

FAMILY CATECHESIS IN THE *CHAVARUL*

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Abstract: Catechetics is an essential aspect of religious education, for it plays a crucial role in nurturing the faith of the believers. Rooted in the ancient traditions and adapted to modern times, catechetics encompasses those teachings, methods, and practices which transmit religious knowledge and foster spiritual growth. Family catechesis is a dynamic and transformative approach to religious education that places the family at the centre of faith formation. It recognizes the vital role of the parents and guardians as the primary educators of their children in matters of faith. In other words, the family is the cradle of the formation of children and the best catechesis is done in the family ambience. The *Chavarul* of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara, the code of conduct for families, which assists the families to lead a Theo-centric life following a love-centred ethics, can be considered one of the significant catechetical tools. The present article explores the various dimensions of the definition of family given in the *Chavarul* which embraces all the aspects required for a harmonious family life.

Keywords: Family, Catechesis, *Chavarul*, Marriage, Ethical issues, Image of God, unity, Parents, Children, Salvation of Souls, Love, Respect, Obedience, Last Testament, *Kudumbachattam*, Decalogue

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1. Introduction

According to Vatican II, “family is the first and vital cell of society.”¹ Pope John Paul II says, “the strength and vitality of any country will only be as great as the strength and vitality of the family within that country. No group has a greater impact on a country than the family. No group has a more influential role in the future of the world.”² The mutual love, union of mind and heart, and fidelity of a couple offer stability and hope to a world torn by hatred and division. By their lifelong perseverance in lifegiving love Catholic couples show the unbreakable and sacred character of the sacramental marriage and promote the dignity and worth of human life.

Today, families are at crossroads due to rapid changes. The ethical issues in contemporary families are complex and multifaceted, as they are often shaped by evolving societal norms, technology, and cultural changes. According to Pope Francis, contemporary society, with the explosion of the media and globalization, has made itself vulnerable to various vices and their consequences. As a result, the role of the family in building up a just, emotionally stable, and healthy society has gained attention and is a topic of concern for people of all religious backgrounds. The metaphor of “domestic church” stands as one of the sources of renewal for a Christian theology of family. St Kuriakose Elias Chavara, a visionary saint of the 19th century Kerala, was a promoter of the family values and tried to impart an ethical vision helpful for the families through his “*Chavarul*.”³

¹ Vatican II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 11 (AAS 58: 848).

² John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 42 (AAS 74: 134).

³ *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul* (Malayalam) or “The Testament of a Good Father,” or *Chavarul* was written by St Kuriakose Elias Chavara of the Holy Family (1805–1871), on 13 February 1868 to his native parishioners at Kainakary. He was an ardent devotee of the Holy Family and the founder of the CMI and CMC Congregations. *Chavarul* gives concrete suggestions and proposals regarding how to lead a good Christian family life in the context of Kerala society. It was published in English in 1910 under the title “Testament of a Good Father.” The title *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul* though not formally given to the letter by the author himself, affirms that this letter should be accepted as coming from a loving father, as his Testament. See Leo, trans., *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara*, Vol, IV: *The Letters*. Hereafter *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara* is referred to as CWC and *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul* is referred to as *Chavarul* and St Kuriakose Elias Chavara as Chavara.

Family catechesis has the potential to transform not only individual families but also the entire faith communities. When families actively engage in their faith together, they become witnesses to the power of God's love in their lives. The impact ripples out into the society as the families rooted in faith bring about positive change, foster moral values, and contribute to the building of a just and compassionate world. As part of his family catechesis, Chavara proposes an emphatic definition on family in the *Chavarul* which includes various aspects that are inevitable to make a family as the image of heaven. This definition highlights the purposes of family such as, the unity of the family members, the love and affection shared by parents and between parents and children, the respect and obedience the children should have towards their parents, the harmony they should uphold with God and the people, and their duty to seek eternal salvation of all. To set the context for the discussion, first we look into the challenges and prospects that the families face currently and the relevance of Chavara's definition of the family in the present socio-cultural context.

2. The Theology of Marriage and Family

The theology of marriage and family evolved over the centuries from the time of the Fathers of the Church to later theological development and the magisterium. Ephrem (306–373 ACE) exalts the intimate relationship of the first couple.⁴ Following St Paul, John Chrysostom gives instruction to the parents and the children. He exhorts, the husband should respect wife and *vice versa*. He says, "as 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?"⁵ Chrysostom advises the parents to discipline their children gently without provoking them.⁶ Augustine teaches that marriage is good.⁷

⁴ Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis*, Translated by Edward G. Mathews and Joseph P. Amar, Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1994, 2:12.

⁵ John Chrysostom, "Homilies on Ephesians," Vol. 13 of *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Homilies on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, Edited by Philip Schaff, Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1994, 20.

⁶ John Chrysostom, "Homilies on Colossians," Edited by Philip Schaff, Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers Inc., 1994, 10.

⁷ John M Rist, "Saint Augustine: Virginité and Marriage-2," *The Canadian Catholic Review* 5. 2 (1987): 57–64, 57.

According to him, marriage is good *a priori* as it is instituted by God,⁸ and it is also good *a posteriori* because of its three observable goods such as *proles* (offspring), *fides* (fidelity), and *sacramentum* (sacrament).⁹ In Augustine's opinion, *bono fides* refers to marital faithfulness. He encourages the spouses to refrain from engaging in sexual activity outside of their marriage. *Bono proles* refers to the acceptance of a child in love, nurturing in affection, and upbringing him or her in the Christian formation.¹⁰ In his words, "no relationship which lacked this intent could be called marriage."¹¹ He gave priority to *proles* than the other two.

