

**Theological Studies on Saint Chavara 2**

**SAINT KURIĀKŌSE CHĀVARA**  
**A Teacher of Family Theology**



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**Saint Kuriākōse Chāvāra:  
A Teacher of Family Theology**

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## FOREWORD

# FAMILY AS THE HEAVEN ON EARTH A Theology of Family in the *Chāvarul* of Saint Chāvāra

Saju Chackalackal CMI

“This script will not perish even when I am dead and gone” (*Chāvarul*,<sup>1</sup> Introduction) was the prophetic utterance of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chāvāra, who wrote *Oru Nalla Appante Chāvarul* (*Testament of a Loving Father*, 1868), a letter addressed to his kith and kin in his native village Kainakary in Kerala. Although Indian society has witnessed myriad transformations over the last one and a half centuries, i.e., after this letter was originally written, most of the insightful directives and gentle admonitions that Saint Chāvāra offered in the *Chāvarul* remain valid for practice both at home and in the society at large. This forty paragraph-long letter dwells on the discipline to be practised at a Christian home to ensure wholesome nurturing of family as an integral unit in society and offers a set of valid principles to be followed for the grooming of children in view of their role in constituting an integral and inclusive society.

Saint Chāvāra’s intention in scripting this letter was to offer the people of Kainakary a set of definite principles and practices that would assure them a steady growth in

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<sup>1</sup>Saint Kuriakose Elias Chāvāra, *Chavarul: Testament of a Loving Father*, trans. Saju Chackalackal, Kochi: Chāvāra Central Secretariat, 2018.

their journey of faith as well as in their social grooming, which are essential for a cultured, civilized society. A closer reading of this brief work of Saint Chāvāra unveils a theologian who believed in the institutions of family and church. He was a person, who not only held firm his faith in the person of Jesus Christ and in the Church, which is a community of disciples of Jesus Christ, but also was bent on perpetuating it among the generations to come. As attempts to articulate the theological vision implied in the *Chāvarul* are being made, it is necessary that a theology of family be unscored, articulated, and disseminated simultaneously in its text and with the hope of enhancing the theology of family that the Catholic Church has been developing over the years. This is important in the light of the fact that there is no known source that predates Saint Chāvāra's *Chāvarul*, which offers a comprehensive plan for disciplining members of a Christian family as well as in grooming the children in their growth as full-fledged members of the Church.<sup>1</sup>

The Church has been holding the institution of family in high esteem, especially after the Vatican Council II, which positively qualified the family as a "domestic church" (*Lumen Gentium*, §11). The same document affirms that family, like any other state of life, shares in the perfect holiness of God the father. As a result, a positive outlook on the relevance and importance of families has been developed in the Church in the

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<sup>1</sup>A number of theological treatises on family were offered by some Fathers of the Church, such as Saint Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Saint Ambrose, Saint John Chrysostom, Saint Augustine. However, their style and intent seemed to be different.

subsequent years and the contemporary Church acclaims the vocation to family life as a unique and responsible intervention from those who constitute family and all those who animate life of the faith community. Later, in 1981, Saint John Paul II, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, affirmed the unique value of family and invited everyone "to love the family" with a hope that it could be reinstated to its prime place in the society. He wrote: "Loving the family means being able to appreciate its values and capabilities, fostering them always. Loving the family means identifying the dangers and the evils that menace it, in order to overcome them. Loving the family means endeavouring to create for it an environment favourable for its development..." (*Familiaris Consortio* §86). Raising the bar one step further, Pope Francis, in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of 2016 *Amoris Laetitia*, affirms that "family is good news indeed" (§1). Against this backdrop, it is heartening to observe that close to a century before the second Vatican Council offered an affirmative theological outlook on families and their vocation in the Church, we find Saint Chāvāra, truly considered a visionary of renaissance in Kerala, offering a solid Christian vision of families and making lasting attempts to entrench the warp and woof of families in the Church with a definite plan of action that ensures its permanence in society.

### **Vocation to Family Life**

Although his personal choice was for a celibate life of a religious priest, Saint Chāvāra positively affirmed the vocation to family life, and shared his insights and

concerns with other members of society, hoping that they, with his initial guidance, would lead good, stable, and ethical family lives for their own good as well as for the larger good of the Church and the human society. When we read the *Chāvarul* along with his other writings on religious life, we can deduce that, for Saint Chāvāra, both were honourable states of life; depending upon God's calling, one would freely choose one over the other (*Chāvarul*, 2:14).

References to certain negative situations in family life to which Saint Chāvāra makes direct or indirect references, I believe, do not denigrate the vocation to family life; instead, in all such references, we encounter an enlightened pastor who accompanies his troubled and wounded sheepfold with the hope that they would successfully tread their way of life despite its pitfalls or shortcomings, and would empower themselves to foster genuine Christian households.

Certain prominent portions of the *Chāvarul* clearly indicate that Saint Chāvāra had a very positive view about marriage and family life. We see Saint Chāvāra gratefully acknowledging the very fact of his birth, the blessed human life that was bestowed upon him by the omnipotent God through his own family (see *Chāvarul*, Dedication). Further, his enlightened definition of the family with which he opens the *Chāvarul* offers a comprehensive and constructive view on family: "A good Christian family is the image of heaven" (*Chāvarul*, Introduction). No better or constructive analogy can be found to describe the uniquely positive view of Saint Chāvāra on family.

In fact, it is true that no Christian writer has ever imagined that a good Christian family could be conceived in the image of heaven. The subsequent sentence, which defines family, clearly offers an explanation as to how a family on this earth - with all its resources and limitations - can be truly the image of heaven: "The *raison d'être* of family is that the members live together by the bond of blood and affection, with children duly obeying their parents, and respecting them and one another, walking peacefully before God and each one, seeking eternal salvation according to his or her proper state of life" (*Chāvarul*, Introduction). Indeed, it is the bond of communion - genetic as well as emotional - along with the definite goal of relentlessly "seeking eternal salvation" in accordance with each one's state of life that would enable members of a family to slowly but steadily shape an earthly-human family into a true image of heaven.

### **Communion as the Familial Foundation**

Family is a basic and critical component of how God designed the world for its social good. In its constituting process, God's inalienable character of the Trinitarian communion has become an essential ingredient of the family. Just as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit remain in communion through a dynamic relationship in which each person enhances the communion by an eternal, mutual selfless sharing of oneself with the others, a family is established, promoted, and sustained through the selfless sharing of each member with everyone else in the family, thus giving rise to the very basic but the most important unit of the society. This is implied in the

opening statement of the *Chāvarul*, which affirms that “a good Christian family is the image of heaven” (*Chāvarul*, Introduction). By offering the analogy of heaven, a good Christian family is laced at the highest realm of dynamic communion that exists in the Trinity, whose three persons together constitute the inner core of what we understand to be heaven. In this regard, by bringing it down to the earthly realm, the faithful are offered a model in the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, and their constant intercession is ensured both for the protection of families and for growing in communion that was dynamically catered in the Holy Family (*Chāvarul*, 2:1, 2).

The same dynamic communion is expressed in the very reason for the existence of family, according to the *Chāvarul*: “The *raison d’être* of family is that *the members live together by the bond of blood and affection...*” (*Chāvarul*, Introduction). Whether resulting from blood or affection, it is the communion among the members that is at the very source of the constitution of a family; if not for this communion among the members, there is no reason for its existence. As Saint John Paul II has expressed in his *Theology of Body* series, “man becomes the image of God not so much in the moment of solitude as in the moment of communion” (9.3 on 14 November 1979). Hence, just as the Trinitarian God does not exist in solitary isolation but in mutual communion, a family comes into existence in the mutual relationality of a man and woman united in marriage, and their offspring resulting from their bodily, emotional, and spiritual communion.

Communion between husband and wife, between parents and children, and among all members in a family

(including the context of a joint family) was the primary area of concern in the *Chāvarul*. The very basic matrix of family, for Saint Chāvara, was communion experienced and cultivated by the members who live their life together. Despite being cognisant of the difficulties confronting family life, he held that living together in a family, where "love, order, and peace reign" offers "the only sweet consolation." This, once again, reaffirms his basic position that families can not only aspire to be "the image of heaven" but can certainly make it happen and experience it in their daily living. In the same paragraph, he dwells on the positive traits that would enhance communion in a family, such as (1) obedience and respect of children towards parents, (2) all members "walking peacefully before God and each one," and (3) "seeking eternal salvation" according to each one's "proper state of life." Being a realistic and down-to earth pastor, he also refers to the most distressing situation in family life where communion among the members is adversely affected by disorder, where discord becomes the rule of the day. According to him, it is an unfortunate situation where no one bothers about "the service of God and their own eternal salvation." Once familial communion is lost, not only would holding together the family on the horizontal plain be in peril, but their vertical aspirations would also be jeopardized.

Saint Chāvara seems to have been convinced of the fact that the vocation of every Christian family is to facilitate an experience of communion through the conscious efforts of each member. For, according to him, in the absence of practising this communion, a genuine

Christian family does not get established. Hence, we find in the *Chāvarul* repeated instructions to practise communion both within the family and in the extended family of the society. For example, his criticism of a person who began amassing wealth for himself and the endless spending of his resources to treat his own ailments offers a clarion call to empathy and compassion in a human being, so as to share the resources with the needy and not to be carried away by the selfish interests to live for oneself (*Chāvarul*, 1:15). There is a constant going out of oneself, a selfless movement, which is at the root of any communion in the family. Indeed, a family grows explicitly into a domestic church only when communion results from the selfless acts of each member, a typical act reflecting the communion in the Trinity (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §959).

The insistence of the *Chāvarul* in following a daily discipline (*Chāvarul*, 1:24) and the instructions offered for the grooming of children in the second part of the *Chāvarul* revolve around fostering a dynamic communion within the family. As we survey these instructions, we realize that they cover both the spiritual and mundane realms, ensuring that everyone as well as everything is fine-tuned to foster communion within the family and the larger society. Through his instructions on grooming the children the Christian way, Saint Chāvāra places mutual self-sacrifice and life-giving love as of highest importance in becoming a full-fledged member in the family.

The same communion, however, is negatively expressed in Saint Chāvāra's admonition that if children were to be lost in hell, parents would be held responsible



(*Chāvarul*, 2:1). Interestingly, referring to Saint Origen, he insists that even the eternal salvation of parents cannot be assured if their children were to be condemned to hell due to the negligence of parents in grooming and guiding their children on the right path of faith and morals. Positively, the dynamic communion that shapes the foundation of a family is expressed in the closing sentence in the same paragraph: "God will receive a mother's petition as that of her baby." It is the spiritual communion that exists between parents and children that is brought to focus in this statement. It is not only the leadership of the mother and the father that is highlighted, but their fundamental spiritual communion with their offspring in the presence of God. A call to foster spiritual communion between parents and their children is a telling instance of experiencing the Trinitarian communion within the family context.

In line with the above understanding of fostering communion within the family and among members in the larger society, the *Chāvarul* offers us further insights, especially calling our attention to cultivate relationships with "orderly and God-fearing relatives" (*Chāvarul*, 1:8). A similar feeling is shared in the subsequent paragraph, which insists that at home we shall not entertain all sorts of people, but shall "receive only those who are well-mannered and God-fearing" (*Chāvarul*, 1:9; see also 1:19). It is categorically stated that "those who do not love God will not truly love you either" (*Chāvarul*, 1:16). Hence, even those who are employed by a family should necessarily be God-fearing, and they should be offered spiritual grooming to ensure that their presence also will

enhance the Christian communion whatever be the type of work they engage in (*Chāvarul*, 1:23). Moreover, it is clear from repeated passages in the *Chāvarul* that the communion to be realized in a family and in the Christian community is not forged by our company with anyone, disregarding their character and state of life, but only with those whose behaviour itself is refined and those who treat their faith in Jesus Christ as the most serious matter in life.

### **Mutual Collaboration for a Flourishing Family**

A family born and sustained in mutual love should naturally be a collaborating family. In fact, it is contingent upon a flourishing family to collaborate with each other. It is generally believed that mutual collaboration between the parents enhances the ability of their children to develop a collaborating approach, which is a crucial factor in the upbringing of the children and the ensuing social cohesion in the wider society. Saint Chāvāra's insistence that both the mother and the father should respect each other (*Chāvarul*, 2:9) stems from his conviction that it would lead not only to a loving relationship in the family and a model to the youngsters who are nurtured by them, but also will generate a much necessary ambience of constant collaboration within the whole family.

*Chāvarul* endorses equality of partners in marriage and their mutually enhancing existence (*Chāvarul*, 2:9). For example, instead of following a male chauvinistic language of a patriarchal tradition in referring to the head of the family as 'father', Saint Chāvāra prefers and

repeatedly employs the expression 'parents'. This is an inclusive expression, which considers the role and responsibility of both mother and father as complementary, and not exclusive in a negative and restricted sense. Moreover, instruction with regard to the grooming of children in the *Chāvarul* are very clear in that it should be carried out only through the collaboration and interdependence of both mother and father.

With regard to the equal status of marital partners, *Chāvarul* offers us an insight in the instruction for mutual respect between the parents. It states: "The mother should set an example to the children in respecting and honouring the father; so shall the father teach the children by his example to love and respect the mother" (*Chāvarul*, 2:9). Indeed, the role of the parents is seen in mutuality, and one is not placed over the other. Saint Chāvāra is categorical in insisting that parents should respect each other (*Chāvarul*, 2:9). Both of them, therefore, are responsible for developing a relationship that underlines their equality as well as mutually respectful life. The sacrifices to be made for constituting a Christian family are applicable to both mother and father on an equal footing.

Although some injunctions of Saint Chāvāra give an impression that girl children in the family should be restricted from proudly showing themselves off, especially by "dressing them up in expensive costumes and ornaments beyond their status and means," and that these daughters must adorn themselves with "modesty, piety, silence, and control of eyes" (*Chāvarul*, 2:12; see also 2:11), when it comes to their education as well as faith journey, both girls and boys are seen as equal partners

(see, for example, *Chāvarul*, 2:11, 14, 16). Hence, the restrictions imposed on girls should be seen as proposals to safeguard their status in the society and to ensure that they present themselves to the society on par with the temporal and spiritual welfare of the family; moreover, this prescription can also be seen as pertaining to the economic and social standing of the families, than a restriction placed on all girls. However, boys being excluded from this injunction probably attests to a prejudice that Saint Chāvāra shared with his nineteenth century conservative Kerala society against letting girls adorn and exhibit themselves in the society.

In the opening paragraph of the first part on “Precepts for Families,” Saint Chāvāra draws our attention to “a family that experiences discord and fight among its members” (*Chāvarul*, 1:1). Such a family would perish as it does not experience mutual understanding and love, where members are not ready to forgive each other; hence, it is categorically stated: “Woe unto those who cause quarrels in families!” (*Chāvarul*, 1:1). Further, we see the *Chāvarul* reprimanding us from proceeding for civil litigations (*Chāvarul*, 1:2), as they would ruin the relationship among the siblings and would kill any incentive for mutual collaboration among the members of a family. Moreover, while dealing with business, which Saint Chāvāra considers to be risky for the soul, he affirms that “riches amassed by fraud and deceit will melt away like snow” (*Chāvarul*, 1:13), meaning that any dishonest or unjust means will only lead us into ruin; here he implies that dishonest and unjust business will not only jeopardize the future of the soul, but will

adversely affect the mutual collaboration in the family, the home, as well as the society. Similarly, it is stated that company with thieves and those who misappropriate others wealth or property should be shunned (*Chāvarul*, 1:17). Laziness and its consequent alcoholic addiction were considered reprehensible (*Chāvarul*, 1:12), as they would incapacitate a person from meaningful relationships and creative engagement in the society. Positively approached, this situation can be redeemed only by cultivating an attitude of mutual collaboration within the family on a daily basis. An effort to promote labour in accordance with one's state of life (*Chāvarul*, 1:12) and the practice of charity on a regular basis among members of a family (*Chāvarul*, 1:14) take us a step forward to ensure that selfless collaboration becomes the lifeline of family as well as the society at large.

