

*Editorial***CHANGING RULES OF ENGAGEMENT
The Christian Marriage****Benny Paul Thettayil***Editor-in-Chief*

In a small Russian village, a rabbi shares the wisdom of God, three Jewish sisters come of age and a matchmaker works her magic, wreaking havoc and breaking the long-standing traditions of a conservative family. This is the plot of the musical, *Fiddler on the Roof* (1971) directed by Janet Lazarus. The story depicts a Jewish father and the challenges that he faces as three of his daughters' marital choices begin to unravel his religious traditions and beliefs. The story transpires in 1905, in the beginning of a revolution as the tsar starts evicting Jews from the territory. He is in a *traditional* mode, and the daughters say, 'I don't want to marry who you ask me to marry; I want to marry outside the faith.' Marriage outside the Jewish faith is a line that he cannot cross. Part of the story is of the father having to come to the realization that he can no longer be rooted in rigid tradition, it is going to change around him, and he will have to give in a little bit.

The scriptural understanding of marriage is that it is willed by God as a sacred covenant relationship between man and woman based on a public vow of lifetime faithfulness (Mt 19). Worded positively and based on the scripture, we believe that marriage is ordained by God at creation as the sacred union of one man and one woman (CCC 1601). However, there is much confusion about marriage among the young people today, and the Church has an important responsibility to teach God's truth on this matter and to show them God's way. It is the clear teaching of the Church that all sexual relations must therefore be reserved for that union. Christian marriage is a representation of Christ's relationship to his Church. We also believe that children, who are the fruit of such union, are a blessing from the Lord. Hence, all human life is sacred and worthy of protection right from the moment of conception.

Marriage has been one of the important social institutions around the world. From a sociological perspective, marriage plays a significant role in regulating the human social life. It is considered primarily a complex of obligations, religious and moral, on the one hand and social and economic on the other. In some cultures, the institution of marriage is sacred and it enjoins the husband to regard his wife as a God-given gift. However, this view of marriage has undergone a drastic transformation in the modern times.

The traditional perceptions and ideologies on the institution of marriage are reshaped under the influence of westernization, modern education, urbanization and reformed legislations. These have affected the implications of marriage within the Indian society and the Church. The young people today look at this socio-religious institution through a different lens. As a result, the institution of marriage has seen many trends some of which are harmful, and they question the traditional meaning, significance and purpose of marriage. The youth of the modern era have less regard for the institution of marriage as a sacrament of companionship, love and trust. They rather subscribe to a marriage of convenience.

1. Marriage and Sexuality as Gifts of God

In the first story of creation, God created human being male and female. In the second story of creation, God saw that it was not good for the man to be alone. God brought the woman to him and united them. The Bible celebrates them and their relationship. Later, according to the biblical teachers, marriage and sexuality are good gifts of God. "He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favour from the Lord" (Prov 18:22). The teacher also blesses the married state: "May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer ... may you ever be captivated by her love" (Prov 5:18-19). And there is an entire book of the Bible devoted to the topic of romantic and sexual love in marriage – the Song of Solomon.

With the gift of marriage and sexuality, God wants his people to have a fulfilling, intimate relationship with their spouses. In a few biblical restrictive instructions, like "Marriage should be honoured by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral" (Heb 13:4), God is not taking away the joys of marriage. He is protecting his people from those things that will hurt them and damage their relationships with others.

2. Challenges to the Married

The marriage vows that couples make to stick together "for better, for worse ... in sickness and in health ... for richer, for poorer ..." presuppose the snags that are in store for them as they are entering married life. These promises presuppose tough times. Every marriage faces these hardships. Many well-meaning newly married couples start their lives together dreaming of a happy thereafter under the blissful delusion that they will never face any problems in their marriage. Regrettably, that is never the case. For the lack of a realistic view, the married couples are led to feel disappointed and disillusioned.

