

UNVEILING THE TESTAMENT OF A LOVING FATHER

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Abstract: St. Chavara had a deep devotion towards the Holy Family and he was known by the name 'Fr. Chavara Kuriakose Elias of the Holy Family'. He considered himself as a little child of God the Father and everyone in this world as his own brothers and sisters. That is why he could break the barriers of caste, colour, race, religion and such other differences and banish many of the evil practices prevalent in the society of his time. He contemplated constantly on the concept of 'Family' and expressed it explicitly in his vision and mission especially in his 'Testament'. This article proffers a short study of the directives given by him to the families and explores his vision on the formation of good Christian families. Chavara, with a tender loving heart of a genuine father wanted to bring up every child born in Christian families in the most excellent manner, giving the best of Christian education and training. 'The Testament' is the first authoritative letter written by an ecclesiastical authority (Vicar General) exclusively for families.

Keywords: Chavara, testament, Christian family, upbringing of children, society, virtues, precepts, Church, literature, encyclicals

1. Introduction

"In every generation wisdom passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God and prophets" (Wis 7:27). Time after time God in His mysterious providence sends great men with special charisms to meet the needs of the Church. The Syro-Malabar Church of 19th century also had a Charismatic leader in the person of St. Chavara. Born on the 10th February 1805 at Kainakary in Kerala, he was a powerful and inspiring social and spiritual force that re-vitalized the Church and society of his time; he is a living flame that enlightens us today, an active inducement that enriches the culture and a stimulating spirit, that renews the manifold spheres of our daily life.

2. The World Today

Today many live in a world of absurdity caused by consumerism and materialism. The paradox of our time is that we are able to travel far and wide, from one continent to another within a few minutes by supersonic airplanes but are not able to make a journey into our own hearts. We are able to reach the moon and Mars but we are not able to reach out to our neighbour next door who is in need of our love. We are able to talk to someone in the farthest corner of the earth with a click of the mouse but we are not able to talk to someone who is next to us.

“We have learnt to fly like the birds of the air, we have learnt to swim like the fish of the sea, but we have not yet learnt the simple art of living together as brothers and sisters as one human community,” says Martin Luther King. Yes, we have conquered the space but not the hearts; we have created robots but not humans. We have more speakers but few listeners. Because of these paradoxes, the younger generation is extremely anxious of their future, how can they live in peace and harmony with others; how can they lead a truly human life that will have a happy end. These paradoxes ignite our minds as we try to “Unveil the Testament of a Loving Father.”

3. Chavara’s Concern for Families

Here the “Family Directives and Regulations” that Chavara prepared for the families and the instructions he gave regarding the upbringing of children certainly give a solid foundation for a true family where the virtues of love, peace, sacrifice, prayer and mutual understanding would thrive. John Paul II refers to family as the most important and fundamental unit of the Church and society at large. A healthy family signifies a healthy society and a healthy Church.¹

Chavara defines a good Christian family as the image of heaven on earth where members live together by the bond of blood and affection, duly respecting and obeying the parents, living peacefully before God and people, seeking eternal salvation according to each one’s proper state of life.² This definition comprises all the aspects of a Christian family. The significance of this notion of family is that nowhere else we see such a refined and comprehensive definition for family. The following are the various elements of the definition: (1) A good

¹John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 42.

²Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Testament of a Loving Father*, ed. by Thomas Panthaplackal, trans. Enrico Calzotari, Kochi: Anaswara Printers, 2014, 10.

Christian family is an image of heaven. (2) The members are joined together by a bond of blood and love. (3) They manifest respect and obedience to elders and God and seek to attain salvation, living according to his vocation.

Chavara's first and foremost concern was the pastoral care of the people. In order to make the Christian family a family of God, immediately after a religious community life was started at Mannanam, Chavara and his companions laid stress on the spiritual renewal of the Church of Kerala, and proposed the preaching of retreats in the parishes as their first external activity. Chavara loved the Church and desired that all the Christian families should lead an authentic Christian life centred on the Holy Eucharist and strengthened by the sacraments.