In this context, *Chāvarul* draws our attention to mutual respect as an attitude that would play a key role in enabling us to be effectively collaborative. The very text of the *Testament* was written in the context of deep respect that Saint Chāvāra felt towards his kith and kin in Kainakary. Instead of looking down upon them from a higher status that he had attained in his religious and priestly state of life, it is with much love and respect that he decides to accompany and promote them in their daily living context of the family. This respect that he felt towards the people made him cherish that they are his successors in the lineage of *blood and affection* (*Chāvarul*, Dedication and Introduction). In his definition of the family, given in the Introduction, Saint Chāvāra calls for due respect and obedience towards the parents. It is the

same attitude that is clearly visible in his insistence to “forgive the mistakes and shortcomings of each other.” Further, as insisted by the *Chāvarul*, “the honour and blessing of a family lies in coexisting without any quarrels and to be on good terms with everyone” (*Chāvarul*, 1:1). In addition, we also find an injunction insisting that there shall be no scope for any “indecent talk, unchristian conversations, grumbling, and uncharitable criticism of neighbours or anyone else” within a family (*Chāvarul*, 1:10; see also 1:19). Thus, when bad habit of hurting others is avoided and mutual respect is cultivated among member a family, they will succeed in maintaining cordial relationship as well as in building up an ambience for creative collaboration in all matters. Paying the just wages to the labourers or respecting the poor (*Chāvarul*, 1:18), and according due respect to one’s own parents and elders (*Chāvarul*, 2:9, 11) are noble expressions that are capable of establishing strong social bonding and ongoing collaboration in the human community.

### **Children as God’s Endowments in the Family**

Although a restricted form of family comes into existence through the marriage between a man and a woman, united together in a covenantal relationship within the Church (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §1601), its full flourishing occurs only when children are born, thus transforming the man and the woman into father and mother and elevating them together as parents. In his Dedication to the *Chāvarul*, we find Saint Chāvāra gratefully acknowledging the very fact of his existence, owing its source both towards the omnipotent and merciful God and his parents. The

affirmation of the *Chāvarul* that "children are sacred treasures entrusted to [parents] by God Almighty" (*Chāvarul*, 2:1; see also Ps 127:3-5) clearly focuses on the fact that children are a gratuitous endowment of God to the family; therefore, each family has the responsibility to ensure that conscious efforts are made to "sanctify them." Along this line of thought, we find the *Chāvarul* taking a position that family offers the best schooling in character (*Chāvarul*, 2:3, 5). It is found reiterated by *Familiaris Consortio*: "The family is the first and fundamental school of social living: as a community of love, it finds in self-giving the law that guides it and makes it grow. The self-giving that inspires the love of husband and wife for each other is the model and norm for the self-giving that must be practised in the relationships between brothers and sisters and the different generations living together in the family" (§37).

One of the intentions that Saint Chāvāra had in offering us the second part of the *Chāvarul* on the upbringing of children, I believe, is to ensure that before they emerge in the society as adults, they are made to assume responsibility for their lives and to be spiritually equipped as mature Christians (*Chāvarul*, 2:8). As their socio-cultural as well as religio-moral formation is responsibly exercised in the family, Saint Chāvāra insisted that children be well-groomed and both independent and responsible. As parents are not expected to be around all the time, the nurturing process, especially the choice of one's own state of life or life's calling (*Chāvarul*, 1:14; see also *Lumen Gentium*, §11 and *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §1656) is conceived to be revolving around making oneself self-

disciplined and self-reliant in relation to a family and community of Christian disciples.

Although there might be various agencies and platforms, including the parish and various local forums that may offer opportunities for the formation of children, parents cannot shy away from their responsibility in nurturing their children in faith and morals. Indeed, 'home' cannot be replaced by any other provision; home is home when it comes to the formation of gentle human beings as well as genuine and virtuous Christian disciples. Hence, the Church and clergy should not create mechanisms to replace families in the formation of children; instead, they must create mechanisms that would empower families in general, and parents in particular, to assume their responsibilities in the grooming of their children and to discharge their duties in this regard focusing on their integral wellbeing in Christian faith and civility.<sup>1</sup>

While each family aims at the sanctification of their children, *Chāvarul* calls for a plan of action to nurture a virtuous character among them. Children should be naturally initiated in the practice of religion, which is

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<sup>1</sup>In Deut 6:4-7, Moses clearly considers home as the most important facility to transmit the truth revealed by God. Later, in the New Testament, Lk 2:51-52 affirms that Jesus, as a young boy, submitted himself in obedience to his parents and grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man. If parents value their Christian faith, naturally home would be the best school for grooming their children in faith in Christ, which will have its implications for the family and the larger society. See also *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §1657.



analogically equated with the nutritious food that is provided to children to take care of their bodies (*Chāvarul*, 2:2). There is also an injunction to ensure that unbecoming conversations and gossip be avoided in the presence of children (*Chāvarul*, 2:3); even though children may not seem to follow the conversations of the grown-ups, practically their attentive minds practically pick up not only vocabularies but also value perceptions and virtuous practices from the verbal and non-verbal communications made in their presence. It is a great psychological insight that as their young minds are gradually formed, children should be provided with the best ambience for their positive grooming. Hence, *Chāvarul* calls for restrictions upon both letting children sleep in the bedroom of their parents and boys and girls sleeping in the same room (*Chāvarul*, 2:4). Caution is also called for letting children go out of the sight of parents, including letting them in the exclusive company of servants or sending them away to relatives' homes (*Chāvarul*, 2:5, 7).

As children are the endowments received by parents, and as children grow up in their company, nurturing them in humanity is an essential task entrusted with the latter. To this effect, *Chāvarul* enjoins them to ensure that "as soon as the children come of age, they should be sent to school" (*Chāvarul*, 2:6). Offering them the best possible education and monitoring their progress in studies as well as the relationships they maintain are also necessary ingredients in fulfilling parental responsibility. As children must be prepared to face their lives and to be self-reliant by way of securing a career and forming a family for themselves, children should be closely

accompanied by the parents to ensure that a realistic futuristic plan is developed as they grow up in age and maturity. A similar approach is also proposed in matters religious, especially to assume responsibility for their own lives and the faith that they profess in Jesus Christ; hence, as they reach the age of reason, along with the education imparted, they should also be trained to approach the confessional (*Chāvarul*, 2:8) and to mend themselves in grace even if they are subject to setbacks in life through their conscious choices, which may even tend to be vicious in nature. While it is admitted that each child is an adult in the making, parents (and the larger society) have a role to ensure that they are offered opportunities that mediate God's presence and grace to which they could fall back as and when required.

Saint Chāvāra had a positive outlook on the grooming of children and, hence, he calls for a middle path in disciplining them at home and in other contexts. *Chāvarul* affirms that "both extreme strictness and too much leniency towards children are evil" (*Chāvarul*, 2:9; see also 1:15). Saint Chāvāra proposes that enforcing extreme strictness, expressed in the form of excessive anger and punishment, "will lead to lack of trust, shamelessness, and intellectual incompetence" among children; similarly, too much leniency exhibited in the form of unregulated affection "will make them proud." In this context, what is called forth is a context-sensitive response from parents, whereby they will discern a middle path by which they can accompany their children and offer them the best disciplined path conducive for their integral growth. It is interesting to note that parents are asked to have a

respectful attitude towards their children (*Chāvarul*, 2:3, 9). For, instead of starting with corporal punishments to discipline children, parents are asked to "honourably advise [children]" with some restrictions on their food or movement. Moreover, any attempt to abuse children should be avoided, as it may only develop resistance on their part, leading to the possible danger of themselves repeating the unbecoming and abusive ways of dealing with their children in future.

The same positive approach is seen in the insistence of the *Chāvarul* to "teach [children] to hold truth and justice in high esteem" (*Chāvarul*, 2:10). This important injunction is offered in the context of some parents training children in "lying or cheating, or other shadowy tricks" considering that it is normal for anyone "to survive in this world." However, strict instruction is given by the *Chāvarul* to counter such practices widely prevalent in the society by asking parents to "rebuke and correct them" when they encounter any such unbecoming practices among their children. The family and society that the *Chāvarul* visualizes should be firmly built on the principles of truth and justice; lest, it will not be a Christian family or society at all (see also *Amoris Laetitia*, §311; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §2487). Christian families must initiate a formative process among children by way of offering "a model of life based on the values of truth, freedom, justice and love – both through active and responsible involvement in the authentically human growth of society and its institutions..." (*Familiaris Consortio*, §48). Moreover, ability to hold on to truth and justice will not only enhance their ability to lead an

integral Christian life but also will have an enhanced understanding of respect for the personal dignity of themselves and everyone else they associate with (*Familiaris Consortio*, §37).

As children are more vulnerable to influences, we must ensure that they are offered an ambience of growth that is equally free and open as well as restricted and disciplined. We don't aim at their 'wild' growth, but careful nurturing of their talents and grooming of the person, who is both a responsible civil person and a proactive Christian disciple placed both in the family and in the society.

### **Goal of Christian Family**

Advocating the position that a family bound together in *blood and affection* orients itself towards the realization of eternal salvation (*Chāvarul*, Introduction), Saint Chāvāra places family on an unparalleled to facilitate experience of God's grace for the whole human race. Although no explicit mention is made about the marital bond and sexual union between married partners, Saint Chāvāra's reference to family as consisting of members living "together by *the bond of blood and affection*" is a clear affirmation of his positive outlook on the biological and emotional constitution of the family, which, for him, is basically a providential act of God in the life of the family through the bonding persons (refer *Chāvarul*, 2:14). An affirmative outlook on familial bond can be seen throughout the *Chāvarul*; at the same time, Saint Chāvāra offers his considered insights - inspired by his first-hand experience with members of the family both inside and

outside the confessional and his wide reading and extensive interaction with people from various walks of life – to further enhance the good that can be realized through family life.

As a family consists of parents and their children, it is also a nurturing ground of the faith of children. The entire *Chāvarul* can be viewed as a programme of life to ensure that every family sets itself as a model in Christian living. As it is expressed by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, "... in a world often alien and even hostile to faith, believing families are of primary importance as centres of living, radiant faith" (§1656). Hence, one of the explicit goals of leading family life is to offer credible life-witness to the children both by parents and any other elder living with them. In fact, parents, wherever they are and whatever they do, must consciously promote the proclamation of their Christian faith in their word and deed (*Chāvarul*, 1:1; see also *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §1666). A family is an ideal ground to germinate and nurture a personal relationship with the person of Jesus Christ, provided each child is given an opportunity to encounter Him within the family bond.

The plan of action chartered by Saint Chāvāra in grooming children – though he obviously prefers the development of a civilized way of life – aims at bringing them up in Christian faith, thus having set a clear goal on their citizenship in the world to come, and not merely for an acceptable life in the socio-cultural realm of a civilized society. In the first paragraph of the second part of the *Chāvarul*, for example, we see a clear injunction to the same effect: "You should also remember ... the Day of

Judgement” (*Chāvarul*, 2:1). At the same time, Saint Chāvāra maintains that a virtuous state of life is clearly applicable in our life in the society. As to the instructions offered, he insists that children should “hold truth and justice in high esteem” (*Chāvarul*, 2:10) and should design a social life accordingly. In fact, he does not endorse them merely as social virtues, but key elements of Christian life inspired by the Gospel values. Although the *Chāvarul* does not explicitly employ the expression, the overall goal of the instructions on grooming the children in a family is focused on cultivating Christian discipleship through the initiation of children in daily family prayer, regular attendance of the Church, ongoing practice of Gospel values, etc.

As we have already seen above, every member of the family who attempts to avoid sin and disorder (*Chāvarul*, Introduction) and instead foster the love of God (*Chāvarul*, 1:16), and relationship with God-fearing persons (*Chāvarul*, 1:8, 9, 19, 23), and total reliance in God’s providence (*Chāvarul*, 1:20), which are insistently prescribed by Saint Chāvāra clearly exhibit an eschatological orientation in the existential situations of Christian families.

*Chāvarul*, Testament of a Loving Father, was drawn up by Saint Chāvāra and handed down to the subsequent generations of believers with great hope for and a positive outlook on the human society in general and Christian families in particular. Following the lead offered by the *Chāvarul*, families in the contemporary society should appropriate its outlook and hope, so that each family would realize its mission in the world. As a family is placed in the world to proclaim the Gospel, first, to its own

members and, then, to the rest of the world, it becomes necessary for every contemporary family to follow a set of time-tested guidelines with an eye on the attainment of the common good as its immediate goal, and to ultimately aim at the eternal salvation of all its members.

In the context of the foregoing attempt to articulate a theology of family from the *Chāvarul*, the present work, namely, *Saint Kuriakose Chāvāra: A Teacher of Family Theology* by Father George Kaniarakath CMI offers an inspiring commentary on *Testament of a Loving Father (Oru Nalla Appante Chāvarul)*, which was written by Saint Kuriakose Elias Chāvāra and handed over to his kith and kin in Kainakary, Kerala. *Chāvarul*, though written 150 years ago, continues to inspire generations and offers a precise and meaningful description of a true Christian family, with a few touching personal notes and directions that aim at enforcing a family code (or *Kudumbachattam*) for better effectiveness in realizing its vocation. Its second part offers a set of directives for the upbringing of children in families, aiming at grooming them to be mature and God-fearing Christians who would be responsible citizens in the civil society as well. Based on an analysis offered in this work of Father Kaniarakath, which is published under the "Theological Studies on Saint Chāvāra" series, *Chāvarul* is confirmed to be "a masterpiece manual on Christian family spirituality."

*Saint Kuriakose Chāvāra: A Teacher of Family Theology* by Father George Kaniarakath offers an interesting study on the *Chāvarul*, interpreting its text to address the needs of the contemporary times. Being a simple and straightforward work on the theology of family by Saint

Chāvāra, this book offers an uncomplicated reading. Father George Kaniarakath, an expert in biblical studies, has enriched the discussion by offering connections of the *Chāvarul* to the biblical sources, particularly to that of Ben Sira; moreover, his attempt to also dwell on the theological vision of families among the Fathers of the Church will be insightful to a reader. As the theological vision of family is analysed in detail in this work and its contemporary relevance is reaffirmed in the light of his discussion on the “General Principles on Family” (chapter 2), “Wise Management of Property” (chapter 3), and “Grooming of Children” (chapter 4), Father Kaniarakath underlines his position that Saint Kuriakose Elias Chāvāra is “a teacher or doctor of family theology and spirituality in the Church.”

I congratulate Father George Kaniarakath for his insightful work *Saint Kuriakose Chāvāra: A Teacher of Family Theology*, which is an excellent attempt in articulating the theological vision behind the injunctions offered in the *Chāvarul*. May this scientific study on the *Chāvarul* receive wide readership and stir ongoing discussions on the vocation of family in the contemporary Church and society.

Echoing the invitation of Saint John Paul II in his *Familiaris Consortio*, namely, “... Family, become what you are” (§17), it is my closing wish and prayer that each Christian family, following the aspirations of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chāvāra in the *Chāvarul*, slowly and steadily succeed in appropriating the image of heaven on earth, both for its own members, particularly its children, and for the whole human race.



## PREFACE

As an aspirant at Mannanam, I was very much fascinated by our Founding Fathers Thomas Palackal, Thomas Porukkara and especially Kuriākōse Chāvāra, who was a great preacher and writer. He had a wonderful devotion to the Holy Family and, consequently, a deep consideration for the Christian family. Indeed, he understood the importance of the family in the plan of God and so he wrote a letter to his relatives and parishioners in Kainakary, which he himself qualified as his 'Final Testament'.

