

## THEOLOGY OF MARRIAGE IN *CHAVARUL*

Jipson Joseph Edappulavan<sup>♦</sup>

**Abstract:** Kuriakose Elias Chavara was the first Vicar General of the Thomas Christians of Kerala after the period of Archdeacons. He was a strong defendant of the original identity of the Thomas Christians which later came to be known as Syro-Malabar Church. His visionary approach could be easily known to the present generation through one of his most inspiring literary contributions, *Chavarul*. It is his last testament particularly addressed to the people of Kainakari symbolising the entire Thomas Christians of Kerala. Most of the researchers try to identify it in connection with the family life in general. But it seems to be a practical manual for the married persons than addressing family in general. This nineteenth century work is still relevant due to its in-depth scriptural foundation, theological articulation, and practical framework. It invites the spouses to focus on mutuality for a meaningful marital life.

**Keywords:** Theology of Marriage, Spouses, Covenantal Love, Procreation, Mutuality, Celebration, *Chavarul*, *Mar Thoma Marga*, Paradigm of Mutuality

### 1. Introduction

*Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul (The Last Testament of a Loving Father)*<sup>1</sup> is a noteworthy contribution of Kuriakose Elias Chavara (1805-1871) to the

---

<sup>♦</sup> **Jipson Joseph Edappulvan** is a priest of the Major Archdiocese of Ernakulam-Angamaly. He holds PhD with the specialisation in Moral Theology from Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore. He also holds LLB from Karnataka State Law University and LLM from Christ University, and is currently pursuing PhD in Law from Christ University, Bangalore. He has published six books including *Celebration of Mutuality in the Sacrament of Covenantal Love-Relationship* and *Eco-friendliness: An Essential Virtue of the Times*. He has also published a few research articles in both national and international journals. Email: jipsonjoseph@gmail.com

<sup>1</sup> It is an 'instruction manual' wrote in Malayalam on 13 February 1868.

Kerala Christian families. He is undoubtedly one of the most noble and holy personalities of the Syro-Malabar Church (SMC). His contributions to the Catholic Church do not confine to the foundation of indigenous CMI and CMC congregations for men and women religious respectively, but extends to a broader horizon of his loving commitment to the life and mission of the Church. He was the first vicar general of the St Thomas Christians after the period of the Archdeacons. He was also one of the most prominent social reformists of the Kerala community. He was a visionary with the zeal of an apostle, a revolutionary with the heart of a priest, and a reformist with the spirit of a prophet. Besides all other contributions, his commitment in preserving the original identity of the Thomas Christians is to be acknowledged and appreciated. Chavara was a staunch promoter of the indigenous customs and traditions of the Kerala Syrian Christian community even when he affirmed his spiritual and liturgical affinity with the Syrian liturgical tradition.

Chavara's literary contribution to the growth of *Mar Thoma* tradition inspires many. *Chavarul* is the epitome of his fatherly concern for the Christian families in Kerala. It was a testament of a loving father to his family, mainly addressed to the people of Kainakari. The people of Kaiankari were chosen as an image of the entire Thomas Christians. It was a testament of the first vicar general of the Thomas Christians to the families entrusted to his spiritual care. His awareness of the issues and difficulties of the then Christian families and his interest for their renewal is explicit in this short and beautiful epistle to the families. It is not merely a spiritual advice of a pastor to his people, but rather, a testament of faith, hope, and service of a man of divine inspiration and blessings. It is a testament of his spiritual conviction presented in the form of practical knowledge for the revival of the marital and family life of the people of God strongly based on the apostolic tradition. Most of the authors and researchers on *Chavarul*<sup>2</sup> try to identify its contributions only to family life in

---

<sup>2</sup> Mathew Ulakamthara, "Vision of the Family in Chavara Testament," *Journal of St. Thomas Christians*, 16, 1 (2005), 73; George Kaniarakath, "Chavara's Vision of a Christian Family according to his Epistle to the Community at Kainakary," *Christian Orient* 8, 3 (1987), 124; Jossy Maria, "The Spirituality of Marriage and Family," *Herald of the East* 14, 1 (2018), 19-34; Thomas Kallukulam, "Appropriation of St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara's *Chavarul*: Testament of a Loving Father to Families Today," *Encounter* 10, 1 (2019), 86-87.

general. The present article is an attempt to expose the theology of marriage depicted in this testament to the families.

