of the Pair Week p.590 Friday of the Pair Week p.592 Friday of the Middle Week p.593 Friday of the Impair week p.584 Saturday of the Pair week p. 586
pages 597-603	Second Sunday of Annunciation
Pages 603-610	Impair week of Annunciation Monday of the Imprair week p.603 Tuesday of the Impair week p.505 Wednesday : ordinary of the week Thursday of the Impair week p. 607

	Friday of the Impair is given above p.584
	Saturday of the Impair week
Pages 611-616	Third Sunday of Annunciation Ramsa: p.613 Lelya: p.614 Qala d'Sahara p.615 Sapra p.616
Pages 617-	Wednesday of the Four times Ramsa p.617 Suvaya p.617 Lelya p.619 Qala d'Sahara 621 Quthata
Pages 623-629	Friday of the Rogations
Pages 6126-628	Saturday of the Rogations
Pages 629-635	Fourth Sunday of Annunciation Ramsa p.629 Lelya p: 630 Qala d'Sahara p.634 Sapra p.635
Pages 636	The fast before the Nativity of the Lord Jesus Christ Small office Basaliqe p. 636 Suvaya p.637 Lelya p.638 Qala d'Sahara 641 Sapra 642
Pages 646-695	On the Day of the Feast of the Nativity of the Lord First type with Octave Ramsa: p.646 Lelya p: 655 First Mauthua p.655 Second Mauthua p.659 Third Muathua p.663 Qala d'Sahara676 Sapra 684-695
Pages 695-714	On the day of the feast of St. Stephen the first Martyr Type 2 with Octave Ramsa p.695 Lelya: First Mauthua p.697 Lelya: Second Mauthua p.698 Lelya: Third Mauthua p.699



	Qala d'Sahara p.704 Sapra p.707-714
Pages 715-734 Evangelist	On the day of the Feast of St. John the Apostle and Type 2 with Octave Ramsa p.716 Lelya: First mauthua p.716 Lelya: Second Mauthua p.717 Lelya: Third Mauthua; p.718 Lelya: Madrasa: p: 724 Qala d'Sahara: p.726 Sapra: p.727
Pages 734-751	On the day of the feast of Holy Innocent Children Type 2 with Octave
Pages 752-764 Martyr	On the day of the feast of the St. Thomas Bishop and
Pages 764-772	Small office The Sunday within the Octave of the Nativity of the Lord Ramsa: p.764 Lelya p.765 Qala d'Sahara p.768 Sapra p.770
Pages 771-777	Sunday after the feast of St. Thomas Ramsa: direction p.771 Lelya p.772 Qala d'Sahara p.776 Sapra directions on p.777
Pages 777-793	On the day of the feast of St. Sylester Pope and Confessor
Period of Nativity(Yalda)	
Pages 794-809	Feast of the Circumcision of the Lord and Octave Type 3 Ramsa p.794 Lelya p.795 Qala d'Sahara p.802 Sapra p. 803
Pages 810-815	Octave of the feast of St.Stephen
Pages 815-821	Octave of the feast of John the Apostle
Pages 821-816	Octove of the feast of innocent children
Period of Epiphany Deneha	



pages 826-832	Day before the feast of Deneha Ramsa p.826 Lelya p.828 Qala d'Sahara (type 2) p.830 Sapra p.832
pages 833-856	Feast of Deneha of Our Lord Jesus Christ Ramsa p.833 Lelya: First Mauthua p.835 Lelya Second Mauthua p.836 Lelya Third Muathua p.837 Qala d'Sahara p.842 Sapra p.845-856
pages 856-862	Monday to Saturday of the Octave Second day of the Octave p.856 Third day of the Octave p.860 Fourth, Fifth and Friday p.861 Saturday p.862
Pages 862-868	Sunday within the Octave of Deneha
Pages 868-871	The Octave of Deneha
pages 872-873	Monday of the Pair week
Pages 874-876	Tuesday of the Pair week
Pages 876-877	Thursday of the Pair Week
Pages 877-879	Friday of the Pair week
Pages 879-881	Friday of the Middle week
Pages 881-882	Friday of the Impair week
Pages 882-884	Saturday of the Pair week
Pages 884-889	Second Sunday after Deneha
Pages 889-890	Monday of the impair week
Pages 890-891	Tuesday of the Impair week
Pages 891-892	Thursday of the Impair week
Pages 892-893	Saturday of the Imprair week
pages 894-898	Third Sunday after Deneha
pages 898-903	Fourth Sunday after Deneha
pages 903-907	Fifth Sunday after Deneha
pages 908-912	Sixth Sunday after Deneha
pages 912-921	Monday of the Three days fast
pages 921-924	Tuesday of the Three days fast
pages 924-928	Wednesday of the Three days fast
pages 928-933	Seventh Sunday after Deneha
pages 933-936	Eighth Sunday after Deneha

The Organization of the Offices



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