After becoming a priest, and a student of the Bible, I wished to call the attention of the faithful to this unique letter as a gift of Saint Chāvāra to his people and through them to the whole world. Earlier, I was tempted to make an exegesis of the letter as we do with the Pauline letters and the result was published in *Herald of the East*.<sup>1</sup>

I am immensely happy that I was asked to write a commentary on the letter of Saint Chāvāra and am very thankful to Fr. Saju Chackalackal CMI, General Councillor for Evangelization and Pastoral Ministry, for editing and making it ready for publication by the Chāvāra Central Secretariat in a series of publications under the title "Theological Studies on Saint Chāvāra."

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<sup>1</sup>Kaniarakath, George, "St Kuriākōse Chāvāra: A Teacher of Family Theology - A Reading in the Light of Ben Sira," *Herald of the East* 13, 2 (2017), 165-182.

May Our Lord Jesus Christ through the intercession of Saint Chāvāra inspire all our readers and well-wishers with the Jesuan family values of joy, peace, hope and love!

Feast of Saint Paul  
29 June 2019

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## Chapter 1

### SETTINGS OF THE 'TESTAMENT'

#### 1.1. Concern for Family

Saint Kuriākōse Ēlias Chāvarā was an ascetic, who lived in a monastery with others praying and doing penance and, simultaneously, engaged in pastoral activities when needed. The members like Father Thomas Palackal, Father Thomas Porukkara and Brother Jacob Kaniyanthara did not understand their consecrated life as a *fuga mundi* (fleeing the world). They were not simply concerned about their own salvation but were also deeply involved in bringing others closer to God. Saint Kuriākōse's homilies and even his writings were meant for the spiritual enlightenment and growth of the community in which he and his companions lived. He was especially concerned about the family which he understood as the "first and vital cell of society," which is "to be the domestic sanctuary of the Church through the mutual affection of its members and the common prayer they offer to God..."<sup>1</sup>

Chāvara's theological understanding and teaching on family is succinctly but beautifully articulated in his Testament, *Oru Nalla Appante Chāvarul* or "The Farewell Words of a Good Father," which he wrote to

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<sup>1</sup>Vatican II, *The Laity*, 11.

his people in Kainakary,<sup>1</sup> and which is unique in different ways. The letter written by the Saint, originally addressed to the people of Kainakēry, on 13 February 1868 is an explicit and rather complete treatise on family in the Church in the language and style of Ben Sira. In the year 2018, the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the letter was meaningfully observed in different places and institutions across India.

### **1.2. Some Characteristic Features of the Letter**

The letter does not have a formal introduction or conclusion as it is not a formal treatise, but a last written exhortation to his people on the key human fact of family life in the form of a very personal letter. Of course, the author ends the letter with a touching Japanese story in which one of the three brothers was declared as robber by the other two before the authorities so that they could win the promised reward for identifying the culprit and thus winning the promised reward with which they could feed their mother who was in utter poverty. But the plot was found out and the brother was spared and the two brothers were rewarded by the authorities.

After the main body of the letter and the signing off at the end, there is an appendix,<sup>2</sup> which is not part of

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<sup>1</sup>In the Bible, we have the final and touching words of Jacob (Gen 49:1-27), Moses (Deut 33:1-29), Paul to the Elders of Ephesus (Acts 20:18-25), and Jesus (Jn 13: 31-16:33).

<sup>2</sup>However, in the *Chāvarayachante Kathukal* (ed. Thomas Panthap-läckal and Jossy, Kakkanad, Kochi: Chāvāra Central Secretariat,

the letter. However, it offers a few touching personal notes and directions that enforce the contents of the *Kudumbachattam* (family code) in a very special way. Here the saint recalls that he belongs to the parish of Chēnnankary from the family of Chāvāra from which he was born in the providence of God. He feels sorry that he was not able to do anything special for his family members and those who are his children in biological and spiritual ways and so offers the letter written by his own hands as an immortal treasure for them. The people are to receive it as his last testament and, as he instructed them in the letter, copies are to be made and distributed, and it is to be the token of being his followers. All the innumerable graces that they have received and are receiving now, according to him, are not only the consequence of their action but also of the charity and hope of their faithful parents. The letter, he willed, will be read on every first Saturday of the month, and this was the only act of commemoration by his kith and kin that he wished for himself after his death. Further, after its monthly reading, he also requested them that they would earnestly recite a little prayer for him: "May the soul of your servant be acceptable to You!"

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2011), puts it as an introduction to the letter, without any justification. But we follow the earlier edition of *Mānnānam*, 1982 by Lukas Vithuvattickal. Besides, we think that the appendix is an important opening to the heart of the Saint.

### 1.3. Human Family and Its Purpose

The letter gives a precise and meaningful description of family. He wrote: “A good Christian family is the image of heaven. Its *raison d’être* (justification = *nyāy*) is that those related by bonds of blood and love live together respecting and obeying the parents peacefully before God and people, seeking eternal salvation according to each one’s state of life” (*Chāvarul*, Introduction). A similar picture is drawn by Ben Sira<sup>1</sup> in his own typical way: “I take pleasure in three things, and they are beautiful in the sight of God: agreement among brothers and sisters, friendship among neighbours, and a wife and husband who live in harmony” (25:1). Both these texts speak about the involvement of God and the mutual love that is to keep the family members together in harmony and the note on joy among them is impressive. Both speak about the involvement of God and the mutual love that is to keep the family members together in harmony. The stress on joy, which Pope Francis emphasizes in his Apostolic

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<sup>1</sup>Ben Sira or Sirach (Sir) Ecclesiasticus presents teachings that are applicable to all conditions of life: to parents and children, to husbands and wives, to the young, to masters, to friends, to the rich, and to the poor. Many of them are rules of courtesy and politeness; and a still greater number contain advice and instruction as to the duties of a person toward oneself and others, especially the poor, as well as toward society and the state, and most of all toward God. These precepts are arranged in verses, which are grouped according to their outward form. The sections are preceded by eulogies of wisdom that serve as introductions and mark the divisions into which the collection falls.

Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, is impressive.<sup>1</sup> The letter is described by the author as a *Chattam* or code, which is to be received and ever kept as a memorial and legacy of the forefathers. It gives twenty-four directions on family life in general, and is followed by another set of sixteen instructions on the upbringing of children. Thus, together these two sets constitute the biblically significant number forty.<sup>2</sup>

The instructions are biblical, theological, and above all highly pastoral;<sup>3</sup> the style of writing is simple with memory devices like similes and stories, and anecdotes are ample; the biblical thinking behind the letter is discernible, though direct references are not found.

The main body of the letter has two parts: the first part presents the general principles constituting a Christian family and its economic concerns and the

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<sup>1</sup>Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia (Joy of Love): Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation*, 19 March 2016.

<sup>2</sup>The number 40 is symbolic and significant in many biblical passages referring to a journey of probation or difficulties. To be noted is that the Israelites were in the desert for 40 years before reaching the Promised Land (Num 4:34; 32:13; Acts 7:30); Prophet Elijah, fleeing from Jezebel, had to journey 40 days to reach Mount Horeb (1 Kings 19:8); and Jesus fasted 40 days, recalling the people in the desert. Life is often compared to a journey of trials; 40 is also the period of a generation (Num 32:13). Hence, what Chāvāra gives is the *torāh* or instruction for family life, which is a journey of probation beset with temptations and trials.

<sup>3</sup>Our preferred text is *Chāvāra Kuriākōse Ēliyāsachante Sampoorṇa Krthikal*, vol 4: *Kathukal*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Malayālam), ed. Lukas Vithuvattickal, Mānnānam: CMI Prasādakha Committee, 1986, which agrees with the former editions.

second part treats the important question of the upbringing of children.

## **2. Chāvāra's Inspirations**

### **2.1. The Home Background**

Saint Chāvāra must have been deeply impressed and inspired above all by his own family background, especially that of his beloved mother about whom he has written some very revealing facts in the first two chapters of his partially autobiographical poem *My Compunction, Ātmānutāpam*.<sup>1</sup> Herein he recalls his mother Mariyamma Thōppil, who nourished him with the names of Jesus, Mary and Joseph along with her own milk. He should have experienced real human love in an atmosphere in which the awe-inspiring presence of God was a reality for him. In these chapters, the saint narrates also how, though unworthy, God showered on him manifold graces and how he felt great compunction for being unworthy and even for failing to cooperate with the Lord completely. The rest of the poem elaborates on the life of Jesus and Mary with some personal reflections.

### **2.2. The Biblical Vision of Family**

The concept of family is extremely important in the Bible, both in physical and theological senses. The theme of family is introduced in the very beginning of creation, as we see it in Genesis 1:28: "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in

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<sup>1</sup>*Complete Works of Blessed Chāvāra, II/CSK II, 1989.*



number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." "Then the Lord God said: "It is not good that man should be alone. I will make a helper as his partner... Therefore, a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Gen 2:15-16, 24). God's plan for humans was that men and women should marry and have children. A man and a woman would form "one-flesh," namely, a union through marriage (Gen 2:24), and they, along with their children, become a family, which is the essential building block of human society. The Jews see in the statement "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fertile and increase, fill the earth,'" as the first of the 613 laws of the commandments.<sup>1</sup>

The teachings of Ben Sira are highly relevant and applicable to parents and children, to husbands and wives, to the young, to masters, to friends, to the rich, and to the poor. Many of them are rules of courtesy and politeness; and a still greater number contain advice and instruction as to the duties of a person toward oneself and others, especially the poor, as well as toward society and the state, and most of all toward God. Again, we have Psalm 45, which is a matrimonial hymn, and the book of the Song of Songs dramatises the love between a lover and his beloved. What we

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<sup>1</sup>*The Torah: A Modern Commentary*, ed. W. G. Plaut, New York: 1962, 20.

have in this book in chapter 8:6 is remarkable: “Set as a seal upon your arm your heart; for love is strong as death; passion fierces as the grave. Its flashes are of fire, a raging flame.”

Psalm 128 points to some blessings of the family life<sup>1</sup> which are based on the fear of God. Evidently, this Psalm is a rich wisdom meditation on the family. With a blessing for those who fear the Lord, the Psalm opens a description of the family and concludes also with the fear of God and Divine blessing, and enjoyment of life (vv. 1, 4). In verses 3-4, we have a beautiful picture of the family at home around the table with father, mother and children. The message is that families make towns and towns make a nation. The heavenly joy and peace are experienced in the family. The book of Tobit emphasises loving relationships between parents and children (4:3-4; 1:12; 14:13), with some beautiful lessons on the purity of marriage (8:5-8), decent burial even to the condemned (1:17-18; 2:3-4; 12:13), the value of almsgiving, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and praying and fasting (1:16-17; 2:2; 3:16; 4:8-11; 12:8-9). The parting words of Tobit are remarkable: “Now, my children, I give you this advice: serve God and do what is pleasing in his sight. Teach your children how to do what is right and how to give arms. Teach them also to remember God, and to bless

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<sup>1</sup>Pope Francis highlights this aspect of family in *Amoris Laetitia (Joy of Love)*, 2016, §1.1.

his name sincerely at all times, with their strength" (14:8).<sup>1</sup>

The importance of family in the Bible is evident also in the provisions of the Mosaic covenant. Two of the Ten Commandments<sup>2</sup> deal with maintaining the cohesiveness of the family. The fifth commandment regarding honouring parents is meant to preserve the authority of parents in family matters, and the seventh commandment prohibiting adultery protects the sanctity of marriage.

This vision of the family is continued in the Second Testament<sup>3</sup> which affirms many of the same commands and prohibitions. Jesus speaks about the sanctity of marriage and against frivolous divorce in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 19. The Apostle Paul talks about what should happen in Christian homes when he gives the twin commands, namely, "children, obey your parents" and "parents, don't provoke your children" (Eph 6:1-4 and Col 3:20-21). The 'great mystery' of marriage that demands total commitment in mutual love is compared to the love of Jesus for the Church (Eph 5:22-33).

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<sup>1</sup>Tobit is an edifying story in the Bible written probably around 200 BCE in wisdom style.

<sup>2</sup>In Hebrew, literally it means "Ten Words" (Ex 34:28; Deut 4:13, 10:4)

<sup>3</sup>Following the general trend today, we call the Old Testament, First Testament and the New Testament, Second Testament.

### **2.3. Devotion to the Holy Family**

A notable characteristic of Saint Kuriākōse's spirituality is devotion to the Holy Family. Of course, we do not find any reference to the family of Nazareth in the Church as a unit of society until around the beginning of the seventeenth century, mainly because the idea of family was much wider than the way we think of it today. The Bible speaks about the family which includes all the people under the authority of the head of the house, including relatives and servants.<sup>1</sup> Saint Bernardine of Siena (1380-1444) seems to have, for the first time, used the term 'Holy Family' in reference to Jesus, Mary and Joseph as early as in 1440. The authors before the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth used the words 'Trinity', 'earthly Trinity' or 'created Trinity'. Thereafter the Holy Family came to be seen as an ideal, though inimitable, and was promoted as a compelling witness to the greatness of the institution of family. The incarnation of Jesus, which is a unique event, happened in this family chosen by God. Mary and Joseph fulfilled their vocation within the framework of a family in the holy relationship, which they had between themselves and with the Son of God. This family of Nazareth inspires Christian families today to be communities of praise and love, who live on the earth as pilgrims on their way towards God, their heavenly Father.

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<sup>1</sup>Here we follow Annie Hayde, "The Holy Family: Emerging of Devotion" (Internet).

To the members of the congregation gathered around his deathbed Saint Kuriākōse said: "In many ways my parents impressed on me a great regard for the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph." Then, pointing to the picture that he has been venerating for years, he continued: "In this way I have ever kept and honoured the Holy Family in my heart and mind; thus, their help has ever been available o me. By God's grace, I feel confident to say that with their help, I never had an occasion of losing the grace I received in baptism. I dedicate this humble congregation and all its members to this Holy Family. Keep your trust in the Blessed Family: may they reign in your hearts!"<sup>1</sup>

### 3. The Vision of Early Fathers

The early Fathers Saint Clement of Alexandria (15-215), Tertullian (155-230), Saint John Chrysostom (344-407) in the East, and Saint Augustine (354-430) in the West, especially through his *On the Good of Marriage* (401 ACE), have made important contributions towards Christian understanding of the family. John Chrysostom, through his two letters to his friend Theodore,<sup>2</sup> sermons<sup>1</sup> and four treatises concerning

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<sup>1</sup>Valerian, in his biography of the saint in Malayalam, *Malankara Sabhāmāthāvinte Oru Veera Santhānam, Athavā (andhya) Divyasree Kuriākōse Ēliyāchan (Jeevacharithram)*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2012, Männānam: 2012, 315; Moolayil in *Positio*, 548, and cited in M. Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriākōse Eliās Chāvāra*, Bangalore, 2008, 390-391.

<sup>2</sup>*Patrologia Graeca*, 47:277-316; W. R. W. Stephens, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, New York: 1889, 9:87-116.

widowhood, marriage, and education of children,<sup>2</sup> has presented a rather comprehensive theology of the family.

### **3.1. The Family Vison of Saint John Chrysostom**

Based on the Bible, especially on the Pauline Letters, Saint John Chrysostom presents a solid theology on family. In the conclusion of to his Homily II on Col 3:18, we read: “Adorn the bride not with these ornaments that are made of gold, but with gentleness and modesty, and the customary robes; in place of all golden ornaments and braiding, arraying her in blushes, and shamefacedness, and the not desiring such things. Let there be no uproar, no confusion; let the bridegroom be called, let him receive the virgin. The dinners and suppers, let them not be full of drunkenness, but of abundance and pleasure. See how many good things will result, whenever we see such marriages as those; but from the marriages that are now celebrated (if at least one ought to call them marriages...), how many are the evils! The banquet hall is no sooner broken up, than straightaway come care and fear, lest anything that is borrowed should have

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<sup>1</sup> *On Genesis* (Homily XV), *On Psalm 44* and *Psalm 113*; on *Matthew* (Homily XVII); *On John* (Homily V XI), on *1 Corinthians* (Homily XV, XVI, XIX, XXXVII), on *2 Corinthians* (Homily XIII), *On Ephesians* (Homily XX, XXI), *On Colossians* (Homily XII), *1 Timothy* (Homily VIII, XV), and *Titus* (Homily IV).

