

SPIRITUALITY OF CHAVARA IN THE *CHAVARUL*

Ann Mary Madavanakkad CMC♦

Abstract: Kuriakose Elias Chavara, an Indian saint, priest, and social reformer, remains a profound spiritual voice in the life of the Church, especially through his enduring contribution to Christian family life. His *Chavarul*, a spiritual testament addressed to the families, offers forty pastoral directives rooted in biblical and theological vision of the family as a “Domestic Church.” The document underscores the sacred nature of the family, describing it as a reflection of the Most Holy Trinity and an image of heaven, where the members are bound by mutual love, respect, discipline, and a shared pursuit of holiness. The first part of the *Chavarul* offers precepts for fostering a God-centred family life grounded in prayer, peace, and sacramental living, while the second part focuses on the holistic upbringing of children in faith and virtue. Chavara’s insights remain strikingly relevant in the contemporary contexts, addressing the moral and spiritual challenges that threaten the unity of the family today. His definition of family emphasizes spiritual communion, unity of mind and heart, and bonds of blood and affection, all modelled after the Holy Family and rooted in divine love. His vision mirrors the Catholic teaching that marriage and family life are sacraments of God’s love,

♦ **Ann Mary Madavanakkad CMC** is a religious nun in the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel (CMC). She holds MSc in Psychology and Counselling, LTh in Pastoral Management from JDV, Pune, and LTh and Doctorate in Moral Theology from Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bengaluru. Her latest publication is “*A Good Christian Family is the Image of Heaven*”: *Family Ethics in the Chavarul of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara* (TSSC 10). She lectures in different religious and theological institutes and formations houses, and served as the Mission Formation Coordinator of the CMC Congregation. Currently, she is the Superior of the Mount Carmel Convent at Almeirim, and is engaged in pastoral ministry in Almeirim, Archdiocese of Santarem, Brazil.

Email: sranmarycmc@gmail.com

designed to embody the unity, mutual self-gift, and fruitfulness that characterize the Trinity. The *Chavarul* thus stands as both a prophetic guide and a pastoral safeguard for preserving the spiritual integrity of the Christian families in every age.

Keywords: *Chavarul*, family, Image of heaven, Unity, Sacraments, Chavara's farsighted vision, Spiritual and moral document, Fear of God, Charity, Disciplined life, Mutual respect, Obedience, Salvation of the souls.

1. Introduction

Kuriakose Elias Chavara is a spiritual giant whose wisdom continues to guide the Christian families even today. One of his most profound contributions to the family and spiritual life is encapsulated in the *Chavarul*—his *Testament to the Families*. This remarkable spiritual and moral document reflects Chavara's deep concern for the integrity, unity, and holiness of the Christian family. Written with pastoral insight and prophetic clarity, the *Chavarul* remains strikingly relevant for contemporary families facing moral, spiritual, and relational crises. It serves as a spiritual guidebook that instructs the families on how to live a God-centred life grounded in love, peace, order, and charity.

At the heart of the *Chavarul* lies the conviction that the family is a divine institution—a Domestic Church—meant to reflect the love and unity of the Most Holy Trinity. Chavara wrote this spiritual testament not merely as advice, but as a safeguard against the spiritual and moral deterioration of the families. He sought to instil a God-conscious order in homes, emphasizing that when the fear of God, charity, peace, and discipline are absent, the very fabric of the family begins to unravel.

2. *Chavarul*

The *Chavarul* is composed of forty directives in two parts, offering a comprehensive spiritual framework for family life. The first part consists of 24 precepts, which Chavara considered essential for establishing family structure and nurturing interpersonal relationships. These guidelines emphasize spiritual virtues—particularly piety, prayer, devotion, and the reception of the sacraments.

The second part of the *Chavarul* focuses on the upbringing of the children. It addresses various dimensions of formation, including faith, intellectual, psychological, and moral development. In these directives, Chavara's farsighted vision and fatherly concern for children become evident. He regarded children as sacred treasures entrusted by God to

the parents. Rooted in a biblical vision of upbringing, he provided detailed guidance for the holistic formation of the children.