Thomas Aquinas, one of the leading theologians of medieval period, discusses the essence of marriage. According to him, developing an intimate relationship between the couple is the essence of matrimony, and monogamous indissoluble marriage is the demand of human nature.¹² For him, their intimate and inseparable union leads to their mutual affection, by which they enter into the intimate sexual expression of their mutual love through which God blesses them with children. The responsibility of the upbringing of children is a divine assignment to the spouses, which should be accomplished with mutual help.¹³ There are several prominent figures from eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, including Alphonsus Liguori and Chavara, who taught on marriage and family. Alphonsus Liguori has given comprehensive instructions on how to lead a good life which is applicable to all families.¹⁴

⁸ Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, Vol. 7 of *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series 1, Edited by Philip Schaff, 1886-1889, 14 Vols. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1994, 9.2.

⁹ Augustine, *De Genesis ad litteram*, In *PL*, 34:245-486, Vol. 2 of *The Ancient Christian Writers*, Books 7-12, Edited by Johannes Quasten, Walter J. Burghardt, and Thomas Comerford Lawler, Translated by John Hammond Taylor, New York: Newman Press, 1982, 9.7.12.

¹⁰ Augustine, *De Genesis ad litteram*, 9.7.12.

¹¹ Rist, "Augustine: Virginité and Marriage-2," 59.

¹² Aquinas, *Summa Theologica: Supplementum*, New York: Benziger Brothers, 1922, q. 44, art. 2.

¹³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 3 vols, Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, New York: Benziger Brothers, Inc., 1946-1948, III, q. 29, art. 2.

¹⁴ Alphonse De Liguori, *The Great Means of Salvation and of Perfection, The Ascetical Works*, vol. 3 of *The Complete Works of Saint Alphonsus De Liguori*, Edited by Eugene Grimm, Brooklyn: Redemptorist Fathers, 1927, 355-56.

3. Family in the Context: Challenges and Prospects

Families today face a wide range of challenges that can vary depending on cultural, socio-economic, and individual factors. Economic pressure, including unemployment, low wages, and rising the cost of living, may create financial stress within families. It may further lead to conflicts, anxiety, and strained relationships. Balancing the demands of work and family life may sometimes lead to ethical dilemmas, such as deciding between career advancement and spending quality time with children. Long work hours, inflexible work schedules, and the blurring of boundaries between work and personal life due to technology can strain family relationships. Parenting is increasingly complex, with parents facing issues such as finding quality childcare, helping with remote learning, and navigating the digital world's impact on children's development and safety.

Mental health problems within the family, including anxiety, depression, and addiction have a profound impact on family dynamics and require significant support and resources. High rate of divorce and separations create emotional and financial challenges for families. Co-parenting, child custody, and maintaining healthy relationships after separation can be difficult. Caring for aging parents or relatives, known as the "sandwich generation," can be challenging, particularly when trying to balance caregiving with one's own family and career responsibilities.¹⁵ Excessive screen time and technology use lead to issues like screen addiction, reduced family communication, and concerns about online safety. Navigating the education system, addressing learning disabilities, and ensuring access to quality education are common concerns for many families. Rising healthcare costs and concerns about access to quality healthcare put financial strain on families, particularly if they face chronic illness or unexpected medical expenses.

¹⁵ By "sandwich generation," it means caring for individuals at both older and younger life stages. J. Bourke, *Elder Care, Self-Employed Women and Work-Family Balance*, Palmerston North: Massey University, 2009; T. Cook, *The History of the Carers' Movement*, London: Carers U. K., 2007; M. Raschick & B. Ingersoll-Dayton, "The Costs and Rewards of Caregiving Among Aging Spouses and Adult Children," *Family Relations* 53, 3 (2004): 317-325; E. P. Stoller, "Parental Caregiving by Adult Children," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 45, 4 (1983): 851-858.

Looking into these factors, sometimes, we might think that family gets the least attention today. It does not mean that family had no challenges in the past. Though gravity and magnitude vary, as in our time, during the time of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara as well, family had to face several challenges. *Chavarul* continues to inspire the Church's vision of the family. Its significance must be understood in the light of Chavara's profound knowledge of the challenges that the families had to face at that time, and his fatherly concern and love for the families. It is noteworthy that his instructions and advice to the families are relevant and helpful for the present-day families, though the context is different, and the problems they face are diverse. Moreover, we may be amazed to see how the *Chavarul* reflects the modern theological insights on the family. Thus, we may say that the *Chavarul* goes ahead of its time in many respects, though it is deeply rooted in its historical and socio-cultural context. The *Chavarul* can be called a unique document in many ways: it presents the Christian theological vision of the family and indicates various challenges and problems the families face; it offers guidelines to lead a family life rooted in love; it inspires the families to be nourished by prayer and spiritual practices.

4. An Overview of the *Chavarul* and the Family Catechesis Envisioned by Chavara

The present article focuses on the *Chavarul* of Kuriakose Elias Chavara, his teachings on marriage and family are studied in detail. It consists of spiritual instructions, theological visions, moral principles, psychological insights, social norms, corrective measures, and practical suggestions for the sound growth and development of the family toward its original vision in the plan of God—"the image of heaven."¹⁶ Exhortations to Christian families are presented in the form of family catechesis embedded in the Word of God, as well as a practical interpretation of the Ten Commandments on how to live the family life as envisaged by God the Father. The following paragraphs deal with an overview of the *Chavarul* and discuss the definition of family given in the *Chavarul*.

4.1. An Overview of the *Chavarul*

St Kuriakose Elias Chavara had written many letters to different groups of people including the ecclesiastical authorities, priests, sisters, families,

¹⁶ *Complete Works of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, vol. 4: *The Letters*, translated by Augustine Keemattam, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2020, "Introduction," 184. Hereafter it is referred as *Chavarul*.

and individuals. Among them, eighty-eight letters are available, of which one is known as *Chavarul*. The *Chavarul* is one of the most significant contributions of Chavara to the family. It contains a set of guidelines based on the Christian concept of the family as well as practical wisdom that mirrored the vision he had for a truly happy, peaceful, and blessed family life. The *Chavarul*—a catechetical text—contains forty precious instructions addressed to the parishioners of Kainakary. It remains as a relic of the sacred memories of the saintly life of Chavara. It comprises an introduction and the main body of forty instructions in two parts. Twenty-four precepts in the first part discuss the characteristics and mode of conduct of a good family, while sixteen precepts in the second part are solely dedicated to the spiritually balanced and morally healthy upbringing of children. Although there is no proper conclusion, an appendix serves that purpose.