Marriage, both as a sacrament and a contract is one of the most wonderful and fulfilling unions in the world. However, for the sake of the future generations as well as the present one, it is very important to reflect on the realities of married life and understand that all marriages go through good seasons, and seasons that are not so good; ups and downs are sometimes vital for crucial lessons in reality. If individuals go into marriage with eyes open, we also need to be open minded to bring the challenges to discussion when, once in a while, things go a little twisted. Although we are aware of the fact that each situation is unique, the following reflection contains a list of most of these common troubles.

2.1. Physical Separation of the Spouse

Marriage is a coming together of two individuals. However, many people are forced to move as they go in search of a job and as they are transferred from place to place. Sometimes, career can cause a change of location. That would entail moving across the state, country or across the world. Moving as a family is a huge stress. Immovable property, education of the children, living conditions of the place where one is working, and a million other factors contribute to the situation in which the husband and wife live separately for a long time.

In an agrarian and traditional society, the spouses would work together, interact and see each other for most of the day. There was more intimacy among the members of the family and all helped each other in their work. With the separation of work and home the interaction between the spouses has been considerably reduced. With one of the spouses working in the industry away from the family, the intimacy in relations has been adversely affected. However, the most

poignant of these separations is the physical parting of the spouses immediately after marriage. Some of them are so pressed for time that they have leave enough just to get married, immediately after which, they take off for their work. This is a real threat to the marital bonding. In such a situation, the husband and wife are forced to live in separate worlds.

The fabric of the society and the Church becomes a bit loose when one of the partners is employed abroad and his/her circumstances do not permit him/her to take the spouse along. Some of them are forced to live separately at the very outset of their marriage. The regular or odd telephone calls and in the modern times, the video calls are the only means available to them to express their mutual affection and emotions. Since the spouses are kept away from each other immediately after their marriage they fail to know each other and to have intimacy in relationship. Not only they fail to fulfil their biological needs but the bonding that is essential for life does not take place. The adverse effects of this lack of bonding and relationship often remain with them for the rest of their life. This type of physical separation of the spouses for employment not only affects their marital life but also badly affects their children, because the child lacks the physical presence and support of his/her parents.

2.2. Challenging Children

Children are a gift of God. However, even the most well-behaved children in the world occasionally present challenges. After his son was picked up from the street after a night of binge drinking along with his schoolmates, Tony Blair, the British Prime Minister, declared that it was easier to run a country than to manage your children. Children are challenging and often, the stress that is resulted will tell upon the relationship between the father and the mother. Spiritual directors would want you to remember that marriage comes first and not the children. The wisdom inherent in such an advice is that only if you nurture and foster your relationship with your wife, you will be better equipped to deal with whatever the children dish out to you as they go around exploring the world.

Together, the father and the mother make strategies to bring their children up in a disciplined manner. The absence of the father or the mother in the family, even for the reasons of career, has an adverse effect on the children. In such families, children are often unruly and undisciplined. Single parents find it increasingly hard to accomplish the task of bringing up the children in discipline.

2.3. Immature Spouse

Traditionally, it is when a boy and a girl come in to maturity, and when this fact is established by the elders, that they are given the responsibility of a family through the sacrament of marriage. In loving relationship, they grow further in maturity over time. Most of the hurdles that are faced by the married couples are caused by emotional immaturity. The immature decisions they make regarding themselves and those related to them aggravate the situation. If they enter family life immature, and despite the passage of time, if they still relate to one another the same way they did when they were married, it is past time to wake up; it is time for the marriage to grow up.

Traditionally, it is living in the family with the parents that the young couple learned the hard lessons of family life. However, when this traditional life in extended families is not possible due to migration, and when the couple is away from the family, their world shrinks and they are confined to themselves. They look for ways and means to remedy the situation in their limited immature world. Spiritual directors advise such individuals to invest in the marriage as if their life depends on it, because it really does. This is when various pious organizations of the faith community or parish to which they belong, come in handy. They are advised to get involved in one of such groups where they can live out their love for one another loud.