4. The Testament of Chavara

Realizing that his life was coming to an end, and in order to give a firm foundation to the Christian families, Chavara prepared an instruction manual which was named as 'The Testament of a Loving Father'. It was almost like Jacob's last blessings to his sons (Gen 49:1-27) or Moses' last testament to the people of Israel (Deut 33:1-29) or St. Paul's last exhortation to the leaders of the church of Ephesus (Acts 20:18-35) or better yet like Jesus' farewell discourse to His disciples (Jn 13:31-16:33).

In the book of Proverbs we note an assortment of guiding principles for families (Prov 1:1-27). Chavara in his sayings, makes the sayings of Proverb more concrete and relevant to the context. In the composing of the testament, he has also taken insights from the letters of Paul (Rom 12:1-21). As many modern families leave the shore of morality and sink in the ocean of consumerism, the sayings of Chavara are a source of hope. They are something to hold on to helping them to come back to the shore of peace and tranquillity.

Today we live in a culture in which the gift of life has not been given due importance and children are not considered as God given gifts. In such a cultural milieu, parents willingly resort to abortion and artificial family planning and they adopt various unethical practices. Ambitious parents insist that their children to enter the world of competition, deceit, consumerism, luxury etc., and no practical lessons in morality is given to them.

The affection between parents and children has vanished from many of our families. Children who turn into murderers of their own parents and parents who exploit and misuse their children are not rare in our societies. Fear of God which should have been the basis of Christian life is often replaced by over-confidence and pride. In this epoch the exhortation from Chavara is a guiding light to the modern world as it attempts to rekindle the divine light in Christian families.

4.1. Precepts for Families

The instruction given by Chavara to the families is titled "Precepts for Families" (*Kudumbhachattam*). It was written in 1868, February 13th and was addressed to the parishioners of Kainakary, his home parish. It expresses his gratitude towards his forefathers and blood relatives to whom he owes his earthly existence and who brought him up and enabled him to fulfil his obligation in justice and charity. He inscribed this testament in order to safeguard the families from the possible disaster caused by lack of order, fear of God, peace, and charity among the members of the family.

Having prayed for divine assistance he wrote these precepts for families in his own hand writing. It was composed in the form of a letter, as though written by a father with paternal love. It consists of suggestions, rules and regulations that are helpful to build a good Christian family and it is given as a testament. It has got a simple and heart-warming conversational style. It imparts Gospel values. The use of life-related events, stories, sayings and examples make the writing pleasant. Ardent love, proficient teaching, prophetic vision, psychological approach, moral consciousness and spiritual profundity are explicit in his writings.

Chavara suggested to the addressees that they might preserve the testament in a box in the chapel of Kainakary and those who were able, to copy it for their home where it could be accessed easily. The parishioners were also instructed to assemble in the chapel on the first Saturday of every month to read it. He suggested that the heads of the families might read it to other members on every Sunday. He charged them that they obey the instructions themselves and make others obey.

4.2. The Structure of the Testament

The testament that Chavara left for his parishioners is mainly in two parts. The first part includes 24 directives regarding family life in

general and the second part consists of 16 specific instructions about the upbringing of children in the family.

Family is the foundation stone of the society. Social progress is impossible without improvement in various aspects of the family life. It is for this reason that Chavara, who is a spiritual reformer with a social vision takes a keen interest in the wellbeing of family in general. In the testament, he envisages a reform of the family in its spiritual, moral, social and financial dimensions. The 24 directives that the testament contains deal with the virtues that must prevail in Christian families like charity, piety, readiness to forgive each other, forbearance, tolerance, respectfulness, meekness, simplicity and good relationships. It has instructions on right conversations, love for work, righteousness, honesty, hospitality, the mode of conduct towards domestic workers and justice to the labourers. The social concern of Chavara reflects in his demands for concern for the poor and needy, habit of giving, modesty, endurance in struggles and difficulties, avoidance of luxury and prodigality. Mention also is made regarding personal virtues like necessity of reading good books, prayer, reception of sacraments, faithful observance of Sundays and other days of obligation and punctuality. The directives come to a conclusion with an advice to keep away from calumnies and to cultivate Christian, moral and human values, and warning about the impairment that may occur in the absence of these virtues.

