



The Liturgical Contributions of Blessed Chavara

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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negative evaluation, is nothing but sheer ignorance of the facts of history and lack of acquaintance with the genuine historical documents related to Blessed Chavara's work for the renewal of the Malabar liturgy and his visions and dreams regarding the development and future of the Malabar Church.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. Readings 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



books. Fr. Kuriakose Porukara his successor and the second Prior General of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate, in the Short History of Blessed Chavara, describes his works for the liturgical renewal:

He prepared the divine office for the whole year with great care and wrote out the whole book in his own hand. ... He also wrote the Order of the Syriac Mass and the Liturgical Calendar of the Syro-Malabar Church. With permission they were printed and published in Malabar. Besides these, he organized the rites for the Solemn Mass, Solemn Vespers, Office of the Dead and other rites. He prepared them with great care. Fr. Placid in his writings mentions the four important liturgical contributions of Blessed Chavara: "His work consisted in the organization of the liturgical books, the Rubrics of the Missal, the Breviary, the Office of the Dead and the Calendar." The Chronicle of Mannanam mentions the preparation of the Rituale for the Mass, the Rite of the Holy Saturday, Rites of the Solemn Mass and Solemn Vespers and the Liturgical Calendar. We know today that the following liturgical books were prepared and published under his Blessed Chavara's care: the Thukasa of the Malabar Liturgy, the Lectionary of the Syro-Malabar Church, the Breviary of the Malabar Church, Calendar of the Malabar Church, the Office of the Dead, the Little Office of the Our Lady, the Rites of the Holy Saturday, the Rites of the Celebration of 40 hours adoration and certain Benedictions.

We can distinguish three categories in these liturgical books. Thukasa and the Lectionary belongs to the first category, the Malabar Breviary, the Calendar and the Office of the Dead belong to the second category and the Little Office of Our Lady, the Rites of the Holy Saturday and the Rites of the Celebration of the 40 Hours Adoration belongs to the third category.

Those in the first category were prepared to help the proper celebration of the Eucharistic Liturgy. Here Thukasa is a new creation by Blessed Chavara based on the then understanding of the Eucharistic Liturgy and its celebration, while the lectionary is an adapted borrowing from the Roman tradition and was only meant to complement the existing lectionary in the Missal which was already romanized.

Of the second category, namely, the breviary, the office of the dead and the calendar, the first two belong to the ancient tradition. Blessed Chavara has taken care to restore the ancient tradition by reorganizing and reediting the ancient texts. The celebration of the divine office had gone out of practice in many churches. Where they were still in use were done differently at different places. Hence Blessed Chavara in consultation with Malapans of Malabar, prepared the text based on the manuscripts existing in Malabar at that time. The calendar was never in use in the Malabar Church. Hence this too was a new creation. These three were the most important contributions of Blessed Chavara. Of these we shall only discuss the breviary and calendar in this article.

The third category is a series of translation from Latin and is totally borrowed from the Roman tradition. What prompted Blessed Chavara was a concern for the spiritual renewal of the people of God.



The Thukasa and the Lectionary

When Blessed Chavara went about the liturgical renewal programmes, he realized that the Eucharistic celebration, the lectionary and the calendar were already well fixed, with the Malabar Missal of 1774, the Lectionary of 1775 and the reedition in 1844. All the three were well romanized. Hence he could only accept situation, as the theological milieu where he lived and worked was much different from that of our post Vatican II era. It was the era of Vatican I. Hence he could not touch anything with regard the Missal and lectionary. All that he could do was to complement what was existing and promote the proper celebration of the Eucharist.

With regard to Eucharistic celebration what Blessed Chavara could do was to see to its proper celebration with "decorum and solemnity" and uniformity everywhere. For this purpose he prepared the "Thukasa", the book of rubrics, in 1865. It was first printed in Mannanam in 1868 and later in 1926. This consists of 150 pages and contains the rubrics of the Mass and certain instructions for related to the Eucharistic celebration.

The lectionary that Blessed Chavara prepared was only to complement what was existing. He prepared readings for certain feasts that were introduced after the printing of the Missal in 1774, the Lectionary in 1775 and the reedition in 1844. He prepared the manuscript and sent it to Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith around 1866. Here he only borrowed the reading from the Roman Missal. The whole reading is not written but only the indications to the versicles in the scriptures are given. The manuscript is kept in the Archives of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches.

Borrowed from the Roman Tradition

The three books in the third category, namely the Small Office of Blessed Mary, the Rite of Holy Saturday and the Rites of Forty Hours Adoration, are borrowals from the Roman tradition and are nothing but Syriac translations adapted to the Malabar Church. It was more the pastoral and spiritual need of the community that prompted Blessed Chavara to prepare these texts.

The Small Office of Our Lady.

This consists of 36 folios written in Blessed Chavara's on hand. The rubrics are written in red and the text in black. This is a Syriac translation of Latin text of the Small Office of Our Lady. Here the originality and genius of Blessed Chavara is that he organizes this according to the triple division of the office into Rmasa, Lelya and Sapra in the Malabar and East Sryain traditions. And it is here that he reveals his love for the ancient traditions. This was never printed.

Rites of the Holy Saturday:

In the Malabar tradition as in all the East Syrian traditions, there is no special



ceremony for the Holy Saturday. To meet this need Blessed Chavara himself prepared the ceremony for the Holy Saturday. This is a Syriac translation of the liturgical text and ceremonies of the Roman rite. From the manuscript written in the hand of Blessed Chavara we know that his was a free translation. The text was prepared in 1865 and sent to Rome for approval. The approval was received in 1870, but it was printed only in 1922. We know that a literal translation was prepared and published later in 1934.

Rite of the Forty Hours Adoration

He has introduced the 40 Hours Adoration in the Malabar Church. For the celebration of this rite he has prepared the text and the rites. This again is a borrowing from the western tradition and a translation into Syriac form, Latin to suit the Malabar tradition.

Ritual of Benedictions

Blessed Chavara translated various benedictions from the Latin traditions. The book was printed only after the death of Blessed Chavara.

The Malabar Traditions preserved

Blessed Chavara's most substantial contribution in preserving the Malabar tradition is the organization and publication of the Malabar Breviary, the Malabar Calendar and the Office of the Dead. The most important of all the three is the organization of the breviary. The Malabar calendar is the most important work after the breviary. It is in the preparation of these two that we see the liturgical genius of Blessed Chavara and his great contribution to the preservation of the ancient traditions of the Malabar Church. The work of Blessed Chavara with regard to the organization of the Breviary and the Calendar and its importance is the main object of this study.

The Office of the Dead

Blessed Chavara prepared the Office of the dead, a long one and a short one and the burial services. Burial services are organized according to the different persons: for priests, adult lay people and for children. In organizing this Blessed Chavara has not merely collected the ancient texts, he also edited them making them shorter. The office of the dead was not printed in Blessed Chavara's life time. It was first printed in 1882 by his successor Kuriakose Eliseus Porukara. In the preface of this work Kuriakose Porukara gives this details. "This office consists of the longer office of the dead and the shorter, as it was divided by our Father Respected Kuriakose Elias whose memory resounds in the whole Kerala today." Later different editions were published until the year 1967 when the Office of the Dead was prepared in Malayalam.

The Breviary



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