In the introduction, Chavara gives a brief description of the Christian family, and in the appendix, he notes that he was impelled by a sense of justice and love to his relatives by flesh and entrusted this work to them, saying, "this is my last testament [Will or *Kudumbachattam* or family code] given to you"¹⁷ and "this script will not perish even when I am dead and gone."¹⁸ Chavara instructs them that this family code should be read every first Saturday of the month.¹⁹ Here the author makes reference to his death, though not imminent, and describes the letter as the 'Testament.' A majority of the forty exhortations are elaborated with a good number of didactic stories, allegories, historical episodes, and biblical events or words.²⁰

Chavara believed a family that functions according to its original vision must strive to be impeccable. The original divine plan for marriage and family is clearly outlined in the creation account of Genesis. We understand God's purpose of marriage as one of companionship, marital union, indissolubility, and procreation (Gen

¹⁷ *Complete Works of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, vol. 4: *The Letters*, translated by Augustine Keemattam, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2020 [hereafter used as *Chavarul*], "Epilogue," 201–202.

¹⁸ *Chavarul*, "Epilogue," 201.

¹⁹ *Chavarul*, "Epilogue," 202.

²⁰ Benny Nalkara, "The Guidelines for the Formation of the Youth as Reflected in the *Chavarul* (Testament of a Loving Father) by St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara," *Vinayasādhana* 9. 2 (2018): 35–42, 35.

1:27–28; 2:23–24).²¹ Taken up by this biblical understanding of family, Chavara took a keen interest in developing healthy relationships in families and penned down the *Chavarul*. It is unique and notable for being a treatise on family, issued by an ecclesiastical leader,²² directly addressing Christians for the upbuilding of God-fearing families and the upbringing of children.

4.2. The Family Catechesis Envisioned by Chavara

The term catechism is derived from the Greek word “*katecheo*,” meaning “to instruct” or “to teach.”²³ It refers to the systematic and intentional process of educating individuals about the beliefs, doctrines, rituals, and moral principles of a particular faith tradition. The origins of catechesis can be traced back to the early days of Christianity when the disciples were instructed in the teachings of Jesus Christ. The practice evolved over centuries as the need for a structured approach to religious education. The primary objective of catechesis is to provide individuals with a solid foundation in their faith, enabling them to understand and articulate their beliefs effectively. Catechetics seeks to deepen spiritual awareness, foster moral development, and encourage active participation in religious practices.

In the introduction of the *Chavarul*, Chavara gives a sound definition of a Christian family involving its social, spiritual, and interpersonal dimensions. According to Chavara, “A good Christian family is the image of heaven. The *raison d'être* of a family is that the members live together by the bond of blood and affection, with children duly respecting and obeying their parents, walking peacefully before God and each one, seeking eternal salvation according to his or her proper

²¹ Patrick Mathias, “No to Divorce (Mt 19:3–9): An Exegetico-Theological Perusal,” Pages 33–58 in *Marriage and Family at the Crossroads*, Edited by Patrick Mathias, Chennai: Don Bosco Publications, 2017, 35.

²² On June 8, 1861, the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly, Msgr. Bernardino Baccinelli, appointed Chavara as the Vicar General for the St. Thomas Christians, and he continued in this office until his death in 1871. See A. Mathias Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications & Chavara Central Secretariat, 2020, 224–26; Mathias Mundadan, *Indian Christians: Search for Identity and Struggle for Autonomy*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2003, 81. During the time of Chavara, there was no appointed bishop for the Syro-Malabar Church.

²³ *Katecheo* means to teach orally, to instruct. <https://www.Biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/kjv/katecheo.html>, Accessed on 25.09.2023.

state of life."²⁴ This definition of family, which is condensed into six clauses, contains the core of Chavara's family catechesis.

4.2.1. A Good Christian Family is the Image of Heaven

The divine dimension of the family is stressed in presenting it as an "image of heaven."²⁵ This statement underscores Chavara's emphasis on the family as a reflection of the Triune God's nature as a communion of love. The Holy Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—exists in a perfect communion of love. By calling "family is the image of heaven,"²⁶ Chavara highlights the idea that the love and unity found within a family mirror the divine love and unity within the Holy Trinity. In this context, the family is seen as a sacred institution where love, mutual support, respect, obedience, and selflessness are ideally practiced, echoing the love that exists within the divine community of the Holy Trinity. The family resembles heaven when its members are intimately related to each other and are ready to fulfil their responsibilities with respect and loving service to each other.²⁷

Chavara believed that the family is the *sanctum sanctorum* of society.²⁸ This perspective reinforces the significance of family life within the Catholic teaching and underscores the importance of nurturing and supporting the families the Church and society. His definition of the ideal family is based on this theological vision of the family. For him, God is the Father of the

²⁴ Chavarul, "Introduction," 184. *Chavarayachante Sampoorana Kruthikal*, Vol. 4: *Kathukal* (Mal.), 133. Nalla Kristyānikudumbam ākāsmōkshathinte sādriśyamākunnu. Kudumbathinte nyāyam enthennāl chōrayālum, snēhathālum thammilthammil kettapetta pala ālukal kāranavanmārude nēre āchāravum kēzhvazhakavum anusarichu thampurānōdum manusyarōdum samādhānamāyi nadakayum, avaravarude anthasinu thakathinvannam nithyagathiye prāpikunnathinu prayatnam cheythu kūtamayi jeevikukayum cheyyunnathākunnu. *Chavarayachante Sampoorana Kruthikal*, Vol. 4: *Kathukal* (Mal.), 133. Hereafter *Chavarayachante Sampoorana Kruthikal* is referred to as CSK.

²⁵ Chavarul, "Introduction," 184; CSK, Vol. 4: *Kathukal* (Mal.), "Introduction," 133; Mampra, "Chāvarul of Chavara: A Precious Gift to Families," 10.

