

## **CHAVARA'S PRECEPTS AND THE DESTRUCTIVE TRENDS OF FAMILY**

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*Abstract:* The modern progressive society, as it embraces modern trends, the concomitant silent threats are destructive to the traditional family life as we know it. The author lists the possible and the actual hazards that modern families are facing especially in the area of raising their children. The influence of materialism on families has landed the young generation in lack of faith, moral laxity and individualism. These harmful trends have also been seen in the indiscriminate choice of a partner, premature marriage, sexual incompatibility, conflicts between couples regarding children and divorce. All these result in the emotional deprivation of the individuals concerned. Furthermore, the influence of mass media and pornography has led to sex explosion and other socially permissive trends like premarital sex, trial marriage and homosexual union. In Christian circles, the sacredness of marriage is gradually disappearing. In a familial atmosphere devoid of sacredness, alcoholism and irresponsible moral life invite various abuses to the family. The most diabolic face of these abuses is experienced by defenceless children who end up with a scarred psyche which they carry to the grave.

*Keywords:* Chavara, family, values, marriage, society, Church, materialism, faith, morality, individualism, divorce, children, economy, media, culture, homosexuality, alcoholism, pornography, child abuse

### **1. Introduction**

Chavara was a reformer who left his impact both on social and ecclesial milieus. He paid so much of attention to family in his attempts at the renewal of the Church and the society, because he considered family to be the garden for an integral human development. The testament that he composed for the sake of the parishioners at Kainakary is a shining example for the concern that he has for families. He gives his directives both to the children and adults who together constitute one family, which is the fertile soil for

emotional development and the spiritual climate for human growth. Family functions through the continuing interaction of its members. A man's role in the family determines his role in society. It is the place where loving, giving, sharing, caring and bearing take place. As a multitude of sounds makes music when they come together harmoniously, so in Christian circles it is the coming together of a man and a woman in marriage that constitutes a Christian family, where love, forgiveness and care blend in to make the harmony of life.

Holy Trinity is the mutual complementarity of love and sharing. When human beings, coming together in marriage, participate in this love, it becomes a true family, which is the experience of the Kingdom of God. According to St Kuriakose Elias Chavara, "A family is the community of a few people joined together in blood relation and bound together by a bond of love, where the members exhibit mutual respect and practice obedience to parents and walk in peace before the Lord and the people, and each one according to his proper state of life seeks to attain eternal salvation and loves peacefully."<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Vatican II observes that 'Christian family is a domestic sanctuary of the Church, the domestic Church' where one is called to experience the Kingdom of God.

Marriage is the vocation of the majority of Christians in our society. Married life is part and parcel of the great web of human life, wherein are strewn fibres of pleasure and pain, joy and sorrow, laughter and tears. Hence, happiness in marriage is achieved with sincere striving, endless patience and persistent effort.<sup>2</sup> However, there are obstacles on the way to this happiness. There are various problems and challenges that married people confront today as they try to keep up with the fast paced industrialized and urbanized settings. Inability to keep pace with the modern times with a spiritual anchor leads to deterioration of family values and the quality of marital life.

Christian faith has always emphasized the holiness of marriage and the family. We believe that the married state was ordained by God and endowed by him with its proper laws. God himself is the author of marriage. Christ who encounters Christian spouses through their true married love blessed the intimate partnership of life and love in the family. It is subsumed into divine love and is enriched by the divine power of Christ and the continuing redemptive work of the Church.

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<sup>1</sup>J. Kanjiramattathil, *The Pastoral Vision of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1986, 43.

<sup>2</sup>Menezes, *The Effects of Stress on Christian Marriages in Urban India*, 88.

Christians are called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Looking back into the history, we find that in several countries the Christian family has been a corrective inspiration to dominant cultures of polygamy, promiscuity, abortion, infanticide etc. Even legal structures have been modified through the active presence of Christian family. However, Christian family is experiencing severe strain under the modernist and post-modernist currents of thought and manipulations of the media. We are losing sight of the original Christian vision of marriage and family succumbing to the pressures and fashions of the world.