Although the *Chavarul* contains few direct references to Bible, its precepts are profoundly influenced by biblical teachings and values. This biblical rootedness is evident in all the writings of Chavara. His counsel is intensely practical, grounded in his lived experience as a pastor, spiritual father, and reformer. His insights anticipate many of the challenges modern families face today, especially the loss of spiritual direction and the erosion of moral values in the wake of post-modern ideologies. The definition of family presented in the *Chavarul* clearly shows that, for Chavara, the family is deeply rooted in spirituality.

3. Definition of Family in the *Chavarul*

In the introduction to the *Chavarul*, Chavara offers a profound definition of a Christian family, highlighting its social, spiritual, and interpersonal dimensions. According to Chavara, “A good Christian family is the image of heaven. The *raison d’être* [purpose] 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 state of life.”¹ This vision aligns with the Catholic teaching that

¹ *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul* (Malayalam), translated as *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 the members of his native parish in Kainakary. A devoted follower of the Holy Family, Chavara was the founder of the CMI and CMC Congregations. *Chavarul* offers concrete suggestions and proposals on how to lead a good Christian family life within the context of Kerala society. It was published in English in 1910 under the title *Testament of a Good Father*. Although the title *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul* was not formally given by the author himself, it aptly expresses the spirit of the letter—as a heartfelt testament from a loving father to his children. *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara*, Vol. 4, *The Letters*, Edited by Lucas Vithuvattical and K.C. Chacko, Translated by Mary Leo, Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Bl. Chavara, 1990. Hereafter, the *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara* is referred to as *CWC*, *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul* as *Chavarul*, and St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara as Chavara.

Chavarul, “Introduction,” 184. *Chavarayachante Sampoorana Kruthikal*, Vol. 4, *Kathukal* (Malayalam), Edited by Lucas Vithuvattical, Mannanam: St. Joseph’s Press, 1982, 133. Nalla Kristyānikudumbam ākāsmōkshathinte sādriśyamākunnu. Kudumbathinte nyāyam enthennāl chōrayālum,

the family is the domestic Church. Just as the Most Blessed Trinity is a communion of love, so should a Christian family be a community united in love and holiness.

3.1. Good Christian Family as the Image of Heaven

The divine dimension of the family is emphasized by describing it as an image of heaven.² A family truly reflects heaven when its members are deeply connected to one another and willingly fulfil their responsibilities with mutual respect and loving service.³ The focus here is on the sacred nature of the family.⁴ Chavara regarded the family as the *sanctum sanctorum* of the society.⁵ His definition of the ideal family is rooted in a theological vision. For him, God is the Father of the human family. However, when he addresses "My Father," he refers to both God the Father and Jesus Christ.⁶ In Chavara's spiritual family, the role of the mother is held by Blessed Virgin Mary, to whom his earthly mother had dedicated him.⁷ He embraced all humanity as his brothers, sisters, and children.⁸

snēhathālum thammilthammil kettapetta pala ālukal kāranavanmārude nēre āchāravum kēzhvazhakavum anusarichu thampurānōdum manusyarōdum samādhānamāyi nadakayum, avaravarude anthasinu thakathinvannam nithyagathiye prāpikunnathinu prayatnam cheythu kūtamayī jeevikukayum cheyyunnathākunnu. *Chavarayachante Sampoorṇa Kruthikal*, Vol. 4: *Kathukal* (Mal.), 133. The *raison d'être* of family means the purpose or aim of the family. Hereafter *Chavarayachante Sampoorṇa Kruthikal* is referred to as CSK.

² *Chavarul*, "Introduction," 184; CSK, Vol. 4: *Kathukal* (Mal.), "Introduction," 133.

³ Mampra, Thomas, "Chavarul of Chavara: A Precious Gift to Families," *Vinayasadhana* 9. 2 (2018): 7–13, 10.

⁴ Mampra, "Chāvarul of Chavara: A Precious Gift to Families," 10.

⁵ Latin word *sanctum sanctorum* refers to 'holy of holies.' See Ann Elizabeth, "Chavara: Visionary and Karmayogi of Families," 124.

⁶ 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.

⁷ 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 Kochumuttam, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 390–93.

⁸ Kochumuttam, Thomas, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Theological Studies on Saint Chavara, 1, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2017, 396.

The Christian family is envisioned as a kingdom where Christ reigns supreme, for Jesus came to bring us into the family of God (Jn 14:1-3). He grants us participation in the sublime communion of the Trinity. We are called to live in communion with God and with one another, imitating the unity of the Divine Persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Jn 17:11-21). This dynamic and life-giving communion finds its most profound earthly expression in the Holy Family.⁹ Therefore, Chavara presents the Holy Family as the model of an ideal Christian family – united in mutual love, respect, and self-giving – a transformed image of heaven.