<sup>2</sup> Kevin F. Mutter, “John Chrysostom’s Theology of Marriage and Family,” *Baptist Review of Theology* 6 (1996), 22.

been lost, and there succeeds to the pleasure melancholy intolerable. But this distress belongs to the mother-in-law, nay, rather not even is the bride herself free; all that follows at least belongs to the bride herself. For, to see all broken up is a ground for sadness, to see the house desolate. There is Christ, here is Satan; there is cheerfulness, here anxious care; there pleasure, here pain; there expense, here nothing of the kind; there indecency, here modesty; there envy, here no envy; there drunkenness, here soberness; here health, here temperance. Bearing in mind all these things, let us stay the evil at this point, that we may please God, and be counted worthy to obtain the good things promised to them that love Him, through the grace and love toward man of our Lord Jesus Christ, with whom, to the Father, together with the Holy Ghost, be glory, power, honour, now and forever, and world without end. Amen."

Again, commenting on Ephesians 5:22-33, he writes: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church." He continues: "You have seen the measure of obedience; hear also the measure of love. Would you have your wife obedient unto you, as the Church is to Christ? Take then yourself the same provident care for her, as Christ takes for the Church. Yea, even if it shall be needful for you to give your life for her, yea, and to be cut into pieces ten thousand times, yea, and to endure and undergo any suffering whatever - refuse it not. Though you should undergo all this, yet will you not, no, not even then, have done

anything like Christ? For thou indeed art doing it for one to whom you are already knit; but He for one who turned her back on him and hated him. In the same way, then, as he laid at his feet her who turned her back on him, who hated, and spurned, and disdained him, not by menaces, nor by violence, nor by terror, nor by anything else of the kind, but by his ... affection; so also do thou behave yourself toward your wife. Yea, though thou see her looking down upon you, and disdainingly, and scorning you, yet by your great thoughtfulness for her, by affection, by kindness, you will be able to lay her at your feet. For there is nothing more powerful to sway than these bonds especially for husband and wife. A servant, indeed, one will be able, perhaps, to bind down by fear; nay not even him, for he will soon start away and be gone. But the partner of one's life, the mother of one's children, the foundation of one's every joy, one ought never to chain down by fear and menaces, but with love and good temper. For what sort of union is that, where the wife trembles at her husband? And what sort of pleasure will the husband himself enjoy, if he dwells with his wife as with a slave, and not as with a free-woman? Yea, though you should suffer anything on her account, do not upbraid her; for neither did Christ do this."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Norbert Vidok, in his article "Chrysostom John: Family 'Domestic Church'" in *Studia Cerenea* 3 (2013), 167-175, trans. Grzybowski, attributes the idea of the family as 'domestic Church' to Saint John Chrysostom.



### 3.2. Education of Children in Saint John Chrysostom

Saint Chrysostom's formal treatise on education was established as authentic by S. Haidacher in 1907.<sup>1</sup> Saint Chrysostom found vainglory, luxury and debauchery as the main vices of Antioch. Especially vainglory 'was ruining the whole body of the Church' and it could be similar to a wild beast 'swooping on a healthy, tender and defenceless body' and fastening its teeth in its victim, injecting poison and filling it with 'noisome stench'. Chrysostom's purpose was to guard youth from such vices by teaching parents the right way to bring up their sons and daughters. He castigated parents for neglecting the important areas in moral training as disdain of money and fame, modesty, fair dealing and a regard for human values, and the necessity of overcoming one's nature by the virtue of one's lifestyle.

In different metaphors, children in the early formative years are compared to wax capable of receiving all kinds of impressions; to pearls that begin as mere drops of water, to statues in the creative hands of artists and to growing cities which are in need of laws and city planners. The mind of a child is like a city and the traditional five senses act as bulwarks and gates of that city. Education is primarily the proper disciplining of these senses. Chrysostom spoke about these 'gates', pointing out the dangers, in a rigorously

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<sup>1</sup>John Evleyns' English version of 1659 entitled the book *The Golden Book of Saint John Chrysostom Concerning the Education of Children*. Evelyn's translation was reissued in 1825 by William Upcott.

moralistic sense, to be avoided by parents. He provided parents with plenty of positive advice, although some of which may sound funny today. According to him boys were not to be exposed to the sight of a beautiful woman as seduction was possible. We have to remember that Chrysostom was a spiritual leader and he was giving guidelines for his flock living during the times of great stress and strain. He felt that solid moral instruction was to be given for the cultivation of sobriety, modesty and prudence in the face of so much luxury, rashness and folly, and concupiscence.

Chrysostom instructed that youth be guided by the fathers along the right lines of conduct to keep them away from indulging themselves in unbridled pleasure. Often he was quite critical of fathers for neglecting to take proper care of their households, and also for indulging in their own pleasures by attending the theatre where they would sit feasting their eyes 'on the naked limbs of women' and being exposed to 'spectacles and songs containing nothing but irregular loves.'

Much of what Chrysostom said on a mother's educational role was influenced by his own mother, Anthusa, a wise, understanding and well educated woman who, widowed by the time she was twenty, devoted the rest of her life to managing the household and property of her patrician husband and to the education of her two children. In a homily on the first epistle of Paul to Timothy, he indicates the duties of

mothers in bringing up their daughters through watching over them, and regulating their lives so that they will be 'pious, modest, despisers of wealth, indifferent to ornaments' and disposing them to the good housekeepers and wives. He sees the mother's role as important in the early education of children of both sexes as she is more often at home than the father, who may be distracted by work and civic affairs. It is her duty, no less than a man's, 'to provide for their children and lead them to philosophy.' He makes it clear that the education of children is a great task since through this avenue she can achieve her salvation. Chrysostom shows a sense of moderate realism in his views on the place of discipline in education. He felt that the people were not attracted to the Church because of the profundity of its dogma, but because of the moral teaching of the Gospels, and the emphasis on Christian life.

There is moderate realism in Chrysostom's views on discipline in education. The child was to know what was expected and if misbehaviour was found, some punishment was to be given, for example, a sharp reprove, with a stern look, or with some promises. If one is constantly trained by the rod, he would despise it and reduce the system ineffective. In a homily on the second epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, he speaks about the golden mean in discipline. 'For this is especially the part of a teacher not to be hasty in taking vengeance, but to work a reformation and ever to be reluctant and slow in his punishments.' He illustrated

his points with references to both First and Second Testament characters; pointing to Eli and John the Baptist, Chrysostom expressed the conviction that fear of consequences was a force for good in the discipline and correction of children by their parents; but it is not a fear to be brought about by coercive and brutalizing corporal punishment.

Throughout his exhortations to parents and those engaged in the upbringing of children, Chrysostom stressed the important role of the teachers 'shining as lights on the world.' Basing his views on the example of Saint Paul as a teacher, and being aware of the great task of forming Christians in a non-Christian world, he insistently reiterated that teachers should be 'leaven' in the society. He calls the attention of the teacher, parent as well as pupil, to the principles of discipline and duty in the formation of character both fully human and genuinely Christian. Thus, we see that the writings of Chrysostom on education contain positive directions as well as of negative warnings, and he has touched upon every phase of education in relation to child development. He did not write long, discursive and frustratingly learned expositions on education; but what he wrote is highly relevant even today.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Philip Schaff, *A Select Library: Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, vols. IX-XIV: *St John Chrysostom on Education*, Buffalo: C. Scribner and Sons, 1905-1912, 103.

### 3.3. Saint Augustine on the Purpose of Marriage

In the year 401, Augustine wrote a pair of treatises pointing to a middle path between marriage and celibacy. He wrote, in his work *On the Good of Marriage, De Bono Coniugali*, stating the benefits of marriage. However, he argued for the supremacy of celibacy in his treatise *On Holy Virginity*.<sup>1</sup> His defence of marriage provided the basic framework for the traditional Christian view of marriage. He pointed to three goods (*bona*) of marriage: children (*proles*), fidelity (*fides*), and sacrament (*sacramentum*) which spoke of indissolubility. For Augustine "the first natural bond (*copula*) of society is that of husband and wife. God did not create them as separate individuals ... but he created one from the other, making the side, from which the woman was taken and formed, a sign of the strength of their union." This first natural bond of society is not an end in itself; it is procreative. Since children are the fruit of sexual union (*concupitus*), sex cannot be viewed as evil as it is commanded: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (Gen 1:28). The union (*copulatio*) of male and female for the sake of having children is, then, the natural good of marriage. The union of husband and wife in marriage is potentially procreative, which means the call to marry is also a call to parenthood; the husband and wife are also father and mother.

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<sup>1</sup>*The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle, vol. 1-9, trans. Ray Kearney, Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1998.

The second good of marriage is fidelity or conjugal chastity (*castitasconiugalis*) which is not to be confused with celibacy. Mutual fidelity sustains the marital bond between husband and wife. Fidelity requires mutual submission in the bedroom (1 Cor 7). Augustine maintains that performing one's conjugal duty is not a sin. Fidelity hinders sexual promiscuity, prevents procreation outside of marriage, and provides the optimal opportunity for children to be raised and nurtured within the natural bonds of the family. Thus, fidelity is a social good.

Augustine sees marriage as a sacrament (*Sacramentum*) in two ways: as a sacramental sign (*signum*) and as a sacramental bond or covenant (*vinculum; foedus*). The sacramental significance of marriage can be inferred from Genesis 2:24: "Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." Paul cites Gen 2:24 in Eph 5:31 and then adds: "This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church" (Eph 5:32). In Augustine's Latin translation, the word *sacramentum* was used to translate the Greek word *mystērion*. Marriage is a sacrament because it signifies the relationship between Christ and the church. This allows Augustine to read Gen 2:24 typologically. The first marriage between Adam and Eve prefigures the last marriage between Christ and the church:

When [Christ] slept on the cross, he bore a sign, yea, he fulfilled what had been signified in Adam: for when

Adam was asleep, a rib was drawn from him and Eve was created; so also while the Lord slept on the cross, his side was transfixed with a spear, and the sacraments flowed forth, whence the Church was born. For the Church, the Lord's Bride, was created from his side, as Eve was created from the side of Adam.

Just as the first union between Adam and Eve, a mutual agreement, signified the union of Christ and his church, so every Christian marriage points to the relation between Christ and his church. In this way, marriage is a sacramental sign.

Marriage is sacramental also because it is a covenant. The husband and wife make a vow of fidelity, 'till death us do part.' When Jesus was asked about divorce, he cited Genesis 2:24 and, then, added: "so they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together let not man separate" (Mt 19:6; Mk 1:9). The marital bond is sacramental because it has been forged by God and the indissoluble permanence of that bond signifies the indissoluble bond between Christ and the church. Commenting on Paul's exhortation to husbands and wives in Ephesians 5, Augustine wrote: "Beyond any doubt the reality signified by this sacrament is that the man and the woman united in marriage persevere inseparably in that union as long as they live... This is, after all, what is preserved between Christ and the Church, that while Christ lives and while the Church lives, they are not separated by any divorce for all eternity."

Thus, for Augustine, the marriage that takes place in time has an eternal significance as it is a symbol of the eternal union of Christ and his bride the Church. The Fathers speak about human sexuality, celibacy, marriage, procreation, and relation between man and woman, and upbringing of children analysing the biblical texts.

### **3.4. Education according to Saint Augustine**

Saint Augustine was trained in Latin grammar and rhetoric and was a professor of rhetoric in Carthage, Rome, and Milan. His very life and his books *De Catechizandis Rudibus*,<sup>1</sup> *De Doctrina Christiana* and *De Magistro* show that he was a true teacher.<sup>2</sup> The position of *De Magistro* is that the teacher can only guide and inspire as real learning is to happen within a student. Education is religious in nature; much of what one has to believe is beyond standards of Platonic understanding of knowledge. Our beliefs are based on the Bible. Another aspect of Augustinian epistemology is

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<sup>1</sup>The title literally means “*For Instructing the Unlearned.*”

<sup>2</sup>In this section, we highly depend on Athanasios Papanicolaou, “Educational Principles of Saint Augustine,” 1971. In his General Audience on 20 February 2008, Pope Benedict XVI said that the responsibility Saint Augustine “felt toward the popularisation of the Christian message was the reason for writing such a book as *De Catechizandis Rudibus*, a theory as well as practice of catechesis.” The Pope also described *De Doctrina* as “a true cultural introduction to the Bible and Christianity, which had a decisive influence on the formation of western culture.”



that one has to trust in authority. Many ideas in history are a matter of trust.

After his conversion Augustine left his chair of rhetoric but continued his teaching profession. The first four years of his life as a layman in the church were dedicated to practising the new life and teaching the Christian doctrines. He wanted to lead his students to Truth than vain eloquence. He opted for a system in which right thinking, and reasoning on the facts of the objective world and human experience was to be found. He developed a philosophy of education within the Church. Several times he recalled that he had studied pagan literature from his childhood and had been trained in liberal arts; he ever remained grateful for the education he had received outside of Christianity. It was the Platonists' teachings that brought him to Christianity while he admired Cicero. At the age of nineteen, he read Cicero's treatise called *Hortensius*<sup>1</sup> which impressed him very much. The Neo-Platonists also influenced him greatly.

In his *Educational Principles*, Augustine gets some insights from the statement, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God" (Jn 1:1). Further, he writes that the soul of man, though gives testimony of the light, is not itself the light, but the Word, God Himself, is the true light, that enlightens every man who comes into the world... He continues that the Word, God, was born not of the

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<sup>1</sup>Augustine, *Confessions*, VII, IX, 13-14.

flesh, of blood, of the will of man, of the will of flesh, but of God. But since the pagan culture was of great importance, the question was 'how should it be treated?' The Fathers faced the problem when confronting pagan literature and philosophy; they recognised in Greek and Roman traditions a providential preparation for the time when Christian intelligence, Saint Basil, some years before Augustine, young Men Reading Greek Literature, to take from the writers of antiquity whatever was beneficial for them in understanding the Scriptures. Augustine's view on this subject coincided with that of the earlier Fathers. Whatever is true and useful in the intellectual disciplines cultivated by pagan teachers may be incorporated into Christian program of studies; because it belongs to us as well. Accordingly, the liberal disciplines are found useful for instruction and for the right understanding of Scripture; they contain instructions adapted to the service of truth as also useful principles about morals; even some truths about the service of the one God himself are found among them. They themselves did not create them, but discovered them as from some source of Divine Providence which is present everywhere. The revelation of truth was an act of Divine Providence which worked not exclusively in Christianity. Therefore, even their writings on truth may be found. Augustine, once their student, became a Christian teacher. He took his disciples through the schooling in which he himself had been educated, making the

pagan arts an introduction to Christian doctrine. However, Augustine did not keep the same view towards classical tradition all his life. In later life, he became much less tolerant. Liberal arts and educational subjects are history, natural sciences, dialectics, grammar, rhetoric, mathematics and philosophy. These subjects constitute what came to be known as the seven Liberal Arts in the study of which the students were not to be passive but deliberating their minds.

John Chrysostom and Augustine lived in highly developed intellectual and philosophical contexts and their writings cannot be compared to the agrarian context of Saint Kuriākōse. For these early Fathers education was mainly religious while our focus is on those who live in modern times, which has increasingly become secular.



## Chapter 2

### GENERAL PRINCIPLES ON FAMILY ACCORDING TO SAINT KURIĀKŌSE

In this chapter, we focus our attention on the vision of family (1) as a God-centred, (2) philanthropic life on the earth and (3) a mastering and managing of material things wisely as envisioned by Saint Kuriākōse in his two dozen instructions in the first part of the letter. The central idea here is, as hinted in his idea of a Christian family as, “walking (living) peacefully before God and man,” which means leading a wholesome (in *shalom*) and joyful life with God and one’s neighbours. Here is proposed a theocentric or God-centred life which has God at the centre of one’s existence and activity as the determining and overarching reality and ultimate motivation in life; one finds one’s identity and purpose in God. The chief end of man is to become like Jesus and glorify God and enjoy with him forever. Human life that is nurtured in the family is great blessing of God.