It is the need of the time that Christian family should regain its vitality and become a beacon to the world around it once again. Unless the vision of faith is shared among the younger members of the family, the real meaning of family life will be lost, with all its disastrous consequences. Spouses once again must begin to recognize the presence of God in each other and respect each other's personal dignity. God has willed the unity and permanence of married life and the spouses should ever strive to fulfil God's will.

## **2. Modern Destructive Threats to Family Life**

As a result of globalization and development of the new culture of death, the institution of marriage and family is under strain. Today, family life is adversely affected by evils like the over emphasis on the pursuit of money and pleasure. The increasing addiction to alcohol and drugs, sexual anarchy, abortion and divorces are playing havoc in the society. Immediate and urgent attention of the Church and the society is the need of the hour to save these institutions from degeneration.

Family, which is the very foundation of society is under threat from within and from outside. Hasty industrialization without adequate planning has converted cities into vast concrete jungles with faceless masses surrounded by slums of misery. The city is the land of promise and city of joy for the millions of jobless village youth. The uncontrolled mass inflow into the city has caused unhealthy overgrowth of cities world-wide, especially in India. This has brought millions of young families into various kinds of unbearable strains. John Paul II was deeply concerned about the safety of the family in these new surroundings. The problems that the family is facing are perhaps more dangerous to human society than all the nuclear weapons put together. He begins *Familiaris Consortio*, his Apostolic Exhortation with the observation: "The family in the modern world, as

much as and perhaps more than any other institution, has been beset by the profound and rapid changes that have affected society and culture."<sup>3</sup>

### **2.1. Influence of Materialism**

The philosophy of materialism puts greater emphasis on material possessions than on spiritual values and ideals. The family is urged through advertisements to buy cars of the latest model, and other amenities of life, even if the current models are still functioning quite adequately. One of the greatest challenges families are facing today is finding the balance between material and spiritual values.<sup>4</sup> In this context both husband and wife have to seek employment day and night to satisfy the demands of materialism.

### **2.2. Lack of Faith**

The strength of marital bond is the basis of family. Weakening of marital ties is the main symptom of the weakening of family bond. Today, marriage is no longer a religious ritual but merely a social contract which can easily be cancelled or annulled on grounds of boredom or misunderstanding. Consequently, there is a constant increase in the number of divorce. People subscribe to the covenantal and sacramental aspect of marriage. In the catholic teaching, there is no divorce but annulments are taking place and the number is increasing rapidly. People are blindly influenced by materialism which was imbibed into heart by 'secularized' education and occupation and thirst for a life full of pleasure.<sup>5</sup> Backed by materialistic and individualistic philosophy, people think what they do is right.

### **2.3. Moral Laxity**

An important indicative element of family disorganization is moral laxity in personal and family life. As a result of individualism and globalization, the younger generation wants total freedom from all social, ethical and familial restrictions. It creates a conflict between parents and children. The control of the parents over young men and women is constantly decreasing. Generally, youngsters get employed and reach a stable financial position before their marriage and are

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<sup>3</sup>John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 1.

<sup>4</sup>C. McDonald and P. McDonald, *Creating a Successful Christian Marriage*, Michigan: Baker, 1994, 24.

<sup>5</sup>C. McDonald and P. McDonald, *Creating a Successful Christian Marriage*, 24.

away from parental control. Anonymity in a new place of employment often gives them more freedom and temptation to engage in immoral practices.

#### **2.4. Individualism**

Everybody has an image about an ideal family in which members spend considerable time together enjoying one another's company. Togetherness represents an important part of family life and it gives stability to the marital and familial bond. However, the fast transformation in lifestyle has affected family lives, particularly with regard to the rights and duties of the individual in the exercise of marriage rights and in the achievement of the welfare of family life. Husband, wife, children each have their own ideals, plans and individual programs in which they brook no interference.<sup>6</sup> In this way, even while living together, eating and moving together, they tend to have little concern for one another. The house becomes almost a hotel where the family members gather only to take food and rest. In the instance of the husband and wife being employed, a similar distance is seen to exist between them.