## 2. Spouses, the Primary Addressee of *Chavarul*

*Chavarul* consists of two parts. The first part deals with certain precepts for the orderly life in the family and the second part is an instruction to the parents consisting of the guidelines for the upbringing of their children. In the first part, Chavara focuses on the essentials of family life; and in the second part, he emphasizes the importance of good parenting. According to him, the family is the most essential and decisive element of the Church.<sup>3</sup> At the very beginning of the last testament, Chavara defines family with clarity and understanding. Family is a community of some people joined together either by blood relation or bond of love.<sup>4</sup> Family is identified with two kinds of relationships: blood relationships and love relationship. The intimate and covenantal love-relationship (marriage) is the very source of blood relationship. Children are born through the love-relationship of the spouses. Procreation marks not only the birth of children but also the birth of parents. While marriage points to the birth of covenantal love-relationship, procreation pinpoints the birth of blood relationship. In sum, relationship is the central element of any family and all the relationships in the family is centred on the spousal relationship.

Chavara's definition of family/spousal relationship surprises the readers. He defines it as the community of love. It is evident in the Vatican II's definition of marriage, '*communitate amoris*'.<sup>5</sup> It shows that Chavara was a man of divinely inspired knowledge and foresight. He tried to see marriage and family as a community of love. He proposed a theology of *koinonia* and love to the marital and familial life of the Thomas Christians, which, later on, the Vatican II highlighted as the core of Christian marriage. Procreation was the main thrust of the theology of marriage before Vatican II and the 'ethic of love' was not properly celebrated in the discussions of marriage. But Chavara took the courage to define family from the spousal point of view as it is the community or bond of love refurbishing the horizon of spousal

---

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2017, 389.

<sup>4</sup> Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Chavarul: Testament of a Loving Father*, 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Kakkanad: Chavara Central Secretariat, 2018, 9.

<sup>5</sup> Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 47 (AAS 58:1067).

relationship from the traditional procreational perspective to the biblical perspective of love and communion. His background of *Mar Thoma Marga* (Way of St Thomas) which affirmed the communion dimension of the disciples of Christ and the typical Indigenous understanding of family also prompted him to develop such a theology of marriage. While defining marriage as a communion of love, he enlarges the horizon of spousal relationship from the procreative dimension to all the aspects of their intimate relationship. It helps to understand marriage not from a restrictive perspective but from a wider perspective of love and communion.

Blood relationship originates from the love-relationship of the spouses. The intimate covenantal love-relationship of the spouses motivates them to partake in the creative work of God and they become parents originating the blood relationships. Procreation is the point wherein the love-relationship gives birth to the blood relationship. Love-relationship remains intact even after procreation, but at the same time, it gives birth to another beautiful relationship of parents-children. Thinking in this line we can say that the primary addressee of *Chavarul* is the spouses who are united in love. Husband and wife are the head of the family and the precepts of the family are given to them to transform the entire family into the image of heaven. Upbringing of the children is primarily the responsibility of the spouses, and hence, Chavara in his testament also entrusted this assignment to them. His primary focus was on love-relationship than blood-relationship because the second revolves around the first. He tried to convince his spiritual children that the spousal intimacy and their mutual understanding are the real inspiration for the entire family.

### 3. Practical Theology of Marriage

Chavara did not intend to develop a logical or systematic theology of spousal relationship and it was not the aim of *Chavarul* either.<sup>6</sup> It was purely a practical instruction manual wherein a loving father desiring to empower his children to face the problems and challenges of marital and family life instructed them in a language understandable to them and in a manner acceptable to their way of life. Before leaving this world, Christ instructed his disciples and also assured his continuous guidance.

---

<sup>6</sup> Kaniarakath, "Chavara's Vision of a Christian Family," 119.