In the appendix, which is the key to the understanding of the letter, we have a precise and meaningful description family: “A good Christian family is the image of heaven. Its *raison d’être* (justification = *nyāy*) is that those related by bonds of blood and love live together respecting and obeying the parents peacefully before God and people, seeking eternal salvation according to each one’s state of life.”

A similar picture is given by Ben Sira in his own typical way: “I take pleasure in three things, and they are beautiful in the sight of God; agreement among brothers and sisters, friendship among neighbours, and a wife and husband who live in harmony” (25:1). Both speak about the involvement of God and the mutual love that is to keep the family members together in harmony and the note on joy is impressive.

The letter<sup>1</sup> is described by the author as a *Chattam* or code which is to be received and ever kept as a memorial and legacy of the forefathers. It gives twenty-four directions on family life in general, continued by sixteen instructions on the upbringing of children, together reaching the biblically significant number forty.<sup>2</sup> The instructions are biblical, theological, and, above all, highly pastoral;<sup>3</sup> the style of writing is simple with ample memory devices like similes, stories and anecdotes; the biblical thinking behind is discernible, though direct references are not there.

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<sup>1</sup>Reference to the letter is given by referring to the two parts and the numbers of paragraphs therein; hence, the first part, *Chattam*, is referred as part 1 and the second one on the grooming of children is referred to as part 2. Wherever possible, reference to the section and paragraph is provided within brackets.

<sup>2</sup>The symbolic significane of number 40 is described in an earlier footonote.

<sup>3</sup>As the present writer prefers the published version of the letter in *Chāvaraya Kuriākōse Ēliyāsachante Sampoonakrthikal*, vol. 4; *Kathukal*, he feels that Saint Kuriākōse did not want to mix up his instructions on family with his personal notes and sentiments.

### 1.1. A God-Centred Life

The famous saintly American Radio-preacher Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen begins his book *Three to Get Married*<sup>1</sup> with the following thought-provoking statements:

It takes three to make Love in Heaven:

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

It takes three for Heaven to make love to earth:

God, Man, and Mary, through whom God became Man.

It takes three to make love in the Holy Family:

Mary, and Joseph, and the consummation of their love, Jesus.

It takes three to make love in hearts:

The Lover, the Beloved, and Love.

That nations, hearts, and homes may learn

That love does not so much mean to give oneself to another

As for both lovers to give themselves to that Passionless Passion,

Which is God.

That nations, hearts, and homes may learn

That love does not so much mean to give oneself to another

As for both lovers to give themselves to that Passionless Passion,

Which is God (opening).

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<sup>1</sup> Fulton J. Sheen, *Three to Get Married*, New York: Appleton-Century, 1951 (Internet).

Archbishop Blessed Sheen continues: “It takes three to make love, for lover and beloved are bound together on earth by an ideal outside both. If we were absolutely perfect, we would have no need of loving anyone outside ourselves. Our self-sufficiency would prevent a hankering for what we have not. But love itself starts with the desire for something good. God is good. God is being and, therefore, has no need of anything outside” him (3). Here the author is hinting to the role of God in family life.

Pope Francis teaches that “If a family is centred on Christ/God, he will unify and illumine its entire life. Moments of pain and difficulty will be experienced in union with the Lord’s cross, and his closeness will make it possible to surmount them. In the darkest hours of a family’s life, union with Jesus in his abandonment can help avoid a breakup. Gradually, ‘with the grace of the Holy Spirit, [the spouses] grow in holiness through married life, also by sharing in the mystery of Christ’s cross, which transforms difficulties and sufferings into an offering of love.’ Moreover, moments of joy, relaxation, celebration, and even sexuality can be experienced as a sharing in the full life of the resurrection. Married couples shape with different daily gestures a ‘God-enlightened space in which to experience the hidden presence of the risen Lord’.”<sup>1</sup>

Here is the conviction that the finite and imperfect humans can find most satisfaction and fulfilment when

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<sup>1</sup>Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia (Joy of Love)*, §317.



focused on the infinite, unlimited God who is himself love. Living a life with God in the centre encourages becoming merciful, peaceful, humble, selfless, and friendly to all God's creation and that makes life more pleasant for oneself and others. God, the author of life and everything, deserves to be the focal point of our existence. God assures us that happiness is found by keeping him at the centre. A man who delights in God's law and meditates on it day and night is blessed "like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither" (Ps 1:3). Like branches on a vine loaded with grapes are those who "abide" in God and bear much fruit (Jn 15:5). When we walk by God's Spirit, being led by him, we naturally exhibit the fruit of his Spirit, which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22-23). As long as God is an active partner, there is peace and harmony and faithfulness in the family. For Chāvāra, a God-centred life is simultaneously God-oriented, and that leads to 'eternal life'.

## 1.2. A God-Fearing Life

In a theocentric life, the divine presence is ever active and people live with a sense of mystery that is tremendous and fascinating.<sup>1</sup> In the First Testament, a

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<sup>1</sup>Rudolf Otto, in his book *Das Heilige: Über das irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältniss zum Rationalen*, 1917, writes about God who is the *Numinous* and the *Mysterium Tremendum* and *Fascinans*. According to him, the *Numinous* as holy is

clear connection is made between fearing God, keeping his commands and serving him: “And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul (Deut 10:12; 4:10; 6:2).

However, in the Bible, we have two kinds of fear of the Lord/God. In some cases, a concern of rejection or punishment is present as we have in Psalms 2:11; 19:9; 33:8; 34:4; 6:11; Jer 5:22, etc. In Lk 12:5, we are told: “But I will warn you whom you should fear: Fear the one who, after the killing, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!” Again, in Lk 23:40, one thief rebukes the other, saying: “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?” These two men were dying, they would soon stand before God in judgment and they were both under the sentence of condemnation. God has the right to judge. But, as we know, Jesus offered the thief grace and he was saved from condemnation. Paul writes that the evil doers have no fear of God (Rom 3:18). Jude 1:23 asks us to “save others by snatching them out of the fire; have mercy on others, coupled with a fear of God, hating even the clothes

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ineffable and wholly other and beyond human words. Humans feel creaturely and entirely dependent before the awfulness and feel overpowered. C. S. Lewis, in his *The Problem of Pain* (1940), opines that the fear of the Numinous is different from the fear we have for wild animals or ghosts; before the Numinous one feels a sense of inadequacy and is moved to prostration.

stained by the flesh.” This passage brings us to the following theme connected to fearing God: judgment. In Rev 14:7, fearing God is again connected to judgment: “He said with a loud voice: ‘Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water.’” We may add to this the idea of love and holiness as in we have, ‘fearing God’ coming up a couple of times in 2 Cor 7:1: “Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.” Here ‘fearing God’ is connected to holiness. Fearing God means that you keep in line with his will and are kept from grave sins. It gives direction to your life. It can lead to salvation, as was the case with Noah, who in reverent fear of God built the ark (Heb 11:7).

The second kind of ‘fear of the Lord’ is a filial feeling of awe, respect, love and piety before the majesty of God which is positive and well diffused in the Bible as Moses had in his experience on Horeb, ‘the mountain of God’, when he found a bush blazing, yet it was not consumed (Ex 3:1-6). Another striking experience is narrated by Prophet Isaiah of Jerusalem in his autobiographical note (6:1-13). In the year of the death of King Uzziah, the prophet had a vision in the temple of Jerusalem. Yahweh the king was sitting on the throne being praised by the Seraphs (vv.1-4). The setting of the temple is clear in the antiphonal song, the altar with the red-hot stones, the incense smoke that

fills the sanctuary, and the Holy of Holies. The prophet sees Yahweh himself seated upon the throne, clothed in majesty. The thrice-holy anthem, the triple holy, resounds in the temple, and the 'glory' (*kavod*) of the Lord fills the whole earth. God is all holy; the God of Isaiah is the "Holy One of Israel" (*qedoshyisrael* 1:4). We are given the idea of awe, dread, fascination and vitality. Psalm 99 (vv. 3,5,9) repeatedly praises the 'holy' God whose name is 'awesome' and 'worshipful'. Isaiah becomes conscious of his impurity and unworthiness in the presence of the thrice holy God (v.3, 5). This response is evoked by the sense of the holiness of God, who is God and not man (Hos 11:9); God is in the world but not comprehended by it, he is not one to be controlled and manipulated by humans. Isaiah's message of holiness means not only the sublimity of God as contrasted with man's creatureliness; it also means the awful contrast between God's purity and man's sinfulness. "The Holy One of Israel" is a favourite expression of the prophet (5:19; 14:26; 28:29). Before God's holiness he confesses that he is unclean and is a member of a community in which there is no health (Is 1:4-9) and cries out: "Woe is me! For I am lost!" At Psalm 99:4 we read: "Mighty king, lover of justice, you have established equity; you have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob." The Lord of hosts is exalted in justice, and the Holy God is sanctified in righteousness." Divine holiness is contrasted to that of humans who lie, steal, oppress, and even murder (Is 1:4, 21-23; 5:20; 9:17).

Psalm 128, a wisdom psalm, gives a beautiful description of family which is enclosed within “the fear of the Lord” (v 1 & 4) which is key to the understanding of a fulfilled family life: “Happy is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways. You shall eat the fruit of the labour of your hands; and it shall be well with you. Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table. Thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord. May the Lord bless you from Zion. May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life. May you see your children’s children. Peace be upon Israel.” Also remarkable is that the Psalm begins with a beatitude in which fear of the Lord is put parallel to “walking in his ways,” implying that such people are on the right path (Sira 2:15-17; 19: 20-24). The Psalm assures that those who fear God will be happy and live long bringing prosperity to the family, town and the entire nation.

Ben Sira very positively states: “The fear of the Lord is glory and exultation, and gladness and a crown of rejoicing. The fear of the Lord delights the heart, and gives gladness and joy and long life. Those who fear the Lord will have a happy end; on the day of their death they will be blessed” (1:11-13).<sup>1</sup> Again, we are told that “the fear of the Lord is like a garden of blessing, and covers a person better than any glory”

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<sup>1</sup>Ben Sira continues his eulogy of the fear of the Lord/God in 1:14-20, 27-30; 2:7-18b 17:4,10, etc.

(40:27; 9:16). Accordingly, the fear of God or the Lord, which is a filial sense of love, respect, piety, awe and submission to God, is the key to a peaceful, happy and fulfilled family life.

The first mention of the *fear of God* in the Bible occurs in Genesis 22:12, where we have the story of the testing of Abraham by God in which the Jews call the 'binding (*aqedah*) of Isaac'<sup>1</sup> in which Abraham manifested even to sacrifice his son, which appeared to be a real divine demand upon him who tried to execute it when God forbid and commended him for putting his trust in God saying, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know you fear God." The prophet Isaiah speaks about the shoot that shall sprout from the stump of Jesse and adds that "The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, and his delight shall be the fear of the Lord" (Is 11:1-3). Here the "fear of the Lord" is put with highly positive gifts and, besides, finally we are told that "his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord." In the book of Proverbs, fear of the Lord is instruction or discipline (15:33); it is the beginning of wisdom (1:7; 9:10). There is no fear of God in the wicked (Ps 36:1; Rom 3:18); it hates evil (Rom 8:13). In the Catholic tradition, fear of the Lord is counted among the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>1</sup>*Torah: A Modern Commentary*, ed. W. Gunter Plaut, New York: 1962, 145.

A genuine Christian family is a sanctuary where God's awful presence is found everywhere and He is offered worship, love and service. "For you did not receive the spirit of slavery leading again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry, 'Abba, Father'" (Rom 8:15). "There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment" (1 Jn 4:18).

What we call 'fear of God' in the First Testament is love of God in the Second Testament. Pope Francis<sup>1</sup> makes a rather long comment on 1 Cor 13:4-7 in the context of familial love: "Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things..." So, "now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor 13:13). What Paul writes about Christians in general is all the more true of Christian families as we in Col 3:13: "As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another, and if anyone has a complaint against you, forgive each other just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Above all, clothe

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<sup>1</sup>Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia (Joy of Love)*, §90.

yourselves with love, which binds everything in perfect harmony.”

Psalms 128 gives, as we have already noted, the picture of an ideal family with mother, father and children. In addition, the book of Proverbs highlights the role of the Lord in constituting a true family by insisting that the Lord’s providential intervention makes a real difference. We read: “Houses and wealth are inherited from parents, but a prudent wife is from the Lord” (Prov 19:14).

A worthy and diligent mother is lauded in Proverbs 31:28-30: “Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: ‘Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all.’” Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. This wisdom book has a lot to say on the matter: “Wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies” (31:10); “She sets about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for her tasks” (31:17); she is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come” (31:25); “She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue” (31:26); “Honour her for all that her hands have done, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate” (31:31); “She gets up while it is still dark; she provides food for her family and portions for her servant girls” (31:15).

Similar praises are showered upon the fathers as well: “Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged” (Col 3:21). “Husbands, love



your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her” (Eph 5:25). “Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them” (Col 3:19).

### **1.3. Relationships only with the God-Fearing**

Saint Kuriākōse writes: “Do not contract relationships with the disorderly and who have no fear of God. For, it is not the rich who bring blessing and joy to your family, but the orderly, God-fearing relatives” (*Chāvarul* 1:8). The idea is that the norm for our relationships with others should be their relationship to God. The saint knew well and taught that the greatest wealth on earth was fear of the Lord and that alone could make people happy and content in life. People in general run after money, power and prestige, all of which have been and are risky and dangerous temptations for the human race. The saint even warns that not all are to be welcomed home; only those well-behaved and God-fearing (*Chāvarul* 1:9). Our companions and friends can be a great source of edification, consolation and support for us, while they can also dehumanize and lead us away from God. Birds of the same feather gather together and our company declares who we are.

It is not any pharisaic attitude of superiority in knowledge or morality but a real sense of the fear of the Lord that should impel us to keep away from or be at least cautious about people who do not fear God or man. One has to be fearful of such people. Sira

counsels: “Do not invite everyone into your home, for many are the tricks of the crafty... for they lie in wait, turning good into evil, and to worthy actions they attach blame. From a spark many coals are kindled, and such a sinner lies in wait to shed blood. Beware of scoundrels, for they device evil, and they ruin your reputation forever. Receive not strangers into your home and they will stir up trouble for you, and will make you a stranger to your own family” (11:29-34). This statement is to be taken with a grain of salt. Of course, we have to see to the actual situation and act wisely. Our saint knew well that all people were to be welcomed; but one had to be ever prudent. Surely, Jesus was a friend of the sinners and the tax collectors and he even went in search of them not to revel with them, but precisely to win them to the reign of God.

#### **1.4. Have God-Fearing Servants**

Our servants are our close collaborators and Saint Kuriākōse teaches that those who work and serve us must be God-fearing people; we are also duty-bound to take care of their spiritual needs (*Chāvarul* 1:23). At the time of the saint there must have been a healthy familial feeling, possibly that of an extended family, with and among the workers and servants; hence, even they were to be carefully chosen with correct discernment. Humans are not to be seen simply as workforce; they are persons with rights and duties, who also need spiritual care, vigilance, attention and caring support (*Chāvarul* 1:23).

### 1.5. Worship of God

In the First Testament, the seventh day is a day of 'rest' (*shabath*); besides being a day to remember God's rest after the creation on the seventh day (Gen 2:2-3; Ex 34:21), it was also to remind the people that they belonged to the Lord through the Covenant (Ex 31:13; Ezk 20:12). Merchandising was not permitted on this day (Am 8:5; Neh 13:15-22); it was a day of rest even for slaves and animals (Ex 23:12; 34:12). In the Second Testament, Christians remember and celebrate the New Covenant on Sundays representing the great paschal mysteries of Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection in the Holy Eucharist. Sunday should be the great crescendo as the individual worshipers gather communally to praise and thank our great God.