2.4. Lurking Unfaithfulness

It is an everyday struggle all married people face, as they act or speak differently from the standards, which they claim to live by. Marriages run into this hardship often. Sometimes, married men and women tell themselves that they are doing okay, although they know deep inside that they are not. When the author of the letter to the Hebrews says that "the marriage bed should be kept pure" (Heb 13:4), he is talking about the sexual relationship within marriage, only where it is pure and holy and good, but outside of marriage it is displeasing to God.

Sometimes the stress of life becomes overwhelming, but some couples carry on as if they are in control. The falseness and inconsistency in which they live is enough to pull them further down and make them feel depressed, anxious or disconnected from their hearts. All these are perfect ingredients in the recipe of the breakdown of marriage.

New is always fascinating and sometimes time takes away the sheen of the new and it gradually becomes uninteresting. This is the

case also with husband and wife – gradually, each can become disinterested in the other. Sometimes it happens early on. Sometimes it takes a decade or so. The fact is, disinterest and boredom can easily creep into marriage. Not feeling anything special about the relationship with the spouse is a hardship. However, in order to keep the relationship ever new and fresh, both the wife and the husband need to become intentional about it. The constant renewal of the vows of marriage alone keeps them together for ever.

Unfaithfulness in marriage and family life often makes us think of marital disloyalty. However, the definition of “unfaithfulness” stretches beyond adultery. Unfaithfulness does not necessarily have to involve a third party. Many husbands and wives are guilty of being unfaithful when it comes to time, attention, priorities, the way they use their resources, and the list would go on and on. Most people are guilty of infidelity, because at one time or another they have professed to believe something that they really do not. If the husband is not happy with the wife, and something is bothering him, it is likely that he becomes impatient or rude. He becomes undependable, and if left unhandled, the breach in the relationship continues to grow and both physical and emotional intimacy becomes rare. Usually, there is falseness in his statement as his actions do not show love, rather hostility. Conscientious husbands and wives nip such weeds germinating in the garden of marriage in the bud. Some seek spiritual help and some need emotional help. Some might even need psychological help. In the sacrament of reconciliation, most of these hitches are taken care of and help is found in the grace of God.

2.5. Debilitating Maladies

In a healthy marriage, as we mentioned earlier, the husband and the wife undergo a process of gradual but uneventful bonding. This bonding can be so strong that sometimes they do not realize how much they rely on one another until one of them breaks down physically. If the marriage is healthy, the possibility of psychological breakdown is narrowed. However, there are also times when some people go through a rough psychological patch. The challenge here is to cope with a malady that is not very obvious.

To a certain extent, the psychological effect of the debilitating illness on the healthy spouse is similar to that of the physical absence of the spouse. The one who is still standing, with the heart of a servant, does everything in his/her power to be at the service the spouse. He/she goes the extra mile and places the needs of the spouse ahead

of his/her own. Although such an all-inclusive service is tough, some spouses render it with an obvious willing spirit that makes all the difference.

2.6. The Decadence in Divorce

Marriage in the eyes of the Church is a vow of lifetime faithfulness. Divorce is a challenge to marriage as a lifetime commitment. Jesus said: "I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery" (Mt 5:31-32). When a man and woman get married, they are joined together by God. Hence, Jesus said further: "What God has joined together, let man not separate" (Mt 19:6).

Too many people enter marriage with the thought, "If it does not work out, we can always get a divorce." And too many marriages end simply because the couple think that divorce is the easy route and are not willing to work out their problems together.

There are no perfect marriages in the world. Some people face serious problems in their marriages. Real hurt and emotional suffering can be caused when a marriage goes off the track. It takes both the spouses working together with the grace of God to bring it back to track. Each has to put the concerns of the other first in order for that to happen. Divorce is a challenge to the *lifetime* part of the marriage vow of *lifetime faithfulness* on which it is founded.

3. Challenges to the Prospective Spouses

Today, unlike any previous ages, the would-be spouses are on the cross-roads. They look at the married couples, their families and the children who are growing up in the family. They look back at the married life of their parents and their upbringing. In the light of these, they look into their future and consider a life that is worth living. Depending upon what the society and the Church are able to present to them, and they are able to see, decisions are made independently of the family they belong to. Gone are the days when the elders wielded autocratic power in the family. Today, children are independent, earning and capable of decision-making.