²⁶ Chavarul, "Introduction," 184. *Chavarayachante Sampoorana Kruthikal*, Vol. 4: *Kathukal* (Mal.), 133.

²⁷ Thomas Mampra, "Chavarul of Chavara: A Precious Gift to Families," *Vinayasadhana* 9. 2 (2018): 7–13, 10.

²⁸ Latin word *sanctum sanctorum* refers to 'holy of holies.' See Ann Elizabeth, "Chavara: Visionary and Karmayogi of Families," *Herald of the East* 10. 1 (2014): 119–32, 124.

family of humankind.²⁹ In the spiritual family of Chavara, the mother's place was taken by the Blessed Virgin Mary, to whom his earthly mother had dedicated him³⁰ and the entire humankind as his own brothers, sisters, and children.³¹ Thus, a Christian family is envisioned to be a kingdom where Christ reigns supreme—for Jesus has come to take us into the family of God (Jn 14:1–3). He gives us a share in the sublime communion of the Trinity. We are called to be in communion with God and one another in imitation of the communion of the Divine persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Jn 17:11–21). This active and dynamic communion is seen in its deeper sense in the Holy Family.³² Chavara, on his deathbed, looking at the picture of the Holy Family, confessed,

Throughout my lifetime I have spent the life in this Holy Family. I have put on the name Kuriakose of the Holy Family for this memory. My devout parents made me remember the great family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, and I have always seen it in my heart, remembered it, and venerated it. Because, their grace has always protected me, I could, by the divine grace, dare to say that I have not lost the baptismal innocence."³³

Vatican II exhorts that God's eternal plan (Eph 1:3–13) for all men and women is their participation and sharing in the divine life (Jn 1:3; 2 Pet 1:4).

²⁹ CWC, Vol. 3: *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, Edited by J. Chirayil and George H. Ambooken, Translated by Jose Chittilappilly, Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Bl. Chavara, 1990, 9–12. "Father, I did sin against your goodness. Punish me as you will. The love of my corrupt body was instrumental in disfiguring your whole body." CWC, Vol. 3: *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 11. Here, Chavara calls Jesus as Father.

³⁰ CWC, Vol. 2: *Compunction of the Soul, Dirge, Anastasia's Martyrdom*, Translated by Mary Leo, Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Bl. Chavara, 1989, 4–8, 6. See also Thomas Kochumuttam, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, (Theological Studies on Saint Chavara - 1), Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2017, 390–93.

³¹ Kochumuttam, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 396.

³² Sebastian Athappilly, *Christian Images of Salvation*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2016, 33.

³³ *Positio Super Introductione Cause et Super Virtutibus ex Officio Concinnata* (Cause of St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara), Vatican: 1977, 548; C. D. Valerian, *Malankara Sabhā Māthāvinte Oru Vēra Santhānam*, (A Heroic Son of the Malabar Church) or *Vannya Divya Sree Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan* (Reverend Fr. Chavara Kuriakose Elias), Mannanam: St. Joseph's Press, 1939, 315; Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 349.

The Father summons people to realize this plan in union with their fellow human beings to form the wider family of the People of God.³⁴ The mutual love between the couples that results in procreation explicitly portrays a true and living image of God, the Creator and Saviour.³⁵ This fruitful love which represents God's inner life helps us to understand and describe the mystery of God himself; for in the Christian vision of the Trinity, God is contemplated as Father, Son, and Spirit of love.³⁶ Pope Francis' insights on the Trinity and family give us the same idea: "The Triune God is a communion of love, and the family is its living reflection."³⁷ In this respect, with a gaze of faith and love, grace and fidelity, we need to contemplate the relationship between human families and the Holy Trinity. Pope John Paul II sheds light on this when he said, "our God in his deepest mystery is not solitude, but a family, for he has within Himself fatherhood, sonship, and the essence of the family, which is love. That love in the divine family, is the Holy Spirit."³⁸ The family is thus related to God's very being;³⁹ His presence in the family makes it an image of the Holy Trinity in the world.

A Christian family is blessed by sacramental grace, and it is because of this sacramental grace that the family becomes a witness of the presence of the mystery of the Trinity. The dynamism of love between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the source of the love and communion within family life.⁴⁰ Thus, this Trinitarian dimension, which is found in the Pauline theology of family, expresses the mutual love between the couples as the "mystery" of the union of Christ and the Church (Eph 5:21-33).⁴¹ Pope Francis says,

The Word of God tells us that the family is entrusted to a man, a woman, and their children, so that they become a communion of persons in the

³⁴ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 9 (AAS 57:12-14).

³⁵ Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 11 (AAS 108: 315).

³⁶ Michael J. Himes and Kenneth R. Himes, "Rights, Economics, and the Trinity," *Commonweal* 113 (1986): 137-41, 139; Richard M. Gula, *Reason Informed by Faith: Foundations of Catholic Morality*, New York: Paulist Press, 1989, 65.

³⁷ Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 11 (AAS 108: 315).

³⁸ John Paul II, *Homily at the Eucharistic Celebration in Puebla de los Angeles*, AAS 71 (1979): 184.

³⁹ John Paul II, *Homily at the Eucharistic Celebration in Puebla de los Angeles*, AAS 71 (1979): 184.

⁴⁰ Antony Chundelikkat, "Sacrament of Marriage and Family as Domestic Church," *Indian Journal of Family Studies* 5. 1 (2007): 38-57, 54.

⁴¹ Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 11 (AAS 108: 315).

image of the union of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit...The family is called to join in daily prayer, to read the Word of God and to share in Eucharistic communion, and thus to grow in love and become ever more fully a temple in which the Spirit dwells.⁴²

This same aspect of the Trinitarian family is reflected in Chavara's definition of family in the *Chavarul*. It invites the families to witness heaven in their lives by growing in love, compassion, and human virtues to find fulfilment and self-actualization.⁴³ It recommends that the families reflect on God's creative work by praying together, meditating on His Word, and sharing in the Eucharistic communion to nourish the family bond. This in turn will enable the families to serve as the temples where the Holy Spirit makes His dwelling place. The Spirit transforms it into an ever more authentic image of the Holy Family of Nazareth, directing everyone in the world evangelistically towards Jesus. In this way, the family becomes a true and living image of heaven.