Biblical tradition affirms the practice of last blessings and instructions of the fathers to their children. Thomas Christian tradition also attests to this rich ethos of last advice and blessings of the father to the children assuring the continuance of divine blessing. Chavara being a spiritual father realized his responsibility to remind the perils of this world that may challenge the marital life of the Thomas Christians, and so, he took up the initiative to advise them appropriately. He discerned the lack of educational and religious training of the Thomas Christians, which may force them to disorient themselves from fully grasping a systematic theology in depth, and hence, he tried to convey his scriptural, theological and spiritual depth in simple terms. But at the same time, he tried to present these practical guidelines well founded in Scripture, Fathers, and theologians intending to give them a sound theology in coherence. He applied all the precious sources that were available to him. He enriched the Thomas Christians with the rich biblical and theological tradition in simple terms. Instead of the sophisticated medieval theological approach, Chavara tried to incorporate the simple scriptural theological approach. Simplicity was the *modus operandi* of his practical theology of marriage enshrined in *Chavarul*. It was pastoral than doctrinal. Accordingly, every person could easily understand the intention of the author and make changes in their marital life of love.

*Chavarul's* theology of marriage is purely practical than theoretical or systematic. Though Chavara was a man of great wisdom and extensive reading, he was a practical man who knew well the audience. He tried to speak and write in a language that was understandable to them. He tried to conscientize about the importance of practicalities of a successful marital life to enrich their marital ethos. The following points enlist the various elements of Chavara's practical theology of marriage depicted in *Chavarul*.

### 3.1. Mutuality of Love and Respect

Love and Respect are the two substantial elements upon which every marital relationship grows into perfection. St. Paul exhorts the married to model their intimate relationship grounding on the mysterious Christ-Church relationship. He wants them to follow the love-respect model of divine relationship in their human relationship.<sup>7</sup> The husband is instructed to love his wife just as Christ loved the Church. He is given

---

<sup>7</sup> John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan*, Boston: Pauline Books, 1997, 351.

an assignment to follow Christ in loving his wife. He is given the highest of all the models of love to be followed. In loving his wife, the husband should imitate Christ's love towards the Church, wherein there is no limit for love. A limited human person is asked to practice limitless love in his relationship with the wife. The wife, on the other hand, is exhorted to obey her husband just as the Church obeys Christ. A wife should respect her husband as the Church respects her Lord. The conditions and peculiar demands of human persons with regard to marriage become meaningless in this surprising novelty of divine-human comparison and Paul's terming it as mystery (Eph 5:24-32). The patriarchal mindset of Paul forced him to demand love from the husband and obedience/respect from the wife. But in reality, his Christian spirit demanded that both love and respect should be mutual in marriage. It is visible when Paul speaks of mutual subjection in 5:21.<sup>8</sup> Hence, it can be said that just as Christ loves the Church both husband and wife should love each other without any limit and just as the Church respects Christ both husband and wife should respect each other without any gradation. Mutual love and mutual respect thus become the key principles of marriage in the Lord.

Building in this Pauline line of thought *Chavarul* affirms that 'the mother should set an example to the children in respecting and honouring the father; so shall the father teach the children by his example to love and respect the mother'.<sup>9</sup> Chavara wanted the husbands and wives to become exemplars of love and respect in their family life. They should not compromise their love and respect for each other. They are asked to transform their human love into covenantal love. Their children should learn from them the essentiality of marital love and marital respect. Marriage is proposed as a practical lab wherein the children should learn the depth of love and respect from their parents. When the parents through their life-model teach the children the value of love and respect, they in turn, will love and respect their parents and their siblings. It will become a strong inspiration for their future marital life too. Hence, this love-respect model will continue like a chain of divine blessing coupled with human initiative. Chavara does not confine himself in

---

<sup>8</sup> Xavier Edayodil, "Theology of Marriage and Family in St Paul," *Kristujyoti* 24, 1 (2008), 234.

<sup>9</sup> Chavara, *Chavarul*, 2:9.

demanding love from husbands to wives but explicitly affirmed the duty of the father to respect the mother. It was a novelty in those times. At that period of history no one dared to instruct the husbands to show respect towards their wives. Husbands were considered 'lords' of the wives than companions. But Chavara realising the biblical ideal exhorted that respect also should be mutual in spousal life. Both husband and wife should love and respect each other. Mutuality of love and respect helps them to foster their relationship into the real image of Christ-Church relationship.<sup>10</sup> Mutuality of love cannot substitute mutuality of respect. Both are equally important to transform one's intimate spousal relationship into the image of divine relationship.