3.1. Liberal Sexual Orientations

Homosexuality is no more a taboo. Those who have such orientation have come out with pride in public to assert it. The Gay, Lesbian,

Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society maintains an extensive collection of archival materials relating to their history. The society also sponsors the GLBT Historical Society Museum, a unique museum that has attracted international attention.

Following the western society, on 6 September 2018, the Supreme Court of India decriminalised homosexuality by declaring Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code unconstitutional. Although same-sex couples are not legally recognized currently by any form, performing a same-sex marriage is not prohibited under Indian law either. It is in these national and international contexts that we need to look at homosexuality, which is a challenge to the Christian understanding of marriage, especially as seen in the second part of the definition that was given initially, according to which, marriage is a sacred covenant relationship between *a man and a woman*.

Once, Jesus was asked about marriage. In reply, he pointed back to the beginning, when God created human beings: "Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?" (Mt 19:4-5). The Creator made human beings male and female, and for this reason a *man* is united to a *woman*.

Legalizing homosexuality was a gateway to legalizing same sex marriage, which altered the nature, aim and purpose of marriage. On 26 June 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down all state bans on same-sex marriage and legalized it. As of 2019, sixteen European countries have legally recognised and they perform same-sex marriages! An additional twelve European countries legally recognise some form of same sex civil union.

Although the court has decriminalized homosexuality in India, our culture is confused on this issue, and the Church seems to be confused too, especially in the context of the Christian west going down this line. Indeed, every genuine and innate orientation in a person is to be respected in the Church.¹ However, for the best interest of humanity

¹When Pope Francis was asked how he might act as a confessor to a gay person in light of his interrogative remark in a press conference in 2013: "If a person is gay and seeks out the Lord and is willing, who am I to judge that person?" Answering the question, the Pope said: "I was paraphrasing by heart the Catechism of the Catholic Church where it says that these people should be treated with delicacy and not be marginalized ... because before all else comes the individual person, in his wholeness and dignity. And

and a healthy society in the future, the biblical demands of marriage are to be respected and awareness must be spread in the Church.

3.2. Convenience of Cohabitation

Cohabitation refers to a living arrangement in which an unmarried couple lives together in a long-term relationship that resembles a marriage. This kind of an arrangement is not only accepted in some cultures, it is almost expected of the young people. They cohabit, rather than marry, for a variety of reasons. In this arrangement some of them want to test their compatibility before they commit to a legal union and see it as a step on the way to marriage, as they are led to think that living together before marriage will increase their chances for marital success. Others live together out of convenience and still others do so for financial reasons.

There are various plus points that are inherent in the practice of cohabitation. Certainly, there is wisdom in this arrangement as an experimental prelude to marriage, especially in the light of the negative experiences stemming from various incompatibilities that are discovered later on. However, experience teaches that more than eight out of ten couples who live together break up either before the wedding or divorce after the wedding. More than half of those who cohabit do not marry. Couples who cohabit and marry are more likely to divorce than those who had not. Only a small percent of couples who began their relationship with cohabitation have a marriage that is lasting.

Living together lack the stability and security that marriage with a public vow provides. The disastrous consequences of the lack of commitment in cohabitation are seen in the life of the children. Children of cohabiting separated and/or divorced parents are far more likely to be sexually abused by a step parent than by a parent. Experiences show that the children of cohabiting parents are more

people should not be defined only by their sexual tendencies: let us not forget that God loves all his creatures and we are destined to receive his infinite love." What is noteworthy is that the Pope continued: "I prefer that homosexuals come to confession, that they stay close to the Lord, and that we pray all together." The Pope does not say that the path that they walk is okay. They need to come to confession to be close to the Lord. He invites the Church to "show goodwill, show them the way, and accompany them along it."

likely to be drop-outs from school or to get into trouble as teenagers than children from a home with married parents living with them.