The individualistic persons do not normally see the need for a wider community where each one can make a specific contribution to an even broader implementation of the common good of the family. They put their personal goals ahead of family goals defining one's identity in terms of personal attributes. They give less priority on shared values and resources, co-operation and mutual interdependence. The individualistic values encourage people to develop an individualistic orientation, that is, persons think in terms of seeking primarily personal than common good. This orientation puts great stress on family relationships where there is little emphasis on contributing to other family members' happiness or postponing personal satisfaction in order to attain communal goals. Once the members of the family, especially parents, embark on the individualistic way, they find no meaning of living together in one family. It leads them to take the extreme step of separation, which is the sign of the end of their family life. Individualism lands families in trouble and it leads to various dire consequences such as divorce and suicide.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Paul, "Family in the Civilization of Love," vol. xxiv, 1994, no. 77-80.

<sup>7</sup>Agnes, *Psychology Themes and Variation*, 69.

## **2.5. Wrong Choice of a Partner**

In the past the choice of a partner was generally made by the parents or elders. This system had its advantages in traditional society whenever the partners freely consented to the choice. However, today, as young couples mostly live on their own, a choice made for them by others becomes less and less suitable. Young people rightly claim the right to make their own choice. This should, however be guided by elders, at least remotely by the preparing young people for marriage by initiating them to make considered decisions on important matters and by quietly arranging meetings with the right type of person of the other sex. This choice should not be directed by blind infatuation. Mere emotion or sensual attraction cannot sustain a lifelong partnership. Family background, each one's outlook on life, traits of character, interests and aspirations, the capacity of appreciating each other's interests, the right attitude of fidelity, and openness in matters of religion and moral values, and even the health factor, should be taken into consideration.

## **2.6. Premature Marriage**

In a joint family structure, the disadvantage of marriages at a tender age did not appear so clearly since there was the whole group to sustain the young couple. Today, marriage should definitely not take place before people are able to undertake its grave responsibilities. The legal age in India has been raised to 21 for boys and 18 for girls. However, this will not be of much help, especially when even the former limit of 18/15 was more honoured in the breach than in the observance. There is need for an intense educative process so that only mature persons capable of a life-long commitment and of fulfilling their obligations enter into this state. Maturity implies self-esteem and the capability of meeting the emotional needs of the other. One should not be self-centred or have an excessive craving for protection, attention, approval or success. One should, living in a healthy family, have acquired a minimum of emotional independence from one's parents.

## **2.7. Emotional Deprivation**

After the initial warmth, it often happens that couples settle down to a life of monotonous routine or each gets preoccupied with his or her own concerns. A man might be sincerely devoted to his work and think that he is doing wonderful service by keeping late hours at the

place of work. A woman may get interested in some charitable activity and spend a long time on it. Meanwhile, the partner may feel neglected and deprived. If the matter is not remedied in time, serious consequences may follow. Today, many couples suffer protracted separations or are able to meet only over weekends. The monetary advantages of separation must be carefully weighed. Such employers as corporate managements of schools must give serious attention to this problem and try to remedy it as best as they can. When separations are inevitable, each one must be careful to keep clear of any form of infidelity and at the same time not give in too quickly to suspicions regarding the conduct of the other.<sup>8</sup>

## 2.8. Conflicts Regarding Children

Family planning is a necessary dimension of a happy married life. Unless this is undertaken in a spirit of common responsibility, there will be ample room for misunderstandings and tensions. The method chosen should also be mutually acceptable. It is the special merit of natural family planning that it fosters mutual love because it is a way of life and not merely a technique which can be used by either partner. It must be properly understood as a joint project in which there is mutual respect and concern.