Saint Kuriākose insists that the days set apart for divine worship should be strictly observed (*Chāvarul* 1:3); other festal celebrations like marriage or even commemoration of the dead are to be deferred. If someone died in the family, those needed may stay back (*Chāvarul* 1:22). Worshiping God means accepting him as the supreme master and Lord of everything; there is no one or anything equal to him or beside him and so he is to be preferred and honoured above all; he alone shall be worshiped. More than obeying a command, it should be a sense of creatureliness, loyalty and joyful thanksgiving that assemble the people before the Lord, singing, praising and enjoying the company of their brothers and sisters.

We are told by the saint that it is not enough to participate in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist on Sundays and days of obligation; they should be days to hear and reflect on the Word of God and to visit the sick, especially the poor (*Chāvarul* 1:22). In the book of Deuteronomy, Sabbath is 'holy' in the sense that it is set apart for God; in a way, it is a 'tithe' of time given to God. "You shall not do any work - you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and outstretched arm; therefore, the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath" (5:14-15). Remembering the painful days in Egypt, the people are to avoid suffering for other people and should be even empathetic to their conveniences. Rest is extended even to animals, indeed; even mute animals have their rights. Prophet Isaiah gives the true spirit of Sabbath (58:13-14); if one is free from all selfishness and rejoices in the Lord doing well to others, Sabbath is meaningful.

The humane spirit of Sabbath/Sunday was declared and accepted by Jesus when he healed a man with dropsy on the Sabbath (Lk 14:1-6). For Jesus, it is a day for honouring God, for helping others in need and being free to think of oneself. In Mark 2:27, we have a

revolutionary statement of Jesus: “The Sabbath is made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath.”<sup>1</sup>

Saint Kuriākose is pointing to the ecclesial dimension of Christian life as envisioned by Pope Francis: “The Church is a family of families, constantly enriched by the lives of all those domestic churches. ‘In virtue of the sacrament of matrimony, every family becomes, in effect, a good for the Church. From this standpoint, reflecting on the interplay between the family and the Church will prove a precious gift for the Church in our time. The Church is good for the family, and the family is good for the Church. The safeguarding of the Lord’s gift in the sacrament of matrimony is a concern not only of individual families but of the entire Christian community.’”<sup>2</sup>

### **1.6. Be Ever Resigned to the Divine Will**

One has to be happy and content in adversity as well as in prosperity; one who is patient when things go well only is not a man of strong character. A pious person used to say everything went according to his will, as he ever sought the will of God which always happened (*Chāvarul* 1:20). To be able to live with composure and calmness in the midst of turbulences in life is something great; it is the result of a strong conviction that God our father loves us and that whatever

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<sup>1</sup>J. L. McKenzie, in his *Dictionary of the Bible*, London-Dublin: 1965, 752, writes that it “sums up the teaching of Jesus in a single sentence better than any other.”

<sup>2</sup>Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia (Joy of Love)*, §87.

happens to us ultimately is for our benefit and that nothing happens to us without his knowledge and consent. An important request in the great prayer Jesus taught is “thy will be done on earth as it is heaven” (Mt 6:10). The Gospel of Luke ensures that one will save oneself through endurance (Lk 21:19). The Psalmist tells us: “Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved” (Ps 55:22). Job the patient was ever resigned to the will of God; even in the midst of acute suffering he could say, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (1:21), though the mystery of innocent suffering continued to puzzle him.

At the announcement of the birth of Jesus and the choice of Mary as his mother, she could respond to angel Gabriel, “Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word” (Lk 1:38). This *fiat* of Mary looms large in the history of salvation. In Matthew, we read: “Do not worry, saying, ‘What we will eat?’ or ‘What we will drink?’ ‘What we will wear?’ For it is the gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Mt 6:31-33; see also Lk 12:31). Jesus, in his agony on the Mount of Olives prayed: “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done” (Lk 22:42). Here is the highest

expression of spirituality which is ever seeking and living the will of God. At the time of his minor orders, Saint Kuriākose adopted the motto, “The Lord is my portion forever” (Ps 16:5), which speaks about his life-long self-surrendering commitment to the Lord and his will.<sup>1</sup> We have an episode which sheds light on the matter. It was Bishop Maurēlius Stabilini who approved the idea of beginning a religious community as proposed by Fathers Thomas Pālackl and Thomas Pōrūkara. Accordingly, on 28 April 1931, a cross was blessed and planted on the hillock of Mānnānam, which they called in Syriac *bethrauma*, which meant ‘an elevated house’. On 11 March 1931, Fr. Pōrūkara laid the foundation stone for the house of the new community and the supervision of the construction was entrusted with Fr. Chāvāra. In the meanwhile, Bishop Francis, who succeeded Bishop Maurēlius Stabilini was falsely informed about the project and was suspicious of it. Blocking the project, the new bishop appointed Fr. Chāvāra Vicar of South Pallipuram in spite of his insistent pleading and clarification of the whole matter. Chāvāra obeyed not blindly or grudgingly but wisely seeing that there was no other go, resigning himself to the will of God and waiting for God’s time. The bishop, of course, was very adamant and authoritarian who

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<sup>1</sup>See G. Kaniarakath, “The Lord Is My Portion” (Ps 16:5; 119:57): A Key to the Spirituality of Saint Chāvāra” in *The Lord of Heaven and Earth: Chāvāra Studies in Honour of Fr. Lukas Vithuvattickal*, eds. P. Kalluveetil and P. Kochāpilly, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2004, 49-59.

even threatened to punish him without trying to understand the matter. Our saint was convinced that often the divine will is given through fallible human agents, though they themselves may not seek the divine will in dialogue and prayer. He knew that the project belonged to the Lord and that he was only an agent of God in executing his plan. He trusted in the Lord and the Lord favoured his servant at the opportune time by giving him a chance to continue the work. After his bitter experience, along with the author of the book of Lamentations, the saint could say: "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him" (3:24).

Being resigned to the divine will in no way means to be passive or lazy; as intelligent believing Christians, we are to act wisely and pray to God seeking his will, trying at the same time to change or improve the situation as that of poverty, sickness, natural disasters or any other misfortune, hazard or trouble. We pray that at least we may be given the strength and courage to withstand the problem. Jesus in Gethsemane also prayed to remove his pain, being absolutely submissive to the Father's will. With the Psalmist, we may say:

Unless the Lord builds the house,  
those who build it labour in vain.

Unless the Lord guards the city,  
the guard keeps watch in vain.

It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest,  
eating the bread of anxious toil;  
for he gives sleep to his beloved (Ps 129:1-2).



### **1.7. Open and Close the Day Praising and Thanking God**

Saint Kuriākōse proposes a God-centred daily timetable for the family. All are to get up by six o'clock in the morning and begin the day with the morning prayers. After this, if possible, all or at least some members of the family are asked to participate in the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. In the evening, the proper prayers are to be recited and half an hour is to be spent in meditation, if needed, with the help of a good book. After supper an examination of conscience and the night prayers are to be recited. This has to be observed even if some visitor or guest is present at home (*Chāvarul* 1:24). Here a monastic flavour deems to be given to family life. Indeed, our saint, thus, envisions an orderly and regular life that is centred on God even among the ordinary believers. Each of us should begin our day by focusing our thoughts on God, on who he is and on what he is graciously doing for us all. As we do, our hearts will be filled with praise, adoration, and joy. Our days at work, at home, at school, or wherever we are, should be punctuated with thoughts and expressions of divine praise.

### **2. The Philanthropic Aspects of Family Life**

Our Saint was deeply convinced that a true Christian family should be based on love of God and love of human beings. We recall the words of Blessed Fulton J. Sheen: "Imagine a large circle and in the center of it rays of light that spread out to the circumference. The

light in the centre is God; each of us is a ray. The closer the rays are to the centre, the closer the rays are to one another. The closer we live to God, the closer we are bound to our neighbour; the farther we are from God, the farther we are from one another. The more each ray departs from its centre, the weaker it becomes; and the closer it gets to the centre, the stronger it becomes.”<sup>1</sup> Where love of God or man is absent no true and genuine family life is possible. After having seen the theocentric aspect of the Christian family in Chāvāra, we now turn to its philanthropic character. As we have already seen, for him, a good family is formed and related by bonds of blood and love and live together respecting and obeying the parents peacefully before God and people, seeking eternal salvation according to each one’s state of life (*Chāvarul*, Introduction). We are told about the love that should exist among the members of the family as well as other persons whom we encounter in our life. Saint Paul exhorts believers: “Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves” (Rom 12:10). In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus has taught us that anybody in need is our neighbour and we should help all (Lk 25-34). In his first instruction, Chāvāra requires of the family members to love each other and he adds the important aspect of mutual forgiveness, the result of which is peace on earth and eternal bliss in heaven (*Chāvarul* 1:1; see also 1 Jn 4:7). In the same paragraph,

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<sup>1</sup>Fulton J. Sheen, *Three to Get Married*, 5.

he laments the miserable situation in which the siblings, husbands and their wives live in quarrel without true love.

### **2.1. Handling Problems in the Family**

It is natural that there be disputes and quarrels among people, even among relatives. But going to the law courts to settle disputes among people, even in genuine cases, does not help anybody, but only does harm (*Chāvarul* 1:2). In the book of Proverbs, we have a very realistic suggestion and in keeping with the conditions of biblical times: “Whatever your eyes have seen do not hastily bring into court; for what will you do in the end, when your neighbour puts you to shame? Argue your case directly...” (25:9). The words of Jesus in Matthew is very similar: “Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison” (5:25). With a practical orientation, Saint Paul recommends the mediation of a believer who is just (1 Cor 6:1-6ff.).

### **2.2. Personal Privacy to Be Respected**

One is not to poke one’s nose unnecessarily into the affairs of others (*Chāvarul* 1:7). All should be interested in the wellbeing of their neighbours, but that is not to be motivated by unnecessary curiosity. In this instance, Saint Chāvara advocates a gentlemanly behaviour and a sense of privacy. Surely, the Cain policy of asking

“Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Gen 4:9) can never be acceptable. The idea is to let others have their free space and activity. “Do not meddle in matters that are beyond you...” (Sira 3:23).

### **2.3. Be Cautious in Conversation**

One is ever to avoid disorderly, uncharitable and unchristian talks, or talebearing and speaking ill of others (*Chāvarul* 1:10). Empathetic and correct use of the tongue is very important in interpersonal relationships; it can heal, encourage and make life more enjoyable. Narrating the faults and shortcomings of others is often prompted by jealousy or hatred of others that ultimately only harms both parties. Saint James writes: “Anyone who makes no mistakes in speaking is perfect, able to keep the whole body in check with bridle” (3:2). Sira gives us his wise counsel: “Do not be called double tongued and do not lay traps with your tongue; for shame comes to the thief, and severe condemnation to the double tongued” (5:14; see also 9:15; 21:16-17, 26-28; 22:12-15; 23:13,14; 27:11-15; 28:13ff.).

### **2.4. A Day without a Good Deed Is Lost**

Through an anecdote, Saint Chāvāra instructs the families that a day on which they have not done any good to others will not be counted in the book of life (*Chāvarul* 1:13). Here is a very wise and practical counsel. Above all our achievements and positions, God wants our daily life to be useful and helpful to our

sisters and brothers (*Chāvarul* 1:14). What is important before God almighty is charity in words and concrete actions of benevolence.

The command of the Lord is an unambiguous love of God and love of human beings: “The Lord our God the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your soul and with all your might” (Deut 6:4-6). This text is to be read with the instruction, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Lev 19:18). Jesus places both the commandments on an equal plain (Mt 22:34-40; Mk 12:28-34; Lk 10:25-28). Herein J. L. McKenzie sees the revolutionary idea of Christian charity.<sup>1</sup> The requirement in the last judgement is clear, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Mt 25:40). Saint John writes: “The commandment we have from him [God] is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also” (1 Jn 4:21). We are told again: “Those who say ‘I love God’ and hate their brothers are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen cannot love God whom they have not seen” (1 Jn 4:20). The norm for our mutual love is the love with which Jesus loves us (Jn 15:12).

## 2.5. Be Ever in Good Company

We need selected friends and the criterion for selection is that they be people who fear and love God (*Chāvarul*

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<sup>1</sup>McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible*, 521.

1:16). The friendship between David and Jonathan was genuine and went on increasing in the midst of dangers and sufferings and it is to be emulated in our contemporary social life. Sira has a lot to say about human friendship: "Let those who are friendly with you be many, but let your advisers be one in a thousand. When you gain friends, gain them through testing, and do not trust them hastily. For there are friends who are such when it suits them, but they will not stand by you in time of trouble. And there are friends who change into enemies, and tell of the quarrel to your disgrace. And there are friends who sit at your table, but they will not stand by you in the time of trouble. When you are prosperous, they become your second self, and lord it over your servants; but if they are brought low, they turn against you, and hide themselves from you" (6:6-12, 14-17). Here we are not asked to discriminate people, but to be discrete and be aware of human weakness and to keep close company only of those who are trustworthy and fear the Lord. Indeed, the love of our Heavenly Father extends to all (Mt 5:45); we must, therefore, be friendly with every person who comes in contact with us.

## **2.6. Give Just Wages in Time**

An important and highly significant teaching of our saint is that the workers are to be paid just wages in time; both the amount paid and the time of payment are very significant. Our treatment of the workers and the poor is a matter of justice that cries out to God

(*Chāvarul* 1:18). Our saint stresses the amount given, which is relative, as well as the time of giving as in the book of Leviticus, wherein we have a remarkable divine instruction: "... You shall not keep for yourself the wages of a labourer until morning" (19:13). Deuteronomy 24:15 elaborates the humane character of the deal: "You shall pay them their wages daily before sunset, because they are poor and their livelihood depends on them; otherwise, they might cry to the Lord against you, and you would incur guilt." The advice of Tobit to his son is remarkable in this regard: "Do not keep over until the next day the wages of those who work for you, but pay them at once (4:14). At one time the workers were paid, both in India and some other countries of the world, only what was necessary just to keep them fit for the next day's work; it was very difficult for them to eke out a decent living. Fortunately, things have become much more humane and different in contemporary times.

## 2.7. Caution in Reading

Saint Chāvara knew well the effects of reading books and literature as it nourished our intelligence and widened the horizon of our knowledge and experience of life. He instructed that reading and keeping the books of believers of other religions, of pagans (*kāvayer*) and heretics, and lewd songs (*chittampipāttukal*) at home are equal to keeping fire in straw (*Chāvarul* 1:21). Here, of course, we have a rather narrow approach to the scriptures of other religions. This instruction has to

be understood in its historical context, remembering that we are all slaves of history whose reading and interpretation of things, events and people are limited by the spirit and thinking of the times; such a limitation can also be found in the Bible with regard to its approach to slavery and women. With the Second Vatican Council the Catholic Church has opened its doors widely and generously trying to read the plan of God more objectively and realistically in all available sources.

To conclude this discussion on the general principles of family and its necessary philanthropic orientations as enunciated by Saint Chāvāra, a passage from *Amoris Laetitia* of Pope Francis seems to be pertinent: “The Church is a family of families, constantly enriched by the lives of all those domestic churches. ‘In virtue of the sacrament of matrimony, every family becomes, in effect, a good for the Church. From this standpoint, reflecting on the interplay between the family and the Church will prove a precious gift for the Church in our time. The Church is good for the family, and the family is good for the Church. The safeguarding of the Lord’s gift in the sacrament of matrimony is a concern not only of individual families but of the entire Christian community.’”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia (Joy of Love)*, §87.



## Chapter 3

### WISE MANAGEMENT OF PROPERTY

Saint Kuriākōse Chāvāra envisions the holistic and integral wellbeing of the family and, as with the spiritual, he is equally concerned about its material prosperity as it exists on the earth and gives some wise practical counsels in the matter. He was convinced that our life on earth was to be one of love and joy as already given in his definition of family. We humans need also healthy stewardship of property and sound financial decisions that are inevitable for a sound, decent and happy family on the earth.