3.2. Unity of Mind and Heart

In his definition of family in the *Chavarul*, Chavara exhorts “that the members live together”¹⁰ – *kūtamāyi jēvikukayum cheyyunnathākunnu*,¹¹ in unity, love, and mutual respect. Chavara emphasized that the supreme rule of the Christian family is mutual love, which fosters unity of mind and heart. Reflecting on unity from a biblical perspective, the Yahwistic account of creation (Gen 2:24b-25) clearly affirms that the union of man and woman as husband and wife is the foundation of every human family. The Priestly account, which presents man and woman as being created equally in God’s image and likeness (Gen 1:27) underscores the divine intention that they live in harmony respecting their equality while celebrating their differences. Every marriage must be centred on this reality of communion and companionship. Upon seeing the first woman, Adam exclaimed, “This, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (Gen 2:23). This profound physical and relational commonality explains why the Scripture declares, “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” reveals God’s purpose of marriage: the sacred union of man and woman as husband and wife, established by divine design. Secondly, procreation and the continuation of the human race are essential aspects of marriage.

⁹ Athappilly, Sebastian, *Christian Images of Salvation*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2016, 33.

¹⁰ *Chavarul*, “Introduction,” 184.

¹¹ *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.

Following the creation of man and woman, God blessed them saying, "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (Gen 1:28) – another divine purpose for marriage is instituted from the beginning. Thirdly, the creation of the woman from man's ribs (Gen 2:21-23) is a symbolic expression of the deep and intimate relationship between man and woman. It reveals that they are made for one another, destined to live in a bond of mutual love and support.¹² Since marriage is divinely instituted, it is intended to be both heterosexual and monogamous, reflecting God's original design for human relationships.¹³

When Chavara emphasized the need for the unity of heart and mind, he expressed a desire for deep communion between the spouses, as well as an intimate and loving relationship between the parents and the children, qualities he regarded as essential virtues of family life. His profound devotion to the Holy Family helped him to grasp the secret of true familial unity. Within the Holy Family, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph undoubtedly differed in age, gender, temperament, needs, preferences, and personalities; yet, they were perfectly united in love.¹⁴ Chavara's focus on living together in unity of mind and heart underscores the necessity of spousal unity and close, affectionate relationships among all family members. For him, this kind of communion stands as one of the most vital virtues in Christian family life.

3.3. Bond of Blood and Affection

Chavara's definition of the family as the "living together" of its members is complemented by the idea of 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."¹⁵ For Chavara, the family is a *koinonia* - a communion - of individuals united by both blood and love. This highlights the central importance of communion within the family: a

¹² Mathias, Patric, "No to Divorce (Mt 19:3-9): An Exegetico-Theological Perusal," Page 33-58 in *Marriage and Family at the Cross Roads*, Edited by Patrick Mathias, Chennai: Don Bosco Publications, 2017, 35.

¹³ Gangal and Bramer, *Genesis*, 30.

¹⁴ Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 54-55.

¹⁵ *Chavarul*, "Introduction," 184.

profound and unbreakable bond formed among those who are related by blood and sustained through mutual affection.¹⁶

In the context of consecrated life, Chavara offers a profound instruction to his confreres regarding the kind of love that should exist among them. He advises them to love one another as if they were children born of the same mother. He writes: “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.”¹⁷ This reflects the type of love that members of a religious community should cultivate in their relationships, like that of siblings who know how to enhance joyful moments and ease times of difficulty. While friction may occasionally arise, each member has a unique role in strengthening communal bonds and celebrating life together.

Chavara 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.”¹⁸ Here, he emphasizes that a community’s true strength lies in the virtuous lives of its members, lived out in mutual love and communion. It is this fraternal love that fosters a deep sense of belonging in religious life. Reflecting this family spirit, Chavara frequently addressed his fellow members in endearing terms such as “beloved brethren,” “loving sons,” and “sons”¹⁹ and he addressed sisters as “my dear little children.”²⁰

In Catholic sacramental theology, the highest meaning of marriage is love.²¹ Marital love shapes and influences all other dimensions of marriage, including sexual intimacy and procreation. The love shared between Christian spouses is understood as a reflection of God’s love

¹⁶ Thekkekara, George, “Degeneration of Family and Familial Bond Today,” *Encounter: A Journal of Interdisciplinary Reflections of Faith and Life* 9. 2 (2018): 69–82, 69.