Children are really the supreme gift of marriage and contribute very substantially to the welfare of their parents. The mutual love of the couple is meant to find its fulfilment in bearing and rearing children. The child can also be a factor of division when one finds compensation for neglect from the partner in attachment to the child or when one becomes completely preoccupied with the child. The presence of children is a great help in restoring the harmony of the parents. However, the children should not be treated only as means of the parents' welfare or be made the victims of the cold war between them. This is neither fair to the children nor good for the parents themselves.

## 2.9. Sexual Incompatibility

Sex is not everything in marriage. Still, it is a very important factor in fostering mutual love. Each one must appreciate the sexual needs of the other and try to meet them in a spirit of love. Excessive demands on the part of one, or inhibitions on the part of the other, are a frequent

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<sup>8</sup>George V. Lobo, *Moral and Pastoral Questions*, Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1985, 183ff.

source of dissatisfaction which at first may lead to infidelity and tension and ultimately to marital breakdown. The couples should be made aware of the physical and psychological aspects of sexuality of each other. While there is danger of excessive preoccupation in this matter, in most cases, ignorance or indifference causes damage. An apparently 'chaste' wife might well be the cause of the infidelity of her husband.<sup>9</sup>

### **2.10. Economic and Social Factors**

Economic and social factors also have an important influence on the existence of marriage and family. On the one hand, many families throughout the world live in conditions of economic penury. They are deprived of the necessities for a satisfactory family life as regards food, housing, clothing and health. On the other hand, in various societies the affluent mentality considers material prosperity and personal satisfaction the only goals worth pursuing and thus a way of life centred on money, pleasure and power. The couple must come to a clear understanding regarding the use of individual and family finances in a spirit of mutual esteem, trust and freedom. This is even more necessary when women are becoming more and more 'financially independent'. Money should never be allowed to come in the way of mutual love, for much depends on one's sense of relative values.<sup>10</sup>

Although a "man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife" (Gen 2:24), each party must appreciate the fact that the other will necessarily be concerned with the welfare of his or her family. The ideal would be to consider the other's family as one's own and share his or her love and concern. The in-laws themselves must not intrude into the marital relationship and be the cause of its disruption; they should surely show their concern and offer their services when required. But they should respect the autonomy of the new family and avoid anything that might disrupt its relationship.

### **2.11. Influence of Mass Media**

The present scenario depicts the vast changes that take place in the area of media especially television and internet. They are valuable guides if used properly but harmful if used in an uncontrolled manner. Media offer us valid knowledge about various aspects of life

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<sup>9</sup>Lobo, *Moral and Pastoral Questions*, 185.

<sup>10</sup>Heredia C. Rudolf and Mathias Edward, *The Family in a Challenging World*, 254.



including those which are necessary for family life. Thanks to the widespread influence of TV and internet, many are unaware of the ultimate meaning and truth of conjugal and family life. Sometimes they act as great tools for propagating values that are harmful to families and sometimes bring pernicious impact on them. Most of the time it creates and promotes a culture of exaggerated self-centeredness, self-righteousness and momentary pleasure.<sup>11</sup>

## 2.12. Media Culture

The invention and widespread use of television has made a dramatic impact on family life. At launch, television was hailed a means of reuniting families as they would watch programmes together. In the initial stages, many family-oriented programmes were telecasted.<sup>12</sup> As time passed, the style and form of the programmes were changed and became merely private entertainments. Today’s television has cultivated a preference for a quick-paced, erratic even chaotic way of handling information.<sup>13</sup> Families have degenerated to the state of lodges for resting in the night, hotels to eat and theatres to watch serials and movies to get relaxed. The advertisements of all commercial products have been intruding uncontrollably into our houses and bargaining with us turning families into markets. Thus by creating a kind of restlessness, it makes us consumers of various commodities. Thus it puts on the role of villains of the families.

The effects of violence on television have probably received more attention than any type of media effect. Psychological studies have found that the children who watched TV regularly were likely to remember aggressive acts portrayed there. They want to be like the successful characters; no matter they are good or bad.<sup>14</sup> The children who are more exposed to television tend to become more aggressive. These television scenes are being imitated in homes, schools and even streets.