Love is 'a basic good of marriage'<sup>11</sup> but it was largely used with the individualistic and instrumentalist mentality so as to endanger its real nature. It needs to be altruistic and mutual. Spousal love should transcend all the egoistic boundaries of both the husband and wife leading them to communion. When the love is mutual, the spouses realize their innermost calling to come out of egocentrism. It helps them to become protagonists of 'the logic of the sincere gift of self'.<sup>12</sup> The true and meaningful gifting of one person to another in its full sense 'requires that it should be reciprocal, and should exist at least between two equals'.<sup>13</sup> Equality needs to be the hinge upon which the paradigm of mutuality of marriage should function. *Chavarul* promotes the paradigm of mutuality of love and respect in marriage grounding on the equality of both the partners. It suggests a model to be followed in the contemporary marriages where the pillars of love and respect should be built on the foundation of equality for an inspirational marriage.

---

<sup>10</sup> Jipson Joseph Edappulavan, *Celebration of Mutuality in the Sacrament of Covenantal Love-Relationship: A Study Based on the Syro-Malabar Liturgy of Matrimony*, Bangalore: Omega Book World, 2022, 149.

<sup>11</sup> Karol Wojtyla, *Fruitful and Responsible Love*, Slough: St Paul Publications, 1978, 18.

<sup>12</sup> John Paul II, *Gratissimam Sane*, 11 (AAS 86:884).

<sup>13</sup> Thomas J. Gerrard, *Marriage and Priesthood: The Catholic Ideal*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1911, 70.

### 3.2. Celebration of Forgiveness

Chavara was well aware of the main challenge faced by many marriages and families during his life-time. According to him, unforgiveness is one of the important issues that troubles the peaceful living of many marriages. Unforgiveness causes the silly issues to grow to such an extreme level as they become difficult to handle. In the absence of forgiveness spouses try to win over the other without even considering the feelings and thoughts of each other. Instead of addressing the issue at hand, they desire to subjugate the spouse. When they try to win over the other, unfortunately they lose the depth and meaning of spousal oneness. Such a mentality of winning over the spouse than celebrating the uniqueness of love and forgiveness is active in the present times also. Accordingly, the instructions of *Chavarul* have great relevance even for the present generation couples.

Forgiveness is a virtuous attitude of the spouses to consider each other's failures and emotional imbalances with an open-mind. It is the willingness to show love than hatred towards the shortcomings of the spouse. It is a positive attitude wherein they understand the weaknesses of each other with the compassionate heart to excuse them.<sup>14</sup> 'Readiness to mutual forgiveness is indispensable for the stability of the marriage bond'.<sup>15</sup> The patriarchal society could not think of a wife who forgives the mistakes of her husband, for she was considered inferior to the husband, who only had the power to forgive. The ascription of mutual forgiveness in marriage was an appreciable move from the part of *Chavarul* as it tried to enhance the position of women in the society. While establishing the forgiving role of wives it affirms the mutuality of forgiveness. Without having the readiness to forgive the mistakes of each other, the stability of marriage bond will be doubtful.<sup>16</sup> Marital forgiveness insists that the 'thirst for vengeance' should be substituted with the desire for love and communion for a peaceful living of the sacramental marital life.<sup>17</sup> Once the couple shows the willingness to forgive the mistakes of each other, they affirm their divine call to be positioned in the image of Christ. Through the act of forgiveness they share the Christ-experience with each other.

---

<sup>14</sup> Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 105 (AAS 108:353).

<sup>15</sup> Mathew Vellanickal, "Family Life in the Bible," *Biblehashyam* 3, 3 (1977), 201.

<sup>16</sup> Vellanickal, "Family Life in the Bible," 201.

<sup>17</sup> Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 105.



Chavara warns that a marriage which experiences discord and fight among the spouses will perish without any delay.<sup>18</sup> There may have differences of opinion and small conflicts in any marriage but that should not become grave as to trouble marital love. Unwillingness to forgive forces the spouses not to compromise and accommodate each other. The continuance of fighting spirit and discords will ruin the beauty of marriage. Chavara thus exhorts them to 'forgive the mistakes and shortcomings of each other'.<sup>19</sup> Mistakes and shortcomings are part of any person's life but when the spouses show the capacity and disposition to love and respect each other than those undesired elements of one's personality and help each other to correct them, then those marriages will become exemplars of mutuality. The most essential thing in any fruitful marriage is the capacity of the couple to overlook the faults of each other with the mind of Christ.<sup>20</sup> Christ is always ready to forgive others and we experience it in the sacrament of reconciliation. When both the husband and wife accomplish the forgiving-mind of Christ, they become Christ-like-husband and Christ-like-wife. This is how a marriage becomes the image of Christ-Church relationship in its practice.