Viewed in the light of the teaching of the Church, cohabitation is a challenge to marriage as a public vow. In the Church, marriage is not a private agreement between two people. It is a public, legal relationship that takes place within the community. The situation of cohabitation dishonours marriage because in such a situation, those engaged in it enjoy the benefits of marriage while avoiding the responsible commitment demanded by the sacrament. The commitment which should lead them to joy is lost sight of. It is in the security of commitment that the love relationship grows in intimacy and depth to reach its full potential.

3.3. Premarital Sex

As St. Paul warns the Thessalonian church, marriage is a sacred and covenant relationship. Hence, it is the will of God and your sanctification that you abstain from unchastity; that each one of you know how to take a wife for himself in holiness and honour, not in the passion of lust like others who do not know God; that no one wrong or exploit a brother or sister in this matter (1 Thes 4:1-4). In this instruction, Paul tells them how to live pleasing God. And one of those instructions is to avoid sexual immorality. *Unchastity* here is a general word for any sexual activity outside of marriage. The message is, you cannot engage in sexual relations outside of marriage and please God.

As the biblical definition of marriage holds, having sex before marriage is a particular challenge to marriage, a sacred, covenant relationship. *Sacred* denotes "something that has been set apart for a purpose." Sex is sacred because God has set apart the sexual relationship for marriage and for marriage alone.

Now of course, this is a huge challenge to the sacrament of marriage in the western Church today. In the western society in general, sex before marriage is not only accepted, but it is expected in some quarters for various reasons. In some societies, those who wait until marriage are seen as strange, old-fashioned or *out of step with the times*. However, it is the strong view of the Church, as instructed by Paul, that it is those who do not wait for marriage that are *out of step with God's word*. When marriage was removed from sex, and it was placed independently, promiscuity thrived. Such a process resulted in a culture of broken relationships, debilitating diseases and thousands of children born into the world without a stable mother and father to

take care of them and many of them ended up as orphans and some of them in the streets.

It is when sex and marriage go together that we have a stable and balanced society. Sometimes the place of sex within marriage is compared to the fire in the fireplace in a well-decorated sitting room where it provides warmth and comfort and lifts the atmosphere of the room that everything around is beautiful, making the room more welcoming. Similarly, it is sex within marriage that gives safety and stability to the home. Placed out of the fireplace, fire causes untold damage to the house and hurt to those within. Hence, premarital sex is a challenge to marriage as a sacred, covenant relationship, because it isolates sex from the marriage relationship where it truly belongs.

4. Challenging Trends of Marriage

It is a fact that today marriage has apparently become less popular, more fragile and less of an exclusive setting for having children. There is a decline in marriage rates. It is not perhaps due to the wholesale rejection of marriage; rather, people tend to get married at increasingly older age. This is one of the trends that have gripped the society. The changes that happen in society affect the young faster than it affects the old. The following are the few changing trends of marriage among the youth today.

4.1. Aim and Purpose of Marriage

Traditionally, the purpose of marriage was considered to be companionship and procreation. Concerning the aim of marriage, the Catechism of the Catholic Church states: "The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature *ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring*; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament" (CCC 1601; see also CIC 1055 §1; GS 48 §1). By virtue of the sacrament, the husband and wife become life-long companions of each other; the husband becomes the protector of his wife as they live a life fulfilling the vows and aim of the marriage. However, in the modern era, the young generation perceives marriage as a bonding of a male and a female for life-long companionship. However, some men and women shun the responsibility of a family and the second aspect of marriage is often lost sight of.

4.2. Process of the Selection

Traditionally, structural influences played a significant role in the process of choosing a partner with whom to form a marriage bond. Parents, elders and relatives used to select the spouse for the eligible adult. However, many educated men and women in the modern times, do not believe in the old patterns of arrangement of a prospective husband for marriage. In the modern society, personal preference of the individual is a key component in the selection process. They believe in seeking the prospective spouse and making their choices on their own terms, accomplishing this task themselves, because they feel that marriage is a bonding for lifetime and hence, their spouse should be of their own choice.