Internet does not have any territorial boundaries. It is highly exciting, entertaining and even more educative. However, sometimes it brings more harm than benefit to family life. Children spend a lot of money in chatting and games. Often it leads them to crime culture as

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<sup>11</sup>F. Karakkattu, “T.V. Enna Sarvathipathi,” 30.

<sup>12</sup>C. McDonald and P. McDonald, *Creating a Successful Christian Marriage*, 25.

<sup>13</sup>Traber, *Globalization, Mass Media and Indian Cultural Values*, New Delhi: ISPCK, 2003, 8.

<sup>14</sup>CBCI, *The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World*, no. 9.

they are constantly on the lookout for easy sources of money for game and chatting. The anonymity often leads children to greater chances to misuse or irresponsible use of internet.

### **2.13. Premarital Sex**

The sexual behaviour of the unmarried people has changed considerably in the recent decades. Various surveys in the western countries have shown that a large majority of young people see very little value in the concept of virginity at the time of their wedding. Premarital sex is a prominent feature in today's society and its magnitude is bound to increase in tomorrow's society.

The term pre-marital sex is used to describe the practice of young people engaging in sexual activities with mutual consent before the marriage. Such behaviour is often a sign of profound problems with identity and self-acceptance. Young men and women are often pressured to have intercourse as a sign of adulthood; for they can boast afterwards that, they have had sex, thus hoping to gain respect and recognition.<sup>15</sup> In human persons, sexuality cannot be reduced to mere biological or physical realities. All sexual activity has a moral context. Sex cannot and does not create a relationship. Sex is a very small part of love, a part that cannot be allowed to dominate a relationship.

### **2.14. Trial Marriage**

Another practice that threatens the institution of the marriage is trial marriage or consensual temporary union. Many young people refuse at least for a while, to enter a permanent marriage, preferring a consensual union or trial marriage. The reasons for such unions are to have previous certainty of the partners' compatibility and fertility. It is also driven by economic considerations, too individualistic concept of marriage, ignorance of the partnership character of marriage and fear or refusal of the permanent obligations of marriage.

If Christian people think and behave in this way, the sanctity and sacramentality of marriage will have nothing to do with family life. In this scheme, family and marriage relation becomes a kind of adjustment or business like. Many people in the western countries have adopted this attitude towards marriage. Such a situation will lead to the extinction of marriage and its importance in the Church and in the society.

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<sup>15</sup>F. Podimattam, *Premarital Sex*, Bangalore: Claretian Publications, 1995, 7, 8.

### 2.15. Homosexual Union

Sex is essentially, by its nature, procreative. It is only in the context of permanency in marriage that one can cope properly with procreation. Marriage as a permanent institution, provides an environment fitting for children, and makes sex legitimate. Sex is essentially expressive of love between complementary partners, man and woman. So sex outside the marriage between a man and woman is a lie.

Faced with the fact of homosexual unions, civil authorities adopt different positions. At times, they tolerate the phenomenon, at other times they advocate legal recognition of such unions. They do it under the pretext of avoiding discriminations against persons who live with someone of the same sex. They favour giving homosexual unions legal equivalence of marriage, along with the legal possibility of adopting children.

However, it is the teaching of the Church that homosexual acts go against the natural moral law. In homosexuality the sexual act lacks a higher motivation, the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. However, men and women with homosexual tendencies must be accepted with respect and compassion. Every kind of discrimination should be avoided.

### 2.16. Divorce

The Catholic insistence on the legal "indissolubility" of marriage says that marriage is a legal contract, and that for Christians this contract is legally indissoluble. Marriage is a sacrament conferred upon the partners in the body of the Church through the priest's blessing so it pertains to the eternal life in the kingdom of God. This is not dissolved by the death of one of the partners, but creates between them as eternal bond. In the years since the close of Vatican II, the institution of divorce was been introduced in to the legislation of almost every nation, including those which were traditionally Christian. Statistics show that in some areas one in three marriages leads to divorce. In other places, divorce takes on the form of successive polygamy. Many married people consider permanency impossible and declare that such a bond is without effect. Others hold that they are psychologically incapable of undertaking a permanent commitment.<sup>16</sup> Divorce is very harmful to the children, for they are deprived of the love and affection they need.