#### 1. Handling of Money

The economic system in the world changes and so the business dealings will have to be evaluated in the concrete situations. We are told by our saint that one should not borrow money from others unless it is inevitable; if one has already done so, one has to return it at the earliest. He is very clear about lending: it shall be undertaken only when required by charity. If there is any obligation with regard to the Eucharistic celebrations or parents owing money to others, Saint Chāvāra insists that those have to be fulfilled (*Chāvarul* 1:4). The merciful lend to their neighbours; by holding out a helping hand they keep the commandments. Lend to your neighbour in times of need; repay your neighbour when a loan is due. Keep your promise and

be honest with the lender, and on every occasion you will find what you need. Many regard a loan as a windfall, which may cause trouble to those who help. But a very sympathetic view is found in the matter of lending to the poor, where humanity is considered more important than economics (Ex 22:25ff.). Sira gives a very prudent and practical instruction on the matter which, of course, is to be understood as conditioned by the context (29:1-7): "One kisses another's hands until he gets a loan, and is deferential in speaking of his neighbour's money; but at the time for repayment he delays, and pays back with empty promises, and finds fault with the time. If he can pay, his creditor will hardly get back half, and regard that as a windfall... Many refuse to lend not because of meanness, but from fear of being defrauded needlessly." Of course, in this instance, people who appear to be very honest and just in their dealings may be mere pretenders. The situation changes with the change of time and place.

## **2. Be Modest in Money Matters**

One is not to make a show of one's wealth; such people easily perish (*Chāvarul* 1:5). It is a lesson drawn from concrete life. We know that wealth comes and goes and none can depend on it completely. Sira cautions all: "Do not rely on your wealth, or say, 'I have enough'" (5:1). In a similar fashion, Prophet Hosea finds fault with the Northern kingdom: "Ephraim has said, Ah, I am rich I have gained wealth for myself..." (12:8).

### **3. Income and Expenditure to Be Balanced**

In celebrations, families have to be aware of their limitations and they should not make themselves pauper (*Chāvarul* 1:6). The words of Sira are again strong: “do not revel in great luxury, for you may become impoverished by its expense. Do not become beggars by feasting with borrowed money, when you have nothing in your purse” (18:32-33). People have to be wise and always see that the income and expenditure match.

### **4. Make the Best Use of What One Has**

Before searching for more and more, one has to make the best use of the property one has; the wealth of a family is not the amount of possessions but their quality. When a small farmer was suspected for making wealth unjustly, he declared that his small plot of land was a treasure and the sweat of his face produced gold on the land (*Chāvarul* 1:11). The prayer of the wise man is very realistic: “... Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that I need, or shall I be full, and deny you, and say ‘Who is the Lord?’ or I shall be poor, and steal and profane the name of my God” (Prov 30:8-9). Riches make some feel self-sufficient and forget God; surely not all are like that. Poverty and a dehumanising situation may lead some to steal and rob and even curse or deny God. According to the wise man, “The necessities of life are water, bread, and clothing, and also a house to assure privacy. Better is the life of the poor under their own

crude roof than sumptuous food in the house of others. Be content with little or much, and you will hear no reproach for being a guest” (Sira 29:21-23). Of course, people may ever think of improving their lot in life for themselves and others justly.

In Psalm 128, the father appears as a labourer who by the work of his hands sustains the physical wellbeing and tranquility of his family: “You shall eat the fruit of the labour of your hands; you shall be happy, and it shall be well with you” (Ps 128:2; 127:2). It is clear from the very first pages of the Bible that work is an essential part of human dignity: “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it” (Gen 2:15), that is, by cultivating his talents and endowments.<sup>1</sup>

Everybody should have the habit of hard work according to one’s status (Sira 7:15; 40:1); refusing to work does not make one respectable or acceptable. Laziness is the mother of all vices and it is the father of alcoholism which is disgraceful (*Chāvārarul* 1:12). Even the lazy want to enjoy life, but that is not possible. We are told to consider the industrious ants who work to store up food for themselves (Prov 6:6ff.). The passage also warns against sleeping when we should be working at something profitable. A ‘sluggard’ is a lazy, slothful person who would rather rest than work. His end is assured, namely, poverty and want. “The appetite of the lazy craves, and gets nothing, while the

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<sup>1</sup>Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* (Joy of Love), §23.

appetite of the diligent is richly supplied” (Prov 13:4). Paul reminds that one has to work for the wellbeing of the family; he insists that not working for the wellbeing of the family is a great error and sin: “And whoever does not provide for relatives, and especially for family members, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Tim 5:8).

At the other end of the spectrum is the one who is obsessed with amassing wealth. Such a one, according to Ecclesiastes 5:10, never has enough wealth to satisfy him and must be constantly grasping more and more. First, Tim 6:9-10 also warns against the trap of desiring wealth: “But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and, in their eagerness to get rich, some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.” The parable of the rich man and Lazarus in the Gospel of Luke offers a stern warning on similar outlook and practices (Lk 16:19-31).

People are encouraged to be efficient stewards of what God has given. In Luke 16:1-13, Jesus told the parable of the dishonest steward as a way of warning against poor stewardship. The moral of the story is “So, if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will, then, trust you with true riches?” (v. 11). Again, we are told: “Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not for your masters” (2 Tim 3:23).

## **5. Moderation in Food Habits**

Saint Kuriākōse sees taking alcoholic drinks as leading to laziness and destruction; he looks at it also as an evil despicable before man and God at the same time (*Chāvarul* 1:12). Sira speaks about wine and music as gladdening the heart (40:20); Qoheleth 9:7 instructs as follows: "Go, eat your bread with enjoyment, and drink your wine with a merry heart" (Sira 31:23-31). The Psalmist reminds: "And wine gladdens the human heart" (104:15). Saint Paul wrote to his disciple Timothy: "No longer drink only water, but take a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments." However, in his letter to the Galatians (5:20), Paul listed 'drunkenness' among the evil works of the flesh. Again, we read in Proverbs: "Do not be among winebibbers or among gluttonous eaters of meat; for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and drowsiness will clothe them with rags" (23:20-21). "Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who linger late over wine, those who keep trying mixed wines. Do not look at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly. At the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like an adder. Your eyes will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea, like one who lies on the top of the mast" (Prov 23:29-34). A wicked son is described as "a glutton and drunkard" (Deut 21:20). The Bible teaches that anything in extreme is harmful and sinful. While stressing the negative aspects of

wine, Sira underlines also its positive benefits: "Wine is very life to human beings if taken in moderation. What is life to one who is without wine? It has been created to make people happy. Wine drunk at proper time and in moderation is rejoicing of heart and gladness of soul" (Sira 27:28). People surely have to have self-control and be masters of their appetites.

## **6. Do Honest Business**

In keeping with the experience of his time, business and trade are seen by Saint Kuriākose as dangerous to both soul and wealth. If no other way is open for a living, there is no objection to pursuing it; but it has to be done with care and a sense of justice. No unjust trader has ever maintained steady progress and excelled. The riches amassed through deceit and fraud will soon melt away like snow (*Chāvarul* 1:13). In our modern economy, business and trade are important public services, but the principle of justice and equity should be respected. Saint James is realistic in the matter: "Come now, you who say, 'Today and tomorrow we will go to such and such a town and spend a year there, doing business and making money.' Yet you do not even know what tomorrow - will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes, instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wishes we will do this or that'" (4:13-15).

### **7. Not too Stingy or too Lavish**

One is not to be too stingy or extravagantly generous; the former loses by moth-eating and the latter by smoking away (*Chāvarul* 1:15). “The miser is in a hurry to get rich and does not know that loss is sure to come” (Prov 28:22). Sira has some wise counsel on the matter: “Riches are inappropriate for a small indeed person; and of what use is wealth to a miser? What he denies himself he collects for others; and others will live in luxury on his goods. If one is mean to himself, to whom will he be generous? He will not enjoy his own riches... The miser is an evil person; he turns away and disregards people. The eye of the greedy person is not satisfied with his share; greedy injustice withers the soul. A miser begrudges bread, and it is lacking at his table” (14:3-10). What the saint tells us is that we have to use our money and wealth wisely; sometimes one has to be sparing and at other times one has to be generous, never being extravagant. Wealth and money are for our wellbeing and growth and have to be prudently used and wisely handled. Wealth is to serve us; we should never be slaves of wealth.

### **8. Do Not Steal or Keep Stolen Things**

Nobody is to keep stolen things at home, which may mean cooperation; even being party to storing up stolen good for a short while can spoil one’s integrity. Driving home this principle, Saint Chāvāra cautions us saying that “a house harbouring stolen goods will go up in flames” (*Chāvarul* 1:17). We are told the story of a



man who made wealth for his family by all kinds of theft and deceit. On his deathbed the clerk who came to settle his last will was told to write that he had given himself, his wife and children to the devil when he misappropriated wealth for them all (*Chāvarul* 1:17). The teaching here is that it is sinful and that one should not take what belongs to another without the owner's knowledge and consent and should not even cooperate in any way in such an action. In the Ten Commandments,<sup>1</sup> we are instructed emphatically: "You shall not steal" (Ex 20:15; Deut 5:19). In Leviticus 19:11, it is combined with the other commandments requiring honesty: "You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; and you shall not lie to one another. And you shall not swear falsely by my name, profaning the name of your God: I am the Lord." When the poor Tobit heard the bleating of a goat at home, he suspected that his wife might have stolen it and he said to her, "Return it to the owners; for we have no right to eat anything stolen" (2:13). Indeed, it was freely given to her with her wages. Paul offers a wise counsel for those who try to live by stealing: "Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labour and work honestly with their own hands, so that to have something to share with the needy" (Eph 4:28). *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* understands that "The seventh commandment requires respect for the universal destination and distribution of

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<sup>1</sup>In the original Hebrew, we have *aserethaddevarim*, 'ten words' (Ex 34:28; Deut 4:13; 11:22). The word *Decalogue*, *decalogos* in Greek, was coined by Saint Clement of Alexandria (+215).

goods and the private ownership of them, as well as respect for persons, their property, and the integrity of creation. The Church also finds in this Commandment the basis for her social doctrine which involves the correct way of acting in economic, social and political life, the right and the duty of human labour, justice and solidarity among nations, and love for the poor.”<sup>1</sup>

The Bible instructs us to manage money matters wisely. We are to save money, but not hoard it. We are to spend it, but with discretion and discipline. We are to make use of it for ourselves and others, but with discernment and with a Christian conscience. It is not wrong to be rich, but it is wrong to love money and be its slave; but it is also wrong to waste money on trivial things. Poverty as a virtue is to show our dependence on God; however, it can be an evil when humans are to live in subhuman conditions below their God-given dignity, which is an evil to be got ridden of. Investing our wealth for such noble social causes is worthy of Christian vocation.

Saint Kurākōse constructs his vision of family on three strong pillars, namely, God-centredness, philanthropism and wise management of material wealth. In the family, the important members are husband, wife, children and God, the final one being the one who unites them in genuine love and mutual commitment. As long as the woman and the man live on the earth, they need mutual love and faithful self-

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<sup>1</sup>*Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*, §503.

giving that result in children; hence, there should be mutual support and sacrificial love in families, which are sustained and guaranteed by the active faith in the presence of God. A family is situated in the midst of a human community and, hence, the members have to be open to others; they should adopt a philanthropic, loving and helping approach towards other human beings living around them. Today we would think of the need for an empathetic ambient in which there are human beings, animals, flora and fauna which all live and flourish along with us; even the inanimate things, such as land, air, and water are of paramount importance.

Humans are psychosomatic or embodied spirits and as long as they live on the earth they need the physical and material wealth for their life and growth; hence, they have to attend prudently and wisely to such needs. Saint Kuriākōse Chāvāra, being a thoughtful spiritual person and a concerned mentor, has a holistic view of family. He inculcated such a noble Christian vision of family and continues to teach us about the inevitable aspects of a wholesome human life on the earth, particularly within a family, that needs to thrive in a healthy, spiritual and material situation.



## Chapter 4

### GROOMING OF CHILDREN ACCORDING TO SAINT KURIĀKŌSE CHĀVARA<sup>1</sup>

Saint Chāvāra has given some sixteen practical instructions concerning the proper Christian upbringing of children. Here the saint purposefully speaks about the ‘upbringing of children’ (*Kuttikaludevalarthal*) which seems to arise from a comprehensive and holistic vision as it could point to the physical, material, emotional, relational, intellectual and spiritual growth of children. Indeed, he sees the family as a communion of father, mother and children growing in the fear of God. Since every family and each person in it is unique, he envisions a healthy and happy family with a future orientation especially with children who are to be prepared for life on earth and the world to come. Pope Francis insists that the “Parents always influence the moral development of their children, for better or for worse. It follows that they should take up this essential role and carry it out consciously, enthusiastically, reasonably and appropriately... [T]he educational role of families is so important and increasingly complex...”<sup>2</sup>

The psalmist declares that “Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him. Like

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<sup>1</sup>In this second part of the letter, the author restarts numbering each paragraph, which we shall also follow in the references.

<sup>2</sup>Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* (*Joy of Love*), §259.

arrows in the hands of a warrior are children born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their opponents in court" (127:3-5). The most important creed in the First Testament reads: "Hear O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. *Recite them to your children* and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates" (Deut 6:4-9). Here we have a profession of Israel's faith that the Lord (Yahweh) is God and that he alone is God, with an instruction to teach the coming generations what he requires of them, to be loved by them with their whole being. God is to be the determining and overarching reality in their lives.

### **1. Parents Responsible to God for Their Children**

Our saint reminds the parents that they should ever remember that it is their great privilege, inalienable right and bounden responsibility to rear Children properly, who are inestimable treasures entrusted to their care, by God. They are given to them to be sanctified by the precious blood of Jesus to be his servants and they are to be handed back to God on the Day of Judgment. If children are eternally lost, parents may be responsible for that and that surely will affect

the parents.<sup>1</sup> “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it” (Prov 22:6).

Besides, children are to take care of their parents in their old age who have brought them up as good Christians. If children do not love and respect God when they are young, they will not do the same to their parents. Parents have often to dedicate their babies to Jesus, Mary and Joseph; mother’s prayer is heard by God as that of the babies (*Chāvarul* 2:1). Hence, the Saint teaches: (i) The formation and experience the children receive at home tell upon their lives on earth very much and will have even a life-long impact. (ii) Children well brought up in faith and fear of God only will be of any help to their parents. Remembering the presence of God and an aptitude for prayer should characterise their lives. Such children will be devoted to their parents and will joyfully and thankfully take care of them when they are old and weak.

## **2. Keep the Divine Names on Lips**

In the Bible and in many ancient cultures, the name stands for the person or thing and it is not merely a tag to distinguish one from another. The God of Israel, Yahweh is present where he is worshipped and his name is invoked. One is not to make a wrongful use of the Lord’s name (Ex 20:7; Deut 5:11); through his name

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<sup>1</sup>It does not mean that parents are punished for the sins of their children; they are punished only for their sins (Deut 24:16; Jer 31: 29-30; Ezek 18:1ff.).

one is delivered (Ps 54:3); one finds help in his name (Ps 124:8). The very name Jesus (Yeshua) means “Yahweh is salvation” (Mt 1:21; Lk 2:21); “his name is above every other name” (2 Phil 2:9; Eph 1:21). “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved” (Acts 3:12). In Jesus’ name Peter healed a crippled beggar (Acts 3:6; 4:12; Mk 16:17). Forgiveness of sin is given in Jesus’ name (Acts 10:43; 1 Jn 2:12). He is the Mashiach/Messiah or “the anointed of the Lord” (Mt 26:63ff; Mk 14:63ff; Lk 22:67ff; Acts 2:36; 3:30).