Chavara's fundamental vision about the families was to make every one of them an earthly replica of the heavenly kingdom. He firmly believed that a religious cannot attain holiness unless he or she loves, serves and tries to sanctify the people of God and their families. Hence praying for God's light and peace, he has composed this rule of conduct for families and concluded his exhortation with a plea: "I pray you to accept and enforce this as a mandate coming from your ancestors."³

4.2.1. General Instructions for Family

As stated above, the content of the testament of Chavara deals with the need of the time. In a society where value erosion was becoming increasingly rampant, Chavara found that this malady had to be treated at the root, which is the family. The content of the testament is the antidote to the unhealthy condition of the society. The 24 directives

³Kuriakose Elias Chavara, CWC, vol. IV: The Letters, trans., Mary Leo, IX/VI, Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Bl. Chavara, 1990.

given to the families of his home parish are delineated briefly in the following lines.

1. Love one another (Jn 10:18); each one forgive the short-comings of others. Love and forgiveness pave your way to peace on earth and eternal joy in heaven. Chavara presents love as the only force in the world that can bring eternal bliss in the world to come. Hence, he admonished his people to keep away from all sorts of strife and the tendency to take revenge. The blessing and honour of a family consist in its peaceful existence with other families without any conflict. Even animals can retaliate. However, forgiveness is possible only for a prudent, strong and dignified human person. He cites the example of the Emperor Constantine who was walking along a road and a man from the street came up and slapped the king. In their consternation at what had transpired, when the officers sought his permission to deal with the offender, the Emperor reminded them of the need of forgiveness saying that retaliation was not the sign of strength, but that forgiveness was the sign of his strength.
2. The law of the land is to be certainly respected. However, in Chavara's opinion, civil lawsuits are a menace to the society. On account of these lawsuits, people go bankrupt, discord is perpetuated and families are destroyed. He prudently urges his people not to resort to civil law-suits even if one feels that it is for a just cause.⁴
3. Chavara respects both the social and religious demands of family life. Sundays and other days of obligations are the Lord's days set apart to remind us of our duty towards God. It is least befitting to hold secular celebrations on such days. The seriousness of this directive is in the warning that it may cause many evils amounting even to the perdition of the souls.
4. Proper management of finance secures the financial stability of a family. Spending beyond income, people in the modern society end up in great financial trouble. The instruction Chavara gives the families is not to borrow money except in special circumstances. In the case of being in debt, his advice is that you pay it back at the earliest.
5. To the people who show off their wealth the exhortation that Chavara gives is almost like a maxim. His advice is not to make a show of your wealth. On the one hand, those who display their

⁴Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Testament of a Loving Father*, 11.

wealth are persons of low status. On the other hand, those who make false pretensions of wealth will, sooner or later, be compelled to go begging.

6. A second reference to the management of finances occurs when Chavara tells the people not to spend excessively on festivals and celebrations. You don't know how long you can keep it up. It is better to light a small lamp and keep it longer, than blaze a haystack which goes up in smoke in a short time. Some lament over their bad days, which follow extravagance. If they had not burnt away their lamp at day time, they could have lighted it at night.
7. The exhortation regarding snooping reminds us of the paraenetic saying of Jesus, Mt 7:3 regarding your concern for the speck that is in your brother's eye, while you have a log lodged in your own eye. Do not go around visiting the houses in your neighbourhood collecting information about them. For, if you will look after yourself properly, you will have no time to look into the affairs of other people.⁵
8. When seeking marriage alliances for children, the wealth of the prospective bride or groom is a crucial factor in the decision making. Chavara would advise his parishioners not to seek alliances with families that are in disorder and are not God-fearing. For, it is not rich relatives and friends that bring you benefit and happiness, but those who lead orderly lives and are God-fearing. Chavara illustrates point with an example: A rich Frenchman made strenuous attempts to make his only son marry a high-born knight's daughter. On the condition that all his family property should be bequeathed to his son, his request was granted and the marriage was solemnized. Eventually, the bride and her parents began resent his low birth and status and he was dispelled from his own household and he went around begging.
9. Friends are to be chosen with discretion. A friend either makes you a better person with his/her friendship or a worse person. Chavara warns people not to admit all sorts of people to your house indiscriminately. Accept only those who are good and God-fearing, so that you and your family might not be misled.