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<sup>16</sup>F. Podimattam, *Divorce or Separation*, Delhi: Media House, 1997, 38ff.

The epidemic of divorce among Christians is not merely a problem that concerns family but the entire society. Divorce affects relatives and friends, especially in an arranged marriage. In earlier generations of Christians, the word 'divorce' was unusual and was seldom heard in Christian communities. Today however, it has become a very real problem. As a result, decline in the stability of Christian family has become one of the alarming signs of the time.

Some people think that divorce is a means to be free of tension, conflicts, apprehension, sadness, regrets or pain. The partner who feels rejected and unloved and who agrees reluctantly to separation is likely to feel anger as well as sadness more intensely than the one who is the prime mover. The lives of both get dramatically disrupted. Divorced people carry a sense of failure, guilt, rejection, shame and humiliation.

One of the greatest concerns of most parents is the psychological effects of divorce on their children. The effects do not always show up immediately after the divorce since some children are able to repress their feelings. Eventually, they have trouble sleeping. They become sad and withdrawn, and may attribute their misbehaviour to the divorce of the parents.<sup>17</sup> They end up developing a low self-esteem.

### **2.17. Alcoholism**

Alcoholism and drug addiction are harmful not only for the individual but also for his family and the society at large. In some circles, the use of alcohol is interpreted as part of growing up, as an act of socialization. However, the problems created by the abuse of alcohol are staggering. Problems like public drunkenness, disorderly behaviour, traffic accidents, poor social functioning and broken marriage. In addition to these, the excess use of alcohol causes mental and physical illness, crime and suicide. The factors like the earning of money in a younger age and staying away from parents have given some teenagers and young adults the opportunity to experiment with alcohol and harmful drugs.

Alcoholism is an illness that consumes the entire family. The feelings, thoughts and actions of everyone in the family are affected by the presence of a member who is an alcoholic. The family of an alcoholic experiences fear, anger, loneliness, shame and the family members themselves unwillingly and bitterly become part of the problem.<sup>18</sup> The addict often endangers his own life as well as the lives

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<sup>17</sup>C. McDonald and P. McDonald, *Creating a Successful Christian Marriage*, 291.

<sup>18</sup>Lawton, *The Christian Response to Alcohol and Drug Problem*, 50.

of others in the family. The children of an alcoholic parent frequently develop severe physical and emotional illness, and marriage to an alcoholic often ends in divorce. Continued use of drugs causes changes in attitudes and personality and leads to the erosion of moral values. Morality is subordinated to the need of procuring the drug. Sexual permissiveness is another product of the drug culture. Alcoholics often become unable to hold jobs, often driving their family to destitution.

### **2.18. Influence of Sex Explosion**

In earlier social ethos, sexuality was defined as sacred, private and secret. The members of a civilized society were taught to control this powerful and productive instinctual drive. In the changing social ethos, the libertarian morality defines sexuality as a pleasure principle and the pursuit of sensual pleasure as an end in itself.<sup>19</sup> This idea is propagated all over the world through all types of media. The impact of this sexual revolution was tremendous; sacredness is taken away from marriage. A considerable variety of open sexual behaviour appeared in the media, on the streets and in the schools. Sexual matters are discussed more openly than ever before. The effects of these sex revolution was expressed in public oral sex, premarital sex and acts that are non-heterosexual in nature. This laxness further lead to increase in prostitution, pornography and increased use of contraceptives, higher rate of abortion, more divorce cases and more mixed marriages. In addition to these effects, the outbreak of venereal diseases has caused a great health hazard with AIDS crowning it all.