4.2.2. Unity of Mind and Heart

In the definition of family in the *Chavarul*, Chavara exhorts "that the members live together"⁴⁴ — "*kūtamāyi jēvikukayum cheyyunnathākunnu*."⁴⁵ He focused his attention on the fact that the supreme rule of the Christian family is mutual love and the consequent unity of mind and heart. When we reflect on unity based on biblical texts, the Yahwistic account of creation (Gen 2:24b-25) clearly affirms that the union of man and woman as husband and wife is the basis for any human family. The Priestly account of God creating man and woman equally in his own image and likeness (Gen 1:27) entails the purpose that they live in harmony as husband and wife, by respecting their equality and celebrating their differences. Every marriage needs to be centred on this reality of communion and companionship. The first man Adam gazed at the first woman and said, "This, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gen 2:23). This physical commonality is the reason for which the Scripture says, "a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Gen 2:24). Firstly, becoming one flesh points out clearly God's purpose of marriage, namely the union of a man and a woman as husband

⁴² Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 29 (AAS 108: 321).

⁴³ *Chavarul*, I:1, 185.

⁴⁴ *Chavarul*, "Introduction," 184.

⁴⁵ *Chavarul*, "Introduction," 184. The word unity is not mentioned in the English translation. But it is cited in the original Malayalam version. CSK, Vol. 4: *Kathukal* (Mal.), 9/6, "Introduction," 133.

and wife, as ordained by God Himself.⁴⁶ Secondly, the aspect of procreation and the continuation of human race is an important part of marriage. After the creation of man and woman, God blessed them saying, "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (Gen 1:28). This is yet another purpose for which God has ordained marriage right at the beginning of creation itself. Thirdly, the creation of the woman from man's ribs (Gen 2:21-23) is a symbolic gesture, which reveals the intimate relationship between man and woman and their union. Man and woman are made for each other.⁴⁷ Since marriage is originally designed by God, it is intended to be heterosexual and monogamous.⁴⁸

When Chavara focused on the need to have the union of heart and mind, he wished to emphasize the union of the spouses and the intimate relationship between the parents and the children in the family life as one of its most important virtues. Chavara's special devotion to the Holy Family led him to understand the secrets of unity in the family. In the Holy Family, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph had certainly personal differences in terms of age, gender, temperament, needs, likes, and dislikes; but despite of these differences, they were perfectly united by love.⁴⁹ Chavara's focus on the requisite of living together in the union of mind and heart necessitates the union of the spouses and the intimate relationship among all the members of the family as one of its most imperative virtues.

4.2.3. Bond of Blood and Affection

The definition of family as "living together" of the members is complemented by the "bond of blood and affection": "The *raison d'être* of family is that the members live together by the bond of blood and affection."⁵⁰ For Chavara, family is a *koinonia* of members bound together by blood and love. This explains the importance of communion in the family; an incredible and unbreakable bond created by those who are related by blood.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Mathias, "No to Divorce (Mt 19:3-9)," 35.

⁴⁷ Mathias, "No to Divorce (Mt 19:3-9)," 35.

⁴⁸ Kenneth O. Gangel and Stephen J. Bramer, *Genesis*, in HOTC, Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002, 30.

⁴⁹ Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 54-55.

⁵⁰ Chavarul, "Introduction," 184.

⁵¹ George Thekkekara, "Degeneration of Family and Familial Bond Today," *Encounter: A Journal of Interdisciplinary Reflections of Faith and Life* 9. 2 (2018): 69-82, 69.

In the context of consecrated life, Chavara has a beautiful instruction to his confreres regarding the kind of love that should exist among them. He advises them to be like the children born of the same mother. He says, "the number of monasteries be any, you must have a genuine love for one another, as if, born of the womb of the same mother, nurtured by the milk of the same mother. This should never weaken instead it should become stronger daily. Remember this as a special piece of advice."⁵² It indicates the kind of love that the members should adopt in their relationship with one another. They ought to be like siblings who know how to make the happy times even better and hard times easier. Although there can be a lot of friction among them, they play a unique role in one another's lives to strengthen the bond and celebrate life. He continues, "the strength of a monastery does not consist in the thickness of its walls, but in the virtue and religious zeal of the monks who dwell in them."⁵³ Here, Chavara implies that the community is strengthened by the virtuous life of the monks lived in mutual love and communion. It is fraternal love that gives us a sense of belongingness to our community. Pertaining to this family spirit in the religious life, Chavara constantly addressed his fellow members at the monastery as "beloved brethren," "loving sons," and "sons"⁵⁴ and he addressed sisters as "my dear little children".⁵⁵

Chavara states that the essential purpose of family is realized when the members live in union with each other by the bond of blood and affection.⁵⁶ The family originates in marriage, which is not a mere external union of two persons, not a union merely for the continuation of the human race or the family, rather, it is first of all the union of a man and a woman in their totality, a total and mutual sharing in every dimension of their life. Through their mutual love and sharing of life,

⁵² *Complete Works of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, vol. 4, *Letters*, Translated by Augustine Keemattam, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2020, 6/5, 115. Hereafter it is referred as CWKEC, Vol. 4: *Letters*; *Chavarayachante Sampoorana Kruthikal*, vol. 4. *Kathukal*, Edited by Lucas Vithuvattickal, Mannanam: St. Joseph's Press, 1982, 6/3, 100. Hereafter it is referred as CSK, Vol. 4: *Kathukal*,

⁵³ *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara*, vol. 4, *The Letters*, Edited by Lucas Vithuvattickal and K. C. Chacko, Translated by Mary Leo, Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Bl. Chavara, 1990, 6/1, 65. Hereafter it is referred as CWC, vol. 4: *The Letters*.