⁵Thomas Kadankavil, "The Christian Family: A Prototype of Heaven on Earth in the Vision of Bl. Chavara" in P. Kalluveettil and P. Kochappilly, eds., *The Lord of Heaven and Earth*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2014, 218-219.

10. Engaging in loose-talk is a means of pastime for many, and many a family is turned into venues of gossip. The advice is to make it clear to others that your home is not a place for indulging in conversation ill-befitting a Christian family. With a touch of exaggeration, Chavara warns his people that if the crime of another is being discussed in your house, the punishment for that crime will fall on your house! He illustrates the theme with the example of a man who habitually went round speaking ill of others and ended his days mad.
11. Chavara makes a point on greed as he asks his people to improve upon what they already possess before trying to acquire more. The real wealth of the family is not the quantity of the possessions but their quality. The example Chavara brings in is that of an industrious man who lived happily with his small assets. Envious of his happiness with what he had, some neighbours reported that he had found some treasure and was hiding it. He was ordered by the king to render a full account of his wealth. He declared in the court that his treasure was his small piece of land and that the soil of the land turned to gold when drenched with his sweat. He was acquitted honourably.
12. In a world that is increasingly health-conscious, Chavara's directive to 'do as much manual work as your social status permits you' is very relevant. On the one hand it improves your health, and on the other hand, it keeps you occupied. A man of honour does not sit idle. Idleness is the mother of all vices.⁶
13. On financial matters, Chavara has a moderate view. According to him, extravagance and miserliness are both sinful. The luxuries of the extravagant will disappear like smoke. The wealth of the miser will be devoured by worms. Once there was a man who lived generously according to his means. He prospered well. As he grew richer, he stinted in charity and started hoarding. Then he was laid up with an ulcer in his leg. Several physicians treated him one after another and a huge expenditure was incurred on this account eating into his wealth. Then an angel told him in a dream: "Know ye that the miser who stints in charity and hoards will have to spend his treasure on what is undesired."
14. "Do good to one another" is a divine precept. In the acts of charity God is present for that is what he is - Love. With the example of a man got up from the table and went out to perform an act of

⁶Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Testament of a Loving Father*, 12-13.

charity, because at supper he had remembered that he had not performed his customary act of charity, Chavara reminds his people that acts of charity is part and parcel of Christian life.

15. Mindfulness is the mark of nobility and Chavara expects Christians to be noble. Hence he would advise his people to be exceedingly chaste, modest and careful, in all their movements, whether sitting or walking, or lying or playing. He considered immodesty, especially with regard to the dress one wears, as disgraceful before God and man.⁷
16. Business ethics was a matter of concern for Chavara. According to him, trade involves risk of both soul and wealth. If trading is the only opening for you to make a living, there is no objection to your pursuing it. However, he wants it to be done very carefully and with justice. An unjust trader has never maintained a steady progress in life. Riches amassed through deceit and fraud will melt away like snow. Chavara makes his point with the example of two dishonest businessmen who never prospered. As soon as they began to deal with honesty, they began to prosper immensely. Taking it a step further, he says that the days on which you have not rendered any good to others will not be reckoned as days of your life. Hence, do not let beggars leave your home empty handed and do not refrain from giving alms whenever you can.
17. Your life can be radically influenced by an influential friend who can play either a constructive role or a destructive role in your life. Chavara would suggest against forging friendship with people indiscriminately. He would advise that out of thousands of possible friends you choose wisely. He who does not love God will not love you either.
18. The testament of Chavara is known for practical ethics. He advises against stealing and obtaining stolen goods. According to him, the houses harbouring stolen goods will be consumed by fire. In consonant with his saying on friendship, he asks his people not to mix with people who steal other people's property. For later they will not hesitate to steal your property. Moreover you share their guilt and sin. This is illustrated with an anecdote of a rich man who had amassed much wealth unjustly. On his death-bed; he dictated his will to the scribe. "I bequeath my soul to the Devil." The children were shocked and they enquired of the father whether he was in his senses or he was in a delirium. He replied