### **2.19. Disappearing Sacredness of Marriage**

A man-woman relationship the resulting human family belong to the original design of God about mankind. They belong to the inner mystery of God's life. The mutual attraction between man and woman is not caused primarily by human lust but from the inner dynamics of divine mystery. Family and marriage are considered to be sacred and holy in all the traditional religions, cultures and societies. In Christian circles, marital bond is always considered to be indissoluble, life long and mutually enriching. Most organized religions teach values that emphasize sexual fidelity.<sup>20</sup>

However, today less and less people are interested in marriage and the responsibility of marriage as a social bond. Instead they tend to

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<sup>19</sup>F. R. Elliot, *Gender, Family and Society*, Palgrave: McMillan, 1995, 190.

<sup>20</sup>C. McDonald and P. McDonald, *Creating a Successful Christian Marriage*, 87.

involve in co-habitation, premarital sex, dating and such other practices. Therefore the number of prostitutes and call girls has increased in cities and urban areas. More opportunities are presented to a married person to engage in sexual activity with someone other than his/her marriage partner and infidelity that is a breach of trust that signifies a lack of faithfulness to a moral obligation to one's partner becomes common.

## **2.20. Various Abuses and the Family**

Degrading matters related to sex arise largely from changes and conflicts in attitude towards human sexuality. This new changed vision on sexuality encourages engaging in sex for pleasure alone rather than procreation. These practices are considered as part of liberalization and freedom. Media has made sex revolution an occasion of celebration. Multinational business people have supported it for the sake of their various booming industries. Sex and sex related matters got good market. Women and children were sexually exploited in various ways in this sex culture. Sex was publicly exhibited, discussed and views were openly expressed. As a result, growth in immature sexual behaviour has appeared in the society as the minds of young people and children were influenced by adult sexual behaviour and expressions.

### **2.20.1. Pornography**

The vast increase and unprecedented openness to sex related literature and their distribution through internet and other media have caused serious problems in the family. Pornography and sex-related articles are the major selling products in the online market visited by members of both sexes. Cable televisions, blue film CDs and internet have made adult films available to a wider audience than ever before. The curiosity of the young people for self-discovery in the process of making a self-image leads to experiment anything and everything. Several popular internet websites are said to be pornographic. Nothing can be sold as easily as sex. In the privacy of internet even immorality is made to appear normal, good and right. The young are exposed to adult experiences which are harmful to them as they cause psychological delinquency in them.

Over-exposure to pornography makes its effect on a person's tastes and outlook. It offers a degraded view of human beings, depriving them of their specifically human character by depicting sex not as part of a personal relationship between two people but as a mere physical

act. It discourages the mature development of healthy adult relationships. It focuses on pure bodily pleasure instead of affection and love. This body-centred sexuality degrades personal relationships.

### **2.20.2. Irresponsible Moral Life**

When we look around, we see many problems that arise from the family. When human beings are viewed merely as objects, there is a tendency to demean human beings. There arises the tendency to use them for one's own satisfaction without considering one's real worth and value. When sex loses its sacredness, it diminishes into an occasion for selfish sexual pleasure and the partner becomes merely an object for one's sexual satisfaction. Often, abortion becomes the result of irresponsible moral life.

An abortion, the termination of a potential life, is allowed and even mandated if the life or health of the mother is gravely threatened. However, for most other reasons, an abortion is prohibited. Since human beings are created in the image of God, it is sacred and the life of a human being begins at the time of conception.

In the name of the protecting women's health, governments have legalised abortion. Often human life is cheaper than avian and animal life! Many thought that sex-education and health care would decrease abortions; some thought that availability of contraceptives would bring down the number of abortions but the rate of abortion has increased highly.

### **2.20.3. Child Abuses**

Child abuse is a serious problem quickly spreading in the industrialized society. The change from the extended family to the nuclear family, the changed work culture in which both the parents are employed, the reduction in the number of functions performed by the family, increased social tolerance of divorce, negative influence of mass media and internet has contributed much to the increase of child abuse. The abuse of children in the family, in other intimate relationships and in institutional care has increased. Its chain is extended from obscene telephone calls and internet chatting to forced intercourse, from once-only experiences to repeated abuse and from abuse by strangers to abuse by family members.<sup>21</sup> The available evidence shows that sexual abuse -whether it occurs within the family

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<sup>21</sup>Elliot, *Gender, Family and Society*, 156.

or outside the family and whether its victims are boys or girls - is nearly always perpetrated by men.