¹⁷ CWKEC, Vol. 4: *Letters*, 6/5, 115; CWC, Vol. 4: *The Letters*, 6/3, 71; CSK, Vol. 4: *Kathukal*, 6/3, 100.

¹⁸ CWC, Vol. 4: *The Letters*, 6/1, 65.

¹⁹ CWC, Vol. 4: *The Letters*, 6/1, 61; 65; 66.

²⁰ CWC, Vol. 4: *The Letters*, 7/2, 76; 7/7, 83.

²¹ Häring, Bernard, *Free and Faithful in Christ*, Vol. 2 of *Moral Theology for Clergy and Laity*, New York: Crossroad, 1978, 534.

for humanity. As Walter Kasper writes, "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."²² In marriage, a communion of persons is realized when two individuals freely give themselves to one another and receive each other in love. The fruit of this union is their children.²³ This communion finds its most sublime expression in the Holy Trinity. According to Christian belief, God is a Trinity, a community of persons, where each of the three divine persons is eternally united in boundless love, forming a perfect unity.²⁴ This divine pattern is mirrored, in a finite and limited way, in human community, especially in the family. True love, therefore, is expressed most authentically in the mutual self-gift of the spouses.²⁵

According to Chavara, the unity of the Holy Trinity serves as the ideal to be replicated, realized, and personalized within our families. True love is found precisely in the mutual self-gift of the spouses to one another.²⁶ This self-giving love begins in the sacrament of marriage, which is understood as a communion of life and love, a covenant aimed at the realization of total personal fulfilment.

3.4. Respect and Obedience to Parents

Chavara affirms that a good Christian family is a small community in which "with children duly respecting and obeying their parents."²⁷ This emphasis on filial respect and obedience directly reflects the spirit of the Fourth Commandment. Chavara's own life exemplified this principle, particularly through his unwavering obedience to his parents and to ecclesiastical authority. His writings to his fellow religious offer a clear articulation of this ideal. He instructs:

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

²² Kasper, Walter, *Theology of Christian Marriage*, New York: Crossroad, 1981, 30; Kochuthara, Shaji, *The Concept of Sexual Pleasure in the Catholic Moral Tradition*, Roma: Editrice, Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2007, 387.

²³ Curran, *The Moral Theology of John Paul II*, 164–65.

²⁴ Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 54–55.

²⁵ Curran, Charls E., *The Moral Theology of John Paul II*, 164–65.

²⁶ Curran, *The Moral Theology of John Paul II*, New York: T & T Clark, 2005, 164–65; Kochuthara, *Sexual Pleasure in the Catholic Moral Tradition*, 434.

²⁷ *Chavarul*, "Introduction," 184.

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.²⁸

Obedience, for Chavara, was not only a personal virtue but a foundational aspect of religious life. His adherence to this principle remained steadfast even during his final days, despite his declining health. When asked whether he would prefer to be transferred to Mannanam or remain in Koonammavu, he replied, “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.”²⁹ This response encapsulates Chavara’s profound humility and spirit of submission. His example continues to serve as a source of inspiration within religious life and offers a model of Christian virtue rooted in the Gospel.

From a biblical perspective, respect and obedience towards one’s parents are rooted in the Fourth Commandment of the Decalogue. Similar norms regarding filial respect and obedience are present across cultures and religions, underscoring the universal significance of the parent-child relationship, one of the most fundamental human experiences. Uniquely, this commandment includes a specific promise: “long life and general well-being” (Ex 20:12; Deut 5:16).³⁰ This promise highlights the profound importance of faithful observance and serves as a strong incentive for compliance.

²⁸ CWC, Vol. 4: *The Letters*, 6/3, 70–71; CSK, Vol. 4: *Kathukal*, 6/3, 99–100.

²⁹ 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, Moolayil, Leonard. *Short Biography of the Last Years (from September 1869 to January 1871) of the Venerable Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara, the First Prior of the Congregation of the Carmelites of Malabar*, Mannanam: St. Joseph’s Press, 1923, 5; Mundadan, A. Mathias, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications & Chavara Central Secretariat, 2020, 142.