⁵⁴ CWC, Vol. 4: *The Letters*, 6/1, 61; 65; 66.

⁵⁵ CWC, Vol. 4: *The Letters*, 7/2, 76; 7/7, 83.

⁵⁶ *Chavarul*, "Introduction," 184.

they become channels of sanctification for each other.⁵⁷ In Catholic sacramental theology, the highest meaning of marriage is love.⁵⁸ Marital love affects all the other aspects of marriage, including marital sexuality and procreation. The love between married Christian partners reflects God's love towards humankind. For this reason, Walter Kasper says, "the love that exists between man and wife is an epiphany of love and faithfulness of God that was given once and for all time in Jesus Christ and is made present in the Church."⁵⁹ In marriage, the communion of persons occurs when two people freely give themselves to each other and accept one another in love. The fruit of this union is their offspring.⁶⁰ This communion is found in its most sublime form in the Holy Trinity. According to the Christian belief, God is the Trinity, a community of persons, and each of the three persons in the Trinity is said to be related to each other in boundless charity and unites them together to be a single unity.⁶¹ It is this pattern that is replicated in a finite and limited way, in the community of humans, particularly in the community of the family. True love consists precisely of spouses' mutual self-gift.⁶²

According to Chavara, the ideal of unity in the Holy Trinity is the ideal that is to be replicated, realized, and personalized in our families. True love consists precisely of spouses' mutual self-gift to one another.⁶³ This self-giving love begins in the sacrament of marriage, which is understood as a communion of life and love experienced as a covenant for the realization of total personal completion.

4.2.4. Respect and Obedience to Parents

Chavara affirms that a good Christian family is a community of a few people joined together "with children duly respecting and obeying their

⁵⁷ Shaji George Kochuthara, *The Concept of Sexual Pleasure in the Catholic Moral Tradition*, Roma: Editrice, Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2007, 104–105.

⁵⁸ Bernard Häring, *Free and Faithful in Christ*, vol. 2 of *Moral Theology for Clergy and Laity*, New York: Crossroad, 1978, II, 534.

⁵⁹ Walter Kasper, *Theology of Christian Marriage*, New York: Crossroad, 1981, 30; Kochuthara, *The Concept of Sexual Pleasure in the Catholic Moral Tradition*, 387.

⁶⁰ Charles E. Curran, *The Moral Theology of John Paul II*, 164–65.

⁶¹ Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 54–55.

⁶² Curran, *The Moral Theology of John Paul II*, New York: T & T Clark, 2005, 164–65.

⁶³ Curran, *The Moral Theology of John Paul II*, 164–65; Kochuthara, *The Concept of Sexual Pleasure in the Catholic Moral Tradition*, 434.

parents.”⁶⁴ This clause – ‘respect and obedience to the parents’ – of the definition of the family is a reflection of the fourth commandment of our Lord. Chavara’s obedience to his parents and to the authorities he was entrusted with can be traced in his writings addressed to his fellow religious. He instructed them: “The only mark of a religious is that one totally giving up one’s will and obeys as if one does not have eyes and ears. One who does so is a true religious. Those who practice perfect obedience [to ecclesiastical authorities, major superiors, local superiors, and one another] will enjoy heavenly peace already here in the monastery which is a miniature heaven.”⁶⁵ For Chavara, obedience to his parents, superiors, and equals was his hallmark. This obedience is explicit in his life as we see him submissive to his authorities even when his health was deteriorating towards the dusk of his life. In that situation, when he was asked whether he would be shifted to Mannanam or stay at Koonammavu, he responded, “do I have a will of my own? I do not wish to do anything according to my own will. I am ready to do only what I am asked to do.”⁶⁶ This is an edifying example of his spirit of humble submission to the superiors, which remains as a source of inspiration to his fellow religious and each one of us.

According to the biblical perspective, respect and obedience to the parents are connected with the fourth commandment in the Decalogue. Similar norms with regard to respect and obedience to parents exist in all cultures and religions because the relationship between the parents and the children is one of the most fundamental and universal relationships experienced by human beings.⁶⁷ Unlike other commandments, it has a specific promise attached to it, namely, “long life and general well-being”

⁶⁴ Chavarul, “Introduction,” 184.

⁶⁵ CWC, Vol. 4: *The Letters*, 6/3, 70–71; CSK, Vol. 4: *Kathukal*, 6/3, 99–100.

⁶⁶ CKC, Vol. 1, 10. Another example of Chavara’s obedience on his sickbed was marvellous. During his last illness, as insisted by Fr. Philip OCD, Pro-Vicar Apostolic in the absence of Vicar Apostolic Mellano, he was shifted from his living room to an out-house on the campus. Though it was painful for him, he quietly obeyed the order of his superiors. *Positio*, 546–547, Leonard Moolayil, “An Account of the Illness and Death of Chavara, September 1869 to January 1871,” (Malayalam Manuscript in AMSJ), 5; Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 142.

⁶⁷ Andrew Anil Sequeira, *Living Christian Life*, 5 vols., Bangalore: Claretian Publications, 2015, *Living Christian Life: Christ, Law and Ten Commandments*, Vol. 3, 165.

(Ex 20:12; Deut 5:16).⁶⁸ It explains the basic reason why one must be particular in their faithful observance. Children and adults are both obliged to their parents (Mk 7:9-12). Hence, this command is meant not only for the children but also for the adults. The commandment required the adults to provide physical and material support, honour, love, and care for the elderly.⁶⁹ Chavara advises the children: "You are bound by the commandment of God to respect your parents and to ensure that their minds are not burdened or aggrieved. If you violate the fourth commandment of God, it will bring down God's curse not only in afterlife but also in the present."⁷⁰ The book of Sirach outlines the ways and means that the children must follow to care for their parents (Sir 3:1-16). Respecting or honouring the parents implies giving them their rightful place and honour in return for their significant role in God's continuation of life by giving birth to the children, nurturing, and educating them, and providing material and spiritual support to them. The children too when they are grown up, are obliged to help the parents with their material and spiritual necessities, look after them in times of sickness and affliction, provide for their healthcare, whenever necessary, and make them feel happy and contented.