⁷Kuriakose Elias Chavara, CWC, vol. IV: The Letters, IX/VI.

clearly: "No my dear children, I am fully conscious and let him take down what I say. 'I bequeath to the Devil, my soul, as well as that of my wife who encouraged me to unjustly acquire the property of others. I surrender to him your souls too, for it was for you that I thus unjustly came by these holdings which belong to others.'" And he died an unfortunate death.

19. To Chavara, social justice was an important part of your Christian life. Like the Israelite prophets he would exhort his parishioners not to deny or delay payment of just wages to labourers for that is a sin which cries up to the throne of God for retribution. He further asks them not to belittle or humiliate the poor, lest they be accountable before God for their tears. Chavara gives an example of a harassing rich landlord in the city of Laverneon in whose estate lived a widow with her four children. He harassed them often to such an extent that one day, she sorrowfully prayed "Oh Lord, deliver me from pain." The landlord was struck dead at the same instant.⁸
20. Misfortunes are part of human life. Chavara's advice is that when you face diseases, trials and difficulties, resign yourselves to the will of God. Those who are patient only when everything goes well with them are weak. A devout soul once observed, "Everything happens to me in the world according to my desire, for I desire only such things as are willed by God."
21. Chavara was a man who would travel far and wide in order to establish a printing press for the sake of the education of his people. However, he warns against the choice of books indiscriminately. He observes that pagan books spread error and ignorance. Keeping such books or other lewd and heretical books in the house is like hiding fire in haystacks.
22. He retakes the topic of the Lord's day. He would not want his people to be satisfied with only hearing mass on days of obligation. He asked them to spend most of the day listening to sermons, in reading, in visiting the poor and in exercising charity in general.
23. Chavara is concerned about the wellbeing both of the servants employed as well as the master and his household who avail themselves of the services of servants. Chavara asks them to engage only God-fearing servants. Let their number be small also. For there are many homes under the sway of the devil who uses

⁸Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Testament of a Loving Father*, 15-16.

servants as his agents. Let masters be responsible for the moral conduct of their dependants and servants and watch over all their activities.⁹

24. A disciplined life in the family brings health of mind and body. Chavara asks his people to go to sleep in time and rise punctually, to pray the morning prayers and if possible attend mass. In the evening, pray the family prayers in common. Then meditate for half an hour on some subject raised by the spiritual reading from any good book. Do not fail to observe this regular feature on any account. After supper make an examination of conscience, pray your prayers before retiring to bed, and proceed to sleep. The head of the house must carefully see to this routine being followed.

The underlying inspiration of these counsels is Chavara's ardent desire for the creation of healthy families with a disciplined Christian lifestyle that is based on faith, and with labour relations that are just.

4.2.2. Instructions on the Upbringing of Children

The second part of the testament of Chavara deals with the upbringing of children in the family. The many exhortations he gives to the parents regarding the care and upbringing of their children hem in a great deal of modern psychological and spiritual insights. Although he gave shape to many of these directives in the social and cultural context of his time, even today these counsels are relevant. These instructions also reveal his vision of the family and family life. The following are the key view of Chavara on child rearing given in his testament.