Child abuse occurs in a number of different forms including physical abuse, psychological maltreatment and sexual abuse. Physical abuse often is described as a situation in which a child sustains injury due to the wilful acts of an adult. Physical abuse occurs more often in families with female children. Physical abuse also includes acts of exploitation. Physical neglect results when a child is not provided with adequate food, shelter and clothing. Psychological maltreatment denotes the repeated remarks to children that they are worthless and unwanted.

It is clear beyond doubt that the negative impact of materialism, media and other sex exposures on family is enormous and that too is happening at a dangerous pace. They affect the ethical and moral atmosphere of the society in manifold ways. The lifestyles, attitudes to life and the patterns of interaction at home have been affected by the images and styles portrayed through permissive culture. Knowingly and unknowingly family is tempted and misguided by the various media hypes. Those who are in power either have forgotten the importance of ethical and moral principles to be held high or have turned a blind eye as some of them are led by the profit making motifs.

More than ever the family is facing various challenges from all direction. Some people feel that it is going towards the culture of death because it shows the signs of a decline in moral values. The alarming growth of divorce rates, the scourge of abortion, wide spread recourse to sterilization and contraception and the increase in the number of single parent families are some of the examples of it. These are obviously great challenges to the institution of family. The society is in need of a guiding light to direct its paths towards a healthy and renewed family life.

### **3. Chavara and Family**

St Kuriakose Elias Chavara of the Holy family, in his attempts to renew both the Church and the society of his time, paid special attention to the building up of the family. He took keen interest in a healthy development of the family in all its dimensions - spiritual, social and financial. It was blessed Chavara's desire that every Christian family should become another Holy Family. Hence, he called Christian family as a prototype of heaven.

In his letter to the parishioners of Kainakary, Chavara defines the family as an earthly replica of the heavenly kingdom. Realizing the



importance of the social dimension of the family, he urges that all should pay attention to this factor in the family life in all charity and justice. Chavara admonished parents about the care they should take, in their all-important sacred duty and responsibility of bringing up the children. He reminded them that the children are the treasures entrusted to them by God. He enlivened the basic unit, the family, in order to bring about a revival in the church.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Family is the fundamental unit both of the Church and of the society. When family is founded in prayer life, it is also rooted in God who blesses it abundantly and family grows spiritually and materially. Spirituality of marital life is important and essential for its wellbeing. The holy family of Nazareth showed the path of a familial spirituality. A Christian family is founded on the permanent and sacred union of one man with one woman, entered into to experience their exclusive togetherness and to ensure the safe and sound begetting and upbringing of the following generation. On the one hand, family is the most influential institution of the society and on the other hand, it is like a garden with various colours of flowers where we find various kinds of personalities who live in harmony and peace making it a heaven built on the earth. Marriage and family are looked upon as forum for personality development in the persons who lie there. The Catholic family, which is privileged to experience grace of the sacramentality of marriage, has the divine duty to be an exemplary model for the society, transmitting its message of loving communion, stability, unity, sacrifice and self-giving.

Most of the issues listed above have its root in the new understanding of relationship, especially in marriage. The fundamental problem today consists in the fact that many Christians lack a clear concept of the sacredness of marriage. They fail to understand that marriage is a sign, both of God's covenant with his people and of the faithfulness of Christ and of the Church. Many Catholics lack such a clear concept of the sacramentality of marriage. Many think that keeping God away from their life brings them greater joy in life. Hence, often they choose a civil or traditional marriage. Unless and until we regain that lost sense of the sacramentality of marriage, it is difficult for Christian marriage to survive in the modern era of supercomputers and technology. When sacredness is taken away from the root of the family, nothing that takes place within the family has a higher reference. One of the effective means to recapture

the stability of families and to ensure a moral society in the future is to recognize the sacred nature of marriage.