The criterion of selection of the spouse also has been altered. For the elders in the family, security in life, which is brought about by employment, housing, working status, prestige, goodwill, attitude, etc., are of prime importance in the selection process. However, the young individuals give more importance to their personal interests, preferences and considerations rather than to the traditional family considerations.

4.3. Range of Selection

In India, the society has long been in the shackles of grave discrimination on grounds of religion and caste. There have been extremely stringent rules enforcing the same. Marriages were arranged within the framework of the caste and ethnicity. Marrying across the caste kindles strong community resentment, leading to the extent of honour killing. And most marriages are governed by the specific personal laws governing the religion that the individual belongs to.

However, in the modern world, increasingly, couples dare to defy this stringent social norm. The youth rejects the structures of the caste system, ethnicity and race, resulting in the inter-caste and inter-ethnic marriages. Many educated young men and women look for a good person as the life partner irrespective of his/her religious and ethnic identity.

We have come a long way in developing liberal perceptions thanks to a society where intermingling between people from different religions and castes is happening at forums both educational and professional.² Consequently, marriage arrangements also involve such

²The youth of today focus more upon personal and professional advancement. They concentrate on higher education, which can land a good job.

intermingling. The youth of today are quite receptive to the idea of inter-caste/inter-religious marriage.

5. Conclusion

As we mentioned earlier, marriage and sexuality are good gifts of God. When we follow God's plan, they work for our benefit. Unfortunately, when the members of a culture or people abandon God's plan, they run into real challenges to marriage. The requirements of a healthy marriage are really demanding that sometimes spouses feel discouraged, defeated, and beat down, as they fall far short of God's standards in these areas. This is what, in a different context Paul tells the Roman Church: "We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23).

The challenge before the leaders of the Church and the society is to orientate the modern youth of our times to perceive the sanctity of the institution of marriage. When the youth are embracing the companionship of a husband or a wife on the foundation of trust and mutual consent, they must be taught to provide space for each other's growth and preferences so that they might grow together into a healthy family. They need to be made aware of the challenges that can arise at various stages of their life together in order to face the challenges and work through them as a team and overcome them together.

The current issue focuses on marriage and family. The overall emphasis is on how to keep the integrity of the sacrament of marriage and how to preserve our families intact. Chavara, in his own way, implicitly warns the community of this threat. Today, the *Chavarul* of Chavara invites us to become aware of the destructive side of the modern trends that call the sacramentality of marriage and the sacredness of the family into question. The main entries of the present issue of the *Herald of the East* focus on various aspects of marriage and family in the light of *Chavarul*.

Reflecting on the spirituality of marriage and the family, Jossy holds that family is a treasure, which must be always protected and defended. From the *Chavarul*, she gleans a definition of family, according to which, family is a God-given place to members to grow in

Only when they are secure financially, they think of getting married and settled. Hence, many men and women get married at an older age. The women used to get married at the age of 18-22 and met at the age of 23-25. Today, the average marrying age is 24-26 for women and 25-30 for men.

love, sanctity and human virtues and find self-fulfilment, where one ensures one's salvation. Chavara calls for a family-centred spirituality, of which marital and family spirituality is part. Marital spirituality is the spirituality of the bond, in which divine love dwells. *Atmanuthapam* is strewn with expressions of mothering experiences as motherhood involves a special communion with the mystery of life, as it develops in the woman's womb. Sacredness of human sexuality is based on the fact that God himself created sexuality, which is a marvellous gift to his creatures. Hence, the celebration of love in conjugal love is the greatest form of friendship. Feminine style of holiness for the church would stem from the genius of woman and mother's role in upbringing children in mutual respect and equality in the family. The reflection comes to a conclusion with a thought on the challenges to families.