4.2.5. Harmony with God and the People

The definition further explains the purpose of the family as the members who "walk in peace before the Lord and the people."⁷¹ The longing of Chavara to be at peace with God can be seen in his meditations: "Here I come before you, O my Heavenly Father, with a heart full of repentance and firm purpose of amendment to feel your peace in my heart."⁷² Chavara's distress about the lack of peace in the families is tangible through his letter, wherein he expresses his grief on the families that become the cause of sin, dissensions, conflicts, destruction, and death. The ultimate purpose of writing the *Chavarul* to the families was to enlighten them from this gloom of tumult and give them divinely

⁶⁸ David Clyde Jones, *Biblical Christian Ethics*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1994, 156.

⁶⁹ Raymond F. Collins, "Ten Commandments," Pages 383-87 in vol. 6 of *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Edited by David Noel Freedman, New York: Doubleday, 1992, 385.

⁷⁰ *Chavarul*, II:16, 41.

⁷¹ CWC, Vol. 4: *The Letters*, 9/6, 102.

⁷² CWC, Vol. 3: *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 3.

inspired clarity and peace of mind.⁷³ In one of his letters to his confreres, Chavara ascertains: "Those who practise perfect obedience will enjoy heavenly peace already here in the monastery, which is a miniature heaven."⁷⁴ It implies that submission to God's will as well as that of the will of parents and elders will bring true peace in the family, and such families will become heavenly abodes.

Through the life of Chavara, it can be comprehended that he is a role model for everyone to imitate, both in family and religious life. Chavara, a peace-loving person, took all the care to ensure that this peace and harmony were always maintained in his community. Whenever he gave any directions, he never used an authoritative tone. Each one felt that they were equally loved and respected by him. His gentleness and sweet temper made him easily approachable by all. He was exceptionally kind to the sick and oppressed. He lightened the burdens of all who suffered by demanding nothing of them that was beyond their capacity. He could win the hearts of many with his affectionate, compassionate, quiet, and simple nature.⁷⁵

In ordinary usage, peace denotes the absence of conflict. In Christian understanding, it refers to a positive state of life, both individual and communal.⁷⁶ The concept of peace in the Old Testament is derived from the Hebrew word *šālôm* which comes from the root *šlm*, meaning to be complete or whole. It denotes the social and personal well-being of everyone in the widest possible sense. It refers to the prosperous and harmonious functioning of the whole personality, its well-being, and keeping up good relations between persons or groups.⁷⁷ A prominent teaching in the Old Testament is that God is the giver of peace in all its fullness (Lev 26:6; 1 Chr 12:18). Peace reigns in a community when there is harmony between God and His creatures (Isa 27:5) and among His creatures themselves (1 Sam 16:4-5; Job 5:23). A community is active when people treat one another with goodwill and love, but no peace is possible where there is malice (Gen 37:4; 2 Sam 3:21-23; 1 Kings 2:13; 2 Kings 9:17-22; Ps 120:6-7). When a

⁷³ Chavarul, "Introduction," 184-85.

⁷⁴ CWC, Vol. 4: *The Letters*, 6/3, 70-71; CSK, Vol. 4: *Kathukal*, 6/3, 99-100.

⁷⁵ Z. M. Moozhoor, *Blessed Chavara: The Star of the East*, Translated from Malayalam by Sheila Kannath, Kottayam, 1993, 105.

⁷⁶ James F. Childress and John Macquarrie, eds., *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986, 460.

⁷⁷ M. Rodri'guez, "Peace in the Bible," Pages 37-38 in vol. 11 of *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America, 1967, 37.

community is at peace, its members can experience safety and prosperity (Isa 26:3). Peace is found by doing good.⁷⁸

In the New Testament, peace is considered a gift from heaven, brought to the earth by the angels: "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours" (Lk 2:14). It is the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22) that enables us to become children of God, for Jesus Himself said: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God" (Mt 5:9). Just like the angels gave the good news of peace by announcing the birth of Jesus, so too His departure from this world with the mandate of spreading the good news was accompanied by his memento of "peace be with you" (Lk 24:36-43; Jn 20:19-22, 26); "peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you" (Jn 14:27); "I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace" (Jn 16:33). It helps us to enjoy the fruit of the Holy Spirit and makes us partakers in the kingdom of God (Rom 14:17). Therefore, we are exhorted to pursue this peace (Heb 12:14; 1 Pet 3:11) and allow the sovereignty of Christ in our hearts (Col 3:15), and maintain the unity that we have in Christ, the "one body," that is controlled by Christ's peace.⁷⁹

When Chavara advises the families to maintain peace with God and people, he intends that the family members should respect and love each other by sharing the burdens, accepting the differences, guiding and directing each other gently; keeping a clear conscience and leading a disciplined and orderly life, which would bring peace and harmony to the families. In a world full of sorrows, Chavara desires for families to be an abode of sweet consolation, peace, and order.

4.2.6. Seeking Eternal Salvation

In the *Chavarul*, Chavara stressed that each one should "seek eternal salvation according to one's own proper state of life."⁸⁰ He further penned down his sorrow over the family's ignorance towards the pursuit of their own salvation as: "It is most distressing for members to live in a family where no one is concerned about the service of God and their own eternal salvation."⁸¹ Throughout Chavara's writings, we find

⁷⁸ Konrad Schaefer, "Psalms," Pages 663-710 in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary for the Twenty-First Century*, Edited by John J. Collins, Gina Hens-Piazza, Barbara Reid, and Donald Senior, London: T & T Clark, 2020, 679.

⁷⁹ McDonald, "The Letter to the Colossians," 1712.

⁸⁰ *Chavarul*, "Introduction," 184.