Chavara further notes that 'woe unto those who cause quarrels in families'.<sup>21</sup> Marriage is a God-made relationship. God is the author of marriage. From the very beginning God planned human nature in such a way that the male and female counterparts should be joined as one for a life of love and communion. But at the same time, Christ reminds us that 'what God has joined together, let no one separate' (Mk 10:9). The human nature, after the fall, is under the clutches of sin and so it can take the control of human behaviour. It may even cause discord in relationships. Hence, the words and deeds and even the presence of some persons can cause quarrels in marital relationship. Spouses need extreme care and attention to avoid such kind of persons who can cause damage in their love-relationship. Shakespeare in his Othello cleverly presents how a jealous friend can cause damage to a beautiful marriage. *Chavarul* in this same line exhorts the Thomas Christians that they should not cause quarrels in any marriage, and at the same time, it also demands the spouses to be cautious against those persons who may

---

<sup>18</sup> Chavara, *Chavarul*, 1:1.

<sup>19</sup> Chavara, *Chavarul*, 1:1.

<sup>20</sup> Chavara, *Chavarul*, 1:1.

<sup>21</sup> Chavara, *Chavarul*, 1:1.

cause disturbance in their spousal relationship. There is no place for quarrels in spousal relationship and no person should ever try to cause such a scandal in any marriage. It implies that everyone has a God-given responsibility to protect the serene atmosphere of family.

### 3.3. Disciplined Economic Life

Discipline in economic matters is the cornerstone of a successful marital life. Many families lose their peaceful living and meaningful celebration of marriage due to economic mismanagement. Chavara says that 'both extravagance and miserliness are sinful',<sup>22</sup> and so, he instructs not to spend beyond one's means.<sup>23</sup> Spending beyond one's capacity is an attempt to catch up with the wealthy persons of the society. They try to show that they are also rich sacrificing the future of their family. Extravagance is a self-imposed burden at the cost of life. It is nothing but an 'extra-thing' added to the inferiority-superiority syndrome of certain human beings. They try to upturn their economic inferiority by living a luxurious life without having proper means. They unnecessarily borrow money and finally will reach to a point where they even fail to satisfy the necessities of life. Debt not only troubles the economic life of family, but it also affects and confuses its every aspect. *Chavarul* thus states that the 'wealthiest family is the one which is not in debt'.<sup>24</sup> Wealth was identified with debtlessness. Unmanageable debt may even force persons and families to anguish and suicide. Debt-free family was the aim of Chavara for giving such a beautiful instruction.

Chavara realized that the economic mismanagement and luxurious life of many families cause issues to their existence. Economic mismanagement creates unparalleled issues among the spouses. Mostly, the wealth of the family was handled by the husband as the head of the family and if he is not strict in financial matters then it will ruin the entire family structure and will cause pain and mental agony to the wife. It disturbs the day-to-day functioning of the family. It will affect their love-life. *Chavarul* instructs the spouses that there should be a disciplined economic life for the survival of marriages and families. Economic discipline echoes the discipline in the family. Chavara counsels them that debt causes tension in marriage, and hence, the absence of debt is the real asset for a successful marital life.<sup>25</sup> Proper and prudent

---

<sup>22</sup> Chavara, *Chavarul*, 1:15.

<sup>23</sup> Chavara, *Chavarul*, 1:6.

<sup>24</sup> Chavara, *Chavarul*, 1:4.

<sup>25</sup> Edappulavan, *Celebration of Mutuality*, 150.

management of wealth and the daily life is an essential requirement for celebrating marriage in its depth.