Saju Karukaparampil reflects on the challenges that the sacrament of marriage faces in the modern world. Some of the serious challenges to the sacrament of marriage and family are enumerated. There is a phenomenal increase in the number of inter-faith and inter-ethnic marriages both in the West and in the East. For several reasons, some Catholics opt for civil marriage, some of them neglecting the sacramental marriage. Break-up of marriage which often leads to divorce is one of the most profound crises in the society as the spouses deny each other and in the process, deny themselves. Due to issues related to dowry, even among the Catholics, often from the beginning of married life, there are conflicts between the couple and between the bride and her in-laws. Although migration, which takes people away, has its advantages, it has enormous effect on the institution of marriage and family in varying degrees.

Benny Mukalel explores the challenges of children, youth and families in the context of the year of youth and in the light of *Chavarul*, a holy legacy that Chavara has left for his people, which presents a vision of the family, which surpasses its historical context. Drawing inspiration from the procedural methodology of the Synod on the Family, the writer invites to *see* the Challenges made by the *Chavarul* in the light of *Amoris Laetitia*, to judge oneself and the society in the light of the Word and to act in the path of mercy that religious institutions might become centres of family ministry.

Cinderella Sequeira looks at the *Chavarul* a prophetic voice for Christian family in the modern world. Chavara stands as an outstanding apostle to a land plagued with the caste system, slavery, illiteracy, female degradation, to which he brought the message of true

faith and social order. He believed that family was the source of all morality and spirituality and his own spirituality was rooted in his experience of the Holy Family within his home. The need of the hour is to resort to 'the plan of God' for a family because it is a community of a few people joined together in blood relation and bound together by a bond of love, which makes it the fertile ground for individuals to nurture their creative energies and realize their full potential for the glorification of God and the good of their neighbours. *Chavarul* instructs the families on devotion to the Lord, unity in the family and peace with neighbours, conscious distancing from evil, management of personal property and ideal upbringing of children, which includes formation of faith, conscience, intellect and discipline.

Mathew Maniampra explores how Thomas Palackal, Thomas Porukara and Kuriakose Elias Chavara were revered pastors and *malpans* with different giftedness, but an inner desire to do greater service to his people and the Church led them to think beyond their individual differences and immediate interests. They were people with openness and could find common grounds to work and collaborate for the greater glory of God and God's people. All leaderships should have a sacred dimension, if they are to be authentic. St. Chavara sensed his leadership as a sacred duty. What is called for is a generative leadership, which has the sensitivity and forcefulness to nourish and nurture the people one is in charge of.

Sophy Rose gets closer to Chavara and see how his pastoral mind works as he goes around making various contributions to the Church. The author is making this study in the light of the contributions made by the Apostolic Fathers. Going through the writings of Chavara, she explores the pastoral and eschatological character of his literature, his discussions on the doctrine of baptism and efficacy of good works for salvation. She makes a detailed study of the Christology of Chavara to see how a picture of Christ is drawn as both divine and human, the titles of Christ and how he is seen both as father and mother. Finally, she reflects on how, like the Apologetic Fathers, Chavara defended and protected the unity of the Church.

Jose Eroorickal makes an Indian reading of the spiritual vision of Chavara whose spirituality was a combination of Indian, Eastern and Carmelite features of mysticism. Rooted in these age old traditions, Chavara and his companions took to a life of contemplation that led them to intense apostolate. Initially, the writer explores the basic characteristic features of the mystics and goes on to survey the general features of Indian spirituality. In this background, he reflects on the

mystical experiences of Chavara, which are expressed in his *darsanam*, *vasam*, and *sallapam* by means of which, he practised the Christian spiritual values in the Indian society, which was very unique for his times.

All of us, no matter which vocation we follow, are fiddlers on the roof trying to concentrate on producing good music, perched precariously on a slippery slope that the roof is. Like the fiddler, who could fall if he leans too far to one side that is liberal or the other side that is conservative undue importance given to any view will take away our balance - life is a balancing act. Our times are times of change. The *Chavarul* invites the believers to balance life between acknowledging the tried and proved wisdom of the tradition of the elders and allowing growth for the young in freedom.