1. The first of the instructions speaks of the value of the young generation as they are considered by him to be the treasure entrusted to the parents in the hands of their parents. He asks parents to consider them as precious gifts given by God. Hence, parents are obliged to handle their children with utmost care, dedication and commitment. Blemishing the beauty of the gift is equal to dishonouring the giver of the gift. This gift is like a piece of clay and it is the duty of the parents to mould this clay into beautiful images. On judgment day every parent must give account for the conduct of their children.
2. The upbringing of children should happen in devotion. As children grow up, they should be taught how to recite with

⁹Kuriakose Elias Chavara, CWC, vol. IV: *The Letters*, IX/VI.

devotion the Holy names of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. In addition, they should also be taught other important prayers.¹⁰

3. Modesty in life was a mark of noble upbringing. Everyone who has been brought up carefully will carry oneself with dignity in public. Hence, he instructs parents that they do not allow young children to walk about naked, even at home.
4. Although he was not instructing people who would have owned multi-bedroom houses, he would make this observation: In order that children may respect their parents, they should not be allowed to sleep in their parent's bed room. Furthermore, despite the number of children, boys and girls should not be put in the same room to sleep. Although impractical in the case of poor families, the children need to be brought up respecting the privacy of others in the house.
5. Corollary to the first instruction regarding children as precious gift, he would tell them how to care for this treasure. He would warn the parents not to let their little children go out of their sight to play with others; not to trust careless servants. For often they are the ones who spoil the little ones.
6. An educationist himself, Chavara had seen the potential of the young ones to bring in a reformation in the society through education. Having done all that he could to disseminate education in his locality, he would instruct the parents that as soon as the children come to the age of reason, they must be sent to school.
7. The influence of the children on their peers is phenomenal. They learn more from their friends than from the parents. Hence, Chavara instructs the parents that their children should not be allowed to stay long in the houses even of their relatives. The reason, though exaggerated, is that they might leave your home as angels and return as devils.
8. A Christian family has to be serious about their sacramental life. Each sacrament must be received at a specific time. Chavara instructs the parents that when the children are eight years of age, they are to be taught all about confession and should be helped to receive the sacrament of reconciliation.
9. Moderation is a virtue and this virtue must be practiced even in the case of bringing up children. Parenting is about maintaining the right balance between clemency and rigorousness. One should be neither too stern nor too lenient with one's children. For, too

¹⁰Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Testament of a Loving Father*, 18.

much of indulgence will make them proud and too much of severity and punishment will make them desperate, shameless, and weak of intellect.

10. A Christian should be brought up in the gospel values, although the ways of the world point to other directions in order to achieve easy success. Chavara tells the parent not to train the children in the worldly habits of lying, or cheating, or playing tricks for the sake of expediency, telling them that it is the way of the world. When they make mistakes, they are to be corrected, reprovved punished. They must be helped to develop in them a regard for truth and justice.
11. Christian life is to be a disciplined life. Children are to be brought up in discipline. At dusk, when the bell for the Angelus is rung, the parents are to see to it that the children are at home. Similarly, tradition has a great role to play in life. Children are to be trained to greet other members of the family with "Praise be to Jesus" and to kiss their hands after the family prayers at night.
12. In a world where people have begun to enjoy vanity, Chavara would teach the people to emphasise essence rather than appearance. To make girls dress up in finery and let them go about on the pretext of human respect, wealth, and family prestige; and to make them wear clothes and ornaments beyond one's ability and status, will in a way, promote vanity in them. A girl's ornaments, in his opinion, are modesty, piety, silence and control of the eyes.¹¹
13. There are times in the neighbourhoods when the squabbles among children are blown out of proportion to make an issue out of it. Chavara teaches that there be no quarrels in your houses arising from pettiness on behalf of children. That your children have been slighted or insulted should not provoke you to bitterness. It is childish to be thus excited.
14. Vocation, according to Chavara, is a matter of personal choice. The parents might guide them, help them discern and place before them all kinds of possible vocations a Christian youth can respond to. However, when children are old enough to determine their vocation, they should be given full freedom to follow their bent of mind. For, it is God who inspires them and it is their part to choose one or the other.