⁸¹ *Chavarul*, "Introduction," 184.

that the primary purpose of all his activities was driven towards the intention of the salvation of souls. Chavara's spiritual director, Fr Leopold Beccaro testified that Chavara never held himself back from any kind of work, for he was always prompted by the salvation of souls.⁸² Chavara, in his testament to his fellow priests, exhorts the purpose of founding the congregation, "God has willed to found this congregation for the salvation of our Christian brethren."⁸³ Aiming at the salvation of souls, Chavara founded the Confraternity for Happy Death.

From his discourse on discernment, we understand Chavara's quest for the salvation of souls and the means to attain it. He says,

The body is more precious than the clothes it wears; the soul is more precious than the body. If both the body and clothes are threatened with danger, save the body and let the clothes perish. If both the body and the soul are in danger, sacrifice the body and save the soul. The body will perish today or tomorrow, but the soul will live forever. Hence, all the work done in the world should be directed towards the benefit of the soul.⁸⁴

Chavara reminds us to keep two important things in mind. The first one is not to forget at any time that we will die at the most unexpected moment and that death will creep on us like a thief, and so we must remember the words of our Lord: "Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour" (Mt 25:13). And the second is to keep away from mortal sin that engenders fear of death. When we realize that we have sinned mortally, we must at once make a perfect act of contrition and seek pardon for our sins through confession before going to sleep.⁸⁵ Another quote from Chavara's writing sheds light on this understanding of salvation. Regardless of how great a sinner is, if a person repents of his or her sins at the moment of death, like the good thief who was hanged on the right side of the Lord, the gates of heaven will automatically be opened to him or her. This is the greatest happiness a person can have. Of all the help given to a person, the greatest is given to him or her at the moment of his or her death.⁸⁶

⁸² Leopold Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Blessed Chavara*, Edited by Lucas Vithuvatical, Mannanam: St. Joseph's Press, 2003, 12.

⁸³ CWC, Vol. 4: *The Letters*, 6/3, 71.

⁸⁴ CWC, Vol. 4: *The Letters*, 9/7, 120.

⁸⁵ CWC, Vol. 4: *The Letters*, 9/7, 119.

⁸⁶ CWC, Vol. 4: *The Letters*, 9/7, 118-19.

When we turn into the Bible, we observe that salvation is one of the key concepts of God's revelation to humanity.⁸⁷ In the song of confidence, the psalmist praises God's providence. Based on the faith in God, "my rock and salvation, my fortress" (Ps 62:3), the psalmist exhorts the faithful to trust God and divine *hesed*.⁸⁸ It is therefore crucial to be united with God.⁸⁹ The core of apostolic preaching was that Jesus alone saves (Acts 4:9-12; Lk 4:17-21). Jesus, the good shepherd, came to seek and save the lost, to heal the sick, to cleanse and wash away sins through His blood, to enlighten the confused, and to correct the wrong (Jn 10:11; Mt 8:7; Rev 7:14; Jn 8:12). He is the victorious liberator who defeated death, the world, and Satan through His death and resurrection to liberate humankind (Acts 26:18; Rom 5-8; 1 Jn 3:8; Col 1:13; 1 Tim 2:5; Rom 5:10). The human beings are redeemed and purchased by His blood and entitled to be the heirs of heaven, His children (Rom 8:17; Titus 2:14; 1 Pet 1:18; 1 Cor 6:20).⁹⁰

Chavara instructs the people to entrust themselves to God Almighty and strive for their salvation by preparing themselves to receive the effects of Christ's earthly acts. He continues this mission in each individual soul through the operation of the Holy Spirit in the Church, particularly through the sacraments, the liturgical re-enactment of His sacrifice and confession, the preaching of His Word, and the personal inspirations of His Spirit in the hearts of every human being.⁹¹ In order to be saved, everyone must respond with faith and reception of baptism (Mk 16:16), detachment (Mt 16:25), good works (Jas 2:14), and the practise of the virtues (1 Thess 5:8). Chavara exhorts the parents to serve as role models for their children by practicing detachment, charity, kindness, and faith in God. So that they might set a good example for children and live virtuously. If not, they may be lost in hell due to the negligence of their parents. If this is the case, the parents may be punished, and their own salvation might even be threatened.⁹²

⁸⁷ Walker, "Salvation," 1435. "For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by His life" (Rom 5:10).

⁸⁸ Schaefer, "Psalms," 687.

⁸⁹ Athappilly, *Christian Images of Salvation*, 27.

⁹⁰ W. G. Topmoeller, "Salvation," Pages 994-95 in vol. 12 of *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America, 1967, 995.

⁹¹ Topmoeller, "Salvation," 995.

⁹² *Chavarul*, II:1, 196.

In short, the *Chavarul* gives a precise definition of family taking into consideration the relationship with God, with oneself, and with one another, that is, trans-personal, intra-personal, and inter-personal relationships.

5. Conclusion

In this article, we have explored the vision of the ideal family as the image of heaven. Here, the family locale is deliberated as the most natural environment for a child's formation and overall development. In Chavara's viewpoint, a good Christian family is the image of heaven, and he insists that every family should reflect the qualities of heaven. There should be unity of mind and heart, as well as a strong and stable bond among parents and between parents and children. They should respect and obey each other, maintain peace with people, and do everything possible to ensure the eternal salvation of all. The *Chavarul* highlights the parental responsibility to mould and shape the minds and hearts of the children and build their character by acquiring virtues, norms, and manners that would enable the children to stand in good stead for the rest of their adult lives and allow them to contribute to an orderly and peaceful society. This kind of upbringing would make both the parents and the children worthy of the eternal salvation promised to all who remain faithful till the end.

The remarkable definition of family envisioned by Chavara in the *Chavarul* is an effective guide for family catechesis that recognizes the family as the fundamental unit of faith formation. Parents as primary educators have a great responsibility in the upbringing of the children and their faith formation, for their involvement and commitment to the same strengthens family bonds, nurtures personal faith, and enables a deeper understanding of religious teachings. As the families grow in their faith together, they become a powerful force for constructive change in the world, embodying the transformative power of God's love.