*Chavarul* though written in the nineteenth century is still relevant where the management of money has become so precious in every step of life. It suggests developing a new lifestyle of openness and simplicity in economic matters as the hallmark of Thomas Christian families.<sup>26</sup> Christian spouses should be known not by their luxurious lifestyle but by their simplicity and modesty. In the present world the Thomas Christian families are known for their big houses, costly weddings, luxurious vehicles, precious ornaments, and delicious food habits. Baptism, first communion, marriage, and Holy Orders have become celebrations of luxury rather than celebrations of faith. Millions are spent unnecessarily for many family functions. Even the poor families try to compensate many of their basic wants to have a luxurious function for the marriages of their children. Status has become the catchword of the Thomas Christians than faith in the contemporary world. But unfortunately, this 'thirst for status' compels them to compensate their desire for happy life. Wealth cannot bring happiness to any marriage if it is not properly managed. The appropriate management of wealth and modest way of life enhances the couple's mutual understanding and sharing leading them to perfect communion.

### 3.4. Beware of Trespassers

Trespassers can fabricate confusion and damage any relationship. Trespassers are the intruders into the specific zone owned by others. They enter the valuable possession of others without availing proper permission, and slowly, they try to own them and their space causing serious issues for the real owners. In many unoccupied properties in cities and towns we see boards with the reminders: "trespassers are prohibited" or "trespassers will be prosecuted." These reminders affirm that trespassers are not lawful persons, and they should not enter the zone occupied by others. The most valuable possession of a couple's life is the sacrament of marriage received at the altar of Christ and the family created in love for life, and so, they must protect it with utmost care from all trespassers. Chavara thus reminds the spouses that they should

---

<sup>26</sup> Josin George Kaithakulam and Thomas J. Parayil, "St Kuriakose Elias Chavara's Vision of the Family in *Chavarul*," in Shaji George Kochuthara, ed., *Vocation and Mission of the Family: Reflections on Chavarul and Amoris Laetitia*, Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2020, 92.

'accept only those who are well-mannered and God-fearing'<sup>27</sup> into their home. If they permit all sorts of people to enter the sanctity of their marital relationship and family, then there is every possibility of having troubles. Every spousal relationship has its own rhythm and when someone trespasses into it then there is high chance for unintended and undesired incidents causing unpleasant noises in marital bond. Once the rhythm is lost then it also damages their harmony of life. *Chavarul's* instruction is noteworthy, if the spouses permit only well-mannered and God-fearing people into their families, their presence can help them to grow in love and communion; and if the indecent persons are allowed into the families, they may cause disorder in their space of love and life.

### 3.5. Do not Peep into other Marriages

Comparison with the other pairs is one of the serious drawbacks of many marriages. Each marital relationship is unique in its own kind, and it cannot be compared with other marriages which are unique in their own nature. Two different personalities through the sacramental grace of marriage become one in body, mind and soul, and this union of two is different in its substance and nature from the other union in another marriage. Hence, it will be a meaningless attempt to follow the other pair's way of life in one's own marriage. Each couple has its own unique way of marital life. But they can incorporate good things from the other spouses. Chavara thus instructs that the spouses should not 'go from door to door seeking news about others'.<sup>28</sup> A couple should focus more on their relationship, and instead, if they peep into the affairs of other couples that will blight their marital intimacy.<sup>29</sup> Peeping into other marriages will ruin the uniqueness of one's own marriage and it will disturb their attention. As a loving father Chavara instructs the spouses to focus on their own marriage than the positives and negatives of other marriages. They should not be so much interested in other marriages than their own. They can be inspired by other couples, but they cannot be confused by their way of life. Chavara tries to affirm a culture of sacredness of marital and family space wherein the spouses should have the freedom and focus to live their life of love without any deviations and perversions.

---

<sup>27</sup> Chavara, *Chavarul*, 1:9.

<sup>28</sup> Chavara, *Chavarul*, 1:7.

<sup>29</sup> Chavara, *Chavarul*, 1:7.