¹¹Thomas Kadankavil, "The Christian Family," 220.

15. Parents are to be the role models in the life of the children. Since the children look up to them, the parents should not show weakness or indecision before them even when the latter grow up to be wiser and are more efficient. As far as possible, they should keep the control of the household affairs. Often parents have come to grief by imprudent conduct.
16. In a culture in which distribution of the ancestral property among the children takes place after the death of the parents, it is likely that selfishness and greed of the beneficiaries play a part. Chavara advises the parents to write out a will or partition-deed in time; or else, after death they will be held responsible for the sins caused by the disputes and quarrels among the children.

Chavara concludes his advice with an exhortation: "Lastly, my dear children remember, you are bound by the law of the Lord, to revere your parents and to avoid giving them any pain. Those who disregard the fourth commandment of God shall merit God's punishment."¹²

5. Critical Evaluation of the Testament

This short work is addressed to, centred on and aimed at family. It can be evaluated in various ways by considering the importance of family in the plan of God, church and society. Ideologically, the testament is very meaningful filled with practical wisdom and insights. Historically, the work is one and a half century old and is the first among such works in history. Pastorally, there was nothing that belonged to the age and times of Chavara that has influenced family life in the Kerala Church as much as these counsels, which remained as an inspiration for solid families, inculcating in the youngsters respect towards elders, prayerfulness, education and vocation.

Ecclesiastically, up until Chavara, we see no exclusive exhortation given by anybody of the Church, solely aiming at family and the upbringing of children. When the protestant reformers gave publicity against the teachings of the Church on sacraments, the council of Trent promulgated the decrees on marriage which was the first official teaching published before the Chavara's testament to the families. In recent times, the first official exhortation of the Church to the family is 'the sacredness of marriage and family' the first chapter of the second part of the constitution *Gaudium et Spes* of Vatican II. Among the exhortations of the various Popes, the two that focused on the families are *Familiaris Consortio* - (1981), the apostolic exhortation of Pope John

¹²Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Testament of a Loving Father*, 21.

Paul II and his letter to the families - (1994). Both these writings have ideological similarities with Chavara's testament to the families. Other official exhortations of the Church related to marriage and human life include: *Arcanum* (On Christian Marriage, 10 Feb 1893) by Pope Leo XIII; *Casti Connubii* (Chastity in Marriage, 3, Dec 1930), an Encyclical by Pope Pius XI, and *Humane Vitae* (Human Life, 1968) by Pope Paul VI.

Theologically, the testament of Chavara is deeply rooted in the Holy Scripture which is the source of our faith. This writing is a practical explanation of the Ten Commandments. In its presentation, it resembles not only the interpretation of the Decalogue given by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* but also the exhortations of Pope John Paul II like *Dies Domini* (31 May 1998).

6. Conclusion

The New Testament writers, especially, the authors of the various epistles, wrote some of these letters to a particular Church in particular need under the divine inspiration. In a similar manner, although the testament of Chavara was addressed to a particular group of people in his Church, the content of the writing has universal application. His concern for the modern families and their needs reflected in his writings makes Chavara special patron of families and family evangelization.

In the opinion of Shri P. Ramachandran, the former governor of Kerala, St. Chavara, a mortal, by means of the humanitarian contributions that he made over a span of six and a half decades, cast him in the mould of immortal humanity. As an illustrious scholar, prolific writer, genuine poet, multi linguist, efficient organizer, eminent educator and as the one who brought about a renewal in the Christian families of his time and locality, the name of Chavara has been immortalized in the Indian soil and in the hearts and minds of all the people of God. The depth of his God experience, Passion for the Word of God, his love for the loyalty to both the Syro-Malabar Church and the Universal Church, and his unflinching concern for the people of God urge and encourage the people of God in the daily steps they take.