Pronouncing the names of Jesus, Mary and Joseph devotedly is a way of bringing us closer to their very presence. Children are to call upon these names and be instructed to venerate and kiss their holy icons and pictures. When they are able to talk, they are to learn the Our Father, Hail Mary and the ‘Angel of the Lord.’ Thus, with the bodily nourishments, they are to be given these spiritual foods (*Chāvarul* 2:2). This instruction is from the personal experience of the saint at home with his mother when he was a child, and it initiates Children to solid Christian life.<sup>1</sup>

Psychology teaches that the impressions or teachings received in infancy make a deep and lasting impression on human beings and, hence, our saint wanted children to be instructed and brought up in Christian faith and practice as early as possible. What

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<sup>1</sup>We have already seen what the saint has written about his own experience, especially with his mother, see pages 40-41.



is true of physical nourishment is valid also for spiritual nourishment.

### **3. Parents Have to Be Vigilant**

Our saint wants that even babies are to be properly dressed up and dignified in their comportment also at home and even though they may not understand much of what others say, words in their hearing should be edifying, clean and polite. At one time elders used a euphemism concerning conception and birth of children saying that they came down from God (*Chāvarul* 2:3). Here is a pedagogical language that is intelligible, not to be pressed too much.

Out of respect for the parents after a particular age children are not to sleep with their parents; boys and girls are to be in separate rooms. Here are two practical lessons: (i) Parents and children have their physical features, private needs and interests which are natural, but which children are to learn gradually. (ii) Young minds are highly receptive while incapable of discretion (*Chāvarul* 2:4).

Parents have to see to which all places and with whom children go and play; who their friends are is to be a serious concern. In this matter even servants cannot be trusted (*Chāvarul* 2:5). “Families cannot help but be places of support, guidance and direction, however much they may have to rethink their methods and discover new resources. Parents need to consider what they want their children to be exposed to, and this necessarily means being concerned about who is

providing their entertainment, who is entering their rooms through television and electronic devices, and with whom they are spending their free time. Only if we devote time to our children, speaking of important things with simplicity and concern, and finding healthy ways for them to spend their time, will we be able to shield them from harm. Vigilance is always necessary and neglect is never beneficial. Parents have to help prepare children and adolescents to confront the risk, for example, of aggression, abuse or drug addiction.”<sup>1</sup>

“Obsession, however, is not education. We cannot control every situation that a child may experience. Here it remains true that ‘time is greater than space.’ In other words, it is more important to start processes than to dominate spaces. If parents are obsessed with always knowing where their children are and controlling all their movements, they will seek only to dominate space. But this is no way to educate, strengthen and prepare their children to face challenges. What is most important is the ability lovingly to help them grow in freedom, maturity, overall discipline and real autonomy. Only in this way will children come to possess the wherewithal needed to fend for themselves and to act intelligently and prudently whenever they meet with difficulties...”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia (Joy of Love)*, §260.

<sup>2</sup>Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia (Joy of Love)*, §261.

#### **4. Staying with Relatives**

Children staying even with relatives is seen as risky; they may go as angels and return as devils. What the saint means to say seems to be that rearing of children is a delicate matter that requires special care and attention from their parents (*Chāvarul* 2:7). Pope Francis gives its modern version: "Families cannot help but be places of support, guidance and direction, however much they may have to rethink their methods and discover new resources. Parents need to consider what they want their children to be exposed to, and this necessarily means being concerned about who is providing their entertainment, who is entering their rooms through television and electronic devices, and with whom they are spending their free time. Only if we devote time to our children, speaking of important things with simplicity and concern, and finding healthy ways for them to spend their time, will we be able to shield them from harm. Vigilance is always necessary and neglect is never beneficial. Parents have to help prepare children and adolescents to confront the risk, for example, of aggression, abuse or drug addiction."<sup>1</sup>

#### **5. Being Patient with Children**

Not to be too harsh or too lenient. Parents are warned not to be too harsh or too lenient with children; anger and punishment cause them trouble and make them

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<sup>1</sup>Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* (*Joy of Love*), §260.

shameless. An awareness of decent behaviour is to be created in them in a prudent way and small punishments may be awarded to children for their mistakes.

The mutual love of father and mother will have a positive influence on children (*Chāvarul* 2:9). Saint Paul is cautious: "And fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph 6:4). Ben Sira wants children to be well disciplined and even physical punishment is not ruled out (22:6; 30:1-13). Some of these measures may appear outdated in our understanding. However, pampering them too much and ignoring discipline will only spoil them and even make them harmful to human society. Pope Francis writes: "The family is the primary setting for socialization, since it is where we first learn to relate to others, to listen and share, to be patient and show respect, to help one another and live as one. The task of education is to make us sense that the world and society are also our home; it trains us how to live together in this greater home. In the family, we learn closeness, care and respect for others. We break out of our fatal self-absorption and come to realize that we are living with and alongside others who are worthy of our concern, our kindness and our affection. There is no social bond without this primary, everyday, almost microscopic aspect of living side by side, crossing paths at different times of the day, being concerned about everything that affects us, helping one another

with ordinary little things. Every day the family has to come up with new ways of appreciating and acknowledging its members.”<sup>1</sup>

### **6. No Worldly Tricks to Be Taught**

Children are not to be taught the worldly tricks and treacheries; if any defect is found in the matter, they are to be corrected and taught to love others sincerely and justly (*Chāvarul* 2:10). Ben Sira makes it very explicit: “My child, from your youth choose discipline, and when you have gray hair you will still find wisdom” (6:18; Eph 4:25-28).

### **7. Daily Family Prayer**

At the sound of the Angelus Bell, children are to gather at home, of course with the other members of the family, and the evening prayers are to be recited after which the children are to greet and kiss the hands of the parents. It surely fosters devotion to God and mutual love (*Chāvarul* 2:11). Regularly coming together for family prayer, as Saint Chāvāra insists, naturally enhances the family bonding and its reliance upon God’s graces. As the old saying goes, a family that prays together stays together.

### **8. Age of Discretion and Choice of the State of Life**

At the age of discretion children are to be sent to school; parents have to know where, in what company and how they learn. Every Sunday their performance

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<sup>1</sup>Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* (Joy of Love), §276.

in the school is to be evaluated (*Chāvarul* 2:6). Of course, such procedures would, if used in a friendly manner, bring rich dividends for the children even in their secular studies and overall life.

From the time they are able to speak, children must be following closely their parents and siblings. But at the age of seven, when they attain discretion, they are to be taught the sacrament of reconciliation.<sup>1</sup> This sacrament, apart from enabling them to seek God's forgiveness, enables them to assume responsibility for their own life and to learn the art of freeing themselves from the clutches of sin (*Chāvarul* 2:8).

Children are not to be indiscriminately exposed to public functions and celebrations like death-anniversaries, feasts, and marriages after the age of twelve. Let them remain at home and practice some useful trade. Decorating and sending girls to feasts and other functions is a trick and style that comes from hell according to our saint (*Chāvarul* 2:11). These instructions are to be seen in the concrete situation that is ever changing.

That the parents dress up and decorate their daughters with costly clothes and ornaments proudly even beyond their means, to exhibit their aristocracy, wealth, and family prestige, draws many to hell fire.

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<sup>1</sup>The absence of a mention of Holy Communion would seem to suggest that the Saint Thomas Christians in India at that time had the practice of 'Initiation Sacraments' for babies and that the reception of Communion in public was proposed later with the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

The ornaments of a girl are her modesty, piety, controlled speech, silence and custody of eyes (*Chāvarul* 2:12). These instructions depend on the situations and could be understood as precautions. Even in modern times, observing these guidelines by the youngsters is said to have a bearing their civilized upbringing.

Children are to be encouraged to choose in perfect freedom their state of life. Children should have full freedom in the choice of their state of life, though, of course, parents should guide them and should see it as their personal concern emerging from their rope as parents in Divine Providence. Matrimonial alliance is to be made with their full knowledge and consent; more than money and prestige, good behaviour and style of life that bring joy to children and parents are to be preferred. Here is a very personal and practical instruction that can affect the future life of families deeply (*Chāvarul* 2:14).

Vatican II has reaffirmed this view of Saint Chāvāra in contemporary situation: “Children should be so educated that as adults they can, with a mature sense of responsibility, follow their vocation, including religious one, and choose their state of life. If they marry, they can thereby establish their family in favourable moral, social, and economic condition. Parents or guardians should by prudent advice provide guidance to their young with respect to founding a family, and the young ought to listen gladly. At the same time no pressure, direct or indirect,

should be put on the young to make them enter marriage or choose a specific partner.”<sup>1</sup>

### 9. Parental Authority

We must beware of what is called ‘*pillapada*’. The petty quarrels and fights among children are not to be taken seriously by the elders as they are only childish emotional expressions which are easily forgotten by the children in no time. This kind of quarrels should have been normal among children in agrarian societies and they are to be taken as they are (*Chāvarul* 2:13). Hence, the parents are advised by Saint Chāvāra to ensure that they remain mature in judgment and cordial in their relationships with their neighbours and relatives.

Even when children are grown up, more educated and experienced, parental authority remains and it should be prudently exercised. According to Saint Chāvāra, parental authority is to be used judiciously. “A wise child makes a glad father, but a foolish child is a mother’s grief” (*Prov* 1:8; 10:1; see *Chāvarul* 2:15).

Parents shall settle property affairs on their children in time. In proper time, parents have to see that the property matters are settled before their death (*Chāvarul* 2:16).<sup>2</sup> It is to avoid any dispute among children over the property after the death of the parents. Children are exhorted to respect their parents and not to cause them any pain or suffering; on their part, they must abide by the fourth commandment (Ex

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<sup>1</sup>Vatican II, *The Church Today*, §52.

<sup>2</sup>This system is prevalent in India even today.



20:12; Deut 5:16; Tob 4:3-4). Saint Paul writes to the children in Ephesus: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honour your father and mother." This is the first commandment that comes with a promise: "... so that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth" (6:1-3).

### **10. Instruction to Respect Parents**

The last exhortation directed to children is touching: "Finally children! How much obliged you are by the fourth divine commandment to respect your parents and not to cause them any pain. Therefore, it is to be remembered that those who violate the fourth commandment will have disgrace not only in the world to come, but even in this world" (*Chāvarul* 2:16). Saint Chāvara's instructions to parents concerning upbringing of children end as we have noted earlier, with a challenging Japanese story of three sons who tried to save their poor mother risking their own lives.

Pope Francis exhorts: "Freedom is something magnificent, yet it can also be dissipated and lost. Moral education has to do with cultivating freedom through ideas, incentives, practical applications, stimuli, rewards, examples, models, symbols, reflections, encouragement, dialogue and a constant rethinking of our way of doing things; all these can help develop those stable interior principles that lead us spontaneously to do good. Virtue is a conviction that has become a steadfast inner principle of operation. The virtuous life thus builds, strengthens and shapes

freedom, lest we become slaves of dehumanizing and anti-social inclinations. For human dignity itself demands that each of us 'act out of conscious and free choice, as moved and drawn in a personal way from within.'"<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia (Joy of Love)*, §267.

## Chapter 5

### SAINT CHĀVARA: TEACHER OF FAMILY

Saint Kuriākōse Elias Chāvara lived in India in the nineteenth century (1805-1871) in an ancient agrarian society of Christian believers who lived enlightened by the celebration of the Divine Liturgy and the reading of the Bible and their simple teachings. Of course, he too was an ordained minister and an ecclesial teacher who was in contact with the mainstream of the Church, to the extent possible in India at that time. As a pastor and teacher, he learned different languages and the Bible in different ecclesial traditions. He understood well that the family is the nursery of the Church.

We do not know how much he was influenced by the great Fathers who wrote in their different intellectual and ecclesial contexts. Their idea of education was mainly religious, while our Saint was concerned about secular education as well, as is evident in his establishment of a Sanskrit school at Männānam and the instruction he gave to the parishes as Vicar General to establish a school (*pallikoodam*) with every Church (*pally*). Its result is powerfully present in all the Catholic communities all over India.

What he diligently studied and prayerfully meditated on, our Saint preached in his sermons and exhortations to the people and even wrote down his thoughts in prose and poetic forms. In them we do not have any technical scholarly discourse, but sharing of

his God-experience and deeper insights that he availed in meditation and contemplation.

That our Saint was able to understand the place of the family in the plan of God itself is something great. As a pastor who loved his people, he found that his thoughts on the family could be the greatest final gift he could give them as he himself has noted it in the letter. What Pope Francis teaches is to be remembered here: “The Church is a family of families, constantly enriched by the lives of all those domestic churches.” ‘In virtue of the sacrament of matrimony, every family becomes, in effect, a good for the Church. From this standpoint, reflecting on the interplay between the family and the Church will prove a precious gift for the Church in our time. The Church is good for the family, and the family is good for the Church. The safeguarding of the Lord’s gift in the sacrament of matrimony is a concern not only of individual families but of the entire Christian community.’<sup>1</sup>

The ‘Testament’ or the “Farewell Words of a Good Father” (*Oru Nalla Appante Chāvarul*) that Saint Kuriākōse wrote on 13 February 1868, one and a half century ago, is a masterpiece manual on Christian family spirituality, in the style of the book of Sirach in a language that was fully intelligible to his people. What our Saint wrote then to his people with love as a final gift, is highly biblical, pastoral, theological and still relevant, and it belongs to the rich treasury of the

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<sup>1</sup>Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia (Joy of Love)*, §87.

universal Church. Indeed, Saint Chāvāra continues to be a teacher or doctor of family theology and spirituality in the Church.

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## THEOLOGICAL STUDIES ON SAINT CHAVARA

Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara (1805-1871) - a Carmelite religious priest and a professor of theology (*Malpan*) in the Syro-Malabar Church, who pioneered consecrated life in the Indian Church by founding the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI; in collaboration with Thomas Palackal and Thomas Porukara, in 1831), the first indigenous religious congregation for men and the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel (CMC; in collaboration with Leopold Beccaro OCD, in 1866) - is widely recognized for his pioneering efforts to reform the Church in Kerala and the society of the nineteenth century. His credible Christian witness along with the leadership he offered to the Church of Saint Thomas Christians, at a time when it was passing through multiple jurisdictional crises, scripted a spiritual and disciplined growth in the Kerala Church.

Canonized on 23 November 2014, Saint Chavara's personal sanctity and Christian wisdom are identified to be unique. While the secular society admires his contributions in pioneering a set of revolutionary changes in uplifting people on the margins and those who were socially ostracised through educational and social initiatives, the fundamental core of all his achievements is solidly established in his filial discipleship of Jesus Christ, whom he addressed '*ente nalla appa*' (my beloved father).

Saint Chavara had a firm foundation in Christian faith, which is clearly visible throughout his life and it is testified by those who knew him. He articulated his views and perspectives primarily based on his personal encounter with Jesus and also based on his readings and theological reflections. They are available to us through his extant writings, which are published in four volumes in the *Complete Works of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*. Some of these works, recognized as pioneering

efforts in Indian literary genre, offer us a mine of rich and sound theological insights. Although his access to scientific Christian literature was minimal (if not completely absent), his writings draw from the biblical as well as other Christian traditions, which he had faithfully and creatively interpreted for the enhancement of the faith life of the Christian community that he had catered to throughout his life.

*Theological Studies on Saint Chavara* - a joint effort of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI) and Congregation of the Mother of Carmel (CMC) - attempts to promote and publish fruits of scientific investigation into the unique and varied theological insights of Saint Chavara in the form of monographs. These theological investigations will be instrumental in appreciating and popularising the sound and solid theological contributions he made to enhance Catholic faith in the nineteenth century, which, in turn, indicate that he deserves titles like 'Father of the Syro-Malabar Church' and 'Doctor of the Church'. As the publication of this series is undertaken with the blessings of the Synod of the Syro-Malabar Archiepiscopal Church, which also had benefitted from the eminent theological acumen, pastoral insights, and ecclesiastical leadership of Saint Chavara, these studies would bring to light the multifarious theological heritage that he had bequeathed to the Church and the subsequent generations of faithful in India.

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