### 3.6. Unfailing Relationship with Christ

Christian marriage is a union of male and female in the Lord. This union is given the capacity and blessing to become the image of the divine covenantal relationship of Christ and the Church. Human marriage thus must be continuously inspired by the divine covenantal relationship. Christ is the *sine qua non* element of both the divine and human relationships. Christ is the bridegroom of the divine relationship whose bride is the Church. Christian marital relationship is nothing but a relationship of man and woman in Christ. The divine marriage is a Christ-Church union, and the Christian marriage is a union in Christ, which is the replica of the divine marriage. Since Christian marriage is a relationship of a Christ-bearing-man with a Christ-bearing-woman in Christ, its endurance depends on their relationship with Christ. Chavara thus says that 'the most valuable possession of a family [marriage] consists in fear of and devotion to the Lord'.<sup>30</sup> He exhorts them to depend on God when they 'are faced with trials and tribulations, disease and difficulties' of life.<sup>31</sup> These are the moments wherein they feel troubled and confused and if they rely on Christ, they will be able to overcome those uncertainties in mutual love and God-given-hope. Divine providence will continue to instill the required strength in the God-fearing couple, so that, they will be able to face and sort out any difficulties of life. Chavara instructs them to participate in the Eucharistic celebrations on Sundays and on the days of obligation and advises them to participate fruitfully in 'the virtuous act of family prayer' daily.<sup>32</sup> Fruitful celebration of the holy Eucharist and the daily participation in family prayer will enhance the Christ-awareness of the spouses. He tries to communicate 'the capability and the naturality of family prayer in inculcating lasting values'<sup>33</sup> in spousal relationship. Only when the spouses show the willingness to unite themselves and their love-union with Christ in Eucharistic celebration and prayer, their union lasts forever.

---

<sup>30</sup> Chavara, *Chavarul*, 1:19.

<sup>31</sup> Chavara, *Chavarul*, 1:20.

<sup>32</sup> Chavara, *Chavarul*, 1:22, 24.

<sup>33</sup> Paulachan Kochappilly, "The Ethical Legacy of Chavara for Our Times," in Paul Kalluveetil and Paulachan Kochappilly, eds., *The Lord of Heaven and Earth: Chavara Studies in Honour of Fr. Lucas Vithuvattickal*, CMI, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2004, 245.

#### 4. Conclusion

Chavara's *Chavarul* is a unique contribution to the Thomas Christians as it expounds the practical theology of marriage strongly rooted in Scripture and the Fathers of the Church. It tries to present the depth of the essentials of Christian marriage in simple terms realizing its necessity for the indigenous people. But at the same time, its vision is universal in nature. The presentation of marriage as a communion of love is its core and it extends beyond time. *Chavarul* enriches the couples to face the uncertainties of marital life with a positive mind and faith in Christ. The key principles of *Chavarul* are applicable to any generation in any part of the world as they are closely connected with the daily life of married people. A torchlight is given to the spiritual children by a visionary father in faith with the conviction that marriage and family are the very base of the Church (*ecclesiola in ecclesia*).<sup>34</sup> These guidelines are given to strengthen the marital relationship of the Thomas Christians desiring to transform their families into the images of the Holy Family of Nazareth. Nevertheless, these guidelines can be incorporated into the daily life of any couple in any part of the world as these are specifically pastoral and practical in its nature and spirit.

Spouses are the primary addressee of the *Chavarul* than the family in general as Chavara was very much aware of their primordial role in forming a culture of love and communion in the family. Marital relationship is the cornerstone upon which all other relationships in the family is built on, and hence, the celebrative functioning of marital union will fortify the entire family structure. According to him, love and respect should not be one-sided in marriage but mutual reinforcing their communion. The virtue of forgiveness is to be celebrated as the essential quality of marital wellbeing. He motivates them to focus on a disciplined economic life as its absence will endanger their peaceful living. He warns them to be cautious of the trespassers and further exhorts them not to peep into the life of others. Unnecessary interference into the life of others and permitting others to trespass the boundaries of one's own marital space are perilous for the beauty and sanctity of marriage. Besides, he advises them to be focused on love of God to live an ideal Christian marriage.

*Chavarul's* visionary positioning in proposing a practical and pastoral theology of marriage enriches not only the married persons but also the

---

<sup>34</sup> Walter Kasper, *The Gospel of the Family*, New York: Paulist Press, 2014, 23.

theologians and other specialists who actively engage in the discussions and marital enrichment programs. The couples need to be enriched with the practical steps that originate from a pastoral approach of the Church leaders. The Church must come close to the fundamental situations and issues of the married. A sound theology of marriage necessitates to concentrate on and address the practicalities of marital life within a scriptural and theological framework. Both these elements are necessary for developing a real theology of marriage and they are presented in this outstanding work of Chavara.