³⁰ Jones, David Clyde, *Biblical Christian Ethics*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1994, 156.

Importantly, the obligation to honour parents extends beyond childhood. As Jesus affirms in Mark 7:9–12, this commandment also applies to adults, requiring them to support their parents physically, materially, and emotionally. It encompasses not only obedience but also ongoing respect, love, and care, especially in old age.³¹ Chavara advises 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 would bring down God's curse not only in afterlife but also in the present."³²

The Book of Sirach similarly provides practical guidance for how children should care for their parents (Sir 3:1–16). To honour one's parents means to recognize their God-given role in the transmission of life and to respond with gratitude and reverence. This includes acknowledging the sacrifices made by parents in nurturing, educating, and providing for their children, both materially and spiritually. As children grow older, they are in turn obliged to care for their parents' material and spiritual needs, attend to them in times of illness or distress, ensure appropriate healthcare, and contribute to their emotional well-being and contentment.

3.5. Harmony with God and the People

The definition of the family, as articulated by Chavara, further emphasizes its purpose: that its members "walk in peace before the Lord and the people."³³ Chavara's personal longing for peace with God is evident 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."³⁴ His concern for the lack of peace within families is poignantly expressed in his letters, where he laments the reality that some families have become sources of sin, dissension, conflict, destruction, and even death. The primary intention behind writing the *Chavarul* was to offer guidance to the families, leading them

³¹ Collins, Raymond F., "Ten Commandments," Pages 383–87 in vol. 6 of *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Edited by David Noel Freedman, New York: Doubleday, 1992, 385.

³² *Chavarul*, II:16, 41.

³³ CWC, Vol. 4: *The Letters*, 9/6, 102.

³⁴ CWC, Vol. 3: *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 3.

out of this turmoil and into a state of divinely inspired clarity and peace of mind.³⁵

In a letter to his confreres, Chavara asserts: “Those who practise perfect obedience will enjoy heavenly peace already here in the monastery, which is a miniature heaven.”³⁶ This statement implies that submission to the will of God, and by extension, to the will of parents and elders, leads to true peace within the family. Such families, according to Chavara, can become reflections of heaven on earth.

Chavara’s own life exemplifies these ideals, making him a model worthy of emulation both in family and religious life. As a deeply peace-loving person, he took great care to preserve harmony within his community. Even when offering guidance or correction, he avoided an authoritarian tone, ensuring that each person felt genuinely loved and respected. His gentleness and kind disposition made him easily approachable. Chavara was compassionate especially to the sick and the oppressed, always mindful not to impose demands beyond a person’s capacity. Through his affectionate, quiet, and humble nature, he won the hearts of many, embodying the very peace and harmony he preached.³⁷

When Chavara exhorts the families to maintain peace with both God and one another, he envisions a household where mutual respect, love, and understanding prevail. He calls for the family members to share one another’s burdens, accept differences with patience, and offer guidance with gentleness. At the same time, he emphasizes the importance of maintaining a clear conscience and living a disciplined, orderly life, elements he views as essential to fostering peace and harmony within the home. In a world often marked by sorrow and disorder, Chavara envisions the family as an abode of sweet consolation, peace, and spiritual stability.

³⁵ *Chavarul*, “Introduction,” 184–85.

³⁶ CWC, Vol. 4: *The Letters*, 6/3, 70–71; CSK, Vol. 4: *Kathukal*, 6/3, 99–100.

³⁷ Moozhoor, Z. M., *Blessed Chavara: The Star of the East*, Translated from Malayalam by Sheila Kannath, Kottayam, 1993, 105.

3.6. Seeking Eternal Salvation

In the *Chavarul*, Chavara emphasizes that each person should "seek eternal salvation according to one's own proper state of life."³⁸ He expresses deep sorrow over the lack of concern within families for this ultimate goal, writing: "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."³⁹ Across Chavara's writings, it is evident that the salvation of souls was the primary motivation behind all his actions and initiatives. His spiritual director, Fr Leopold Beccaro, attested to this, stating that Chavara never hesitated to engage in any kind of labour, as he was always impelled by the desire for the salvation of souls.⁴⁰ Chavara's commitment to this mission is also reflected in his testament to his fellow priests, where he affirms that "God has willed to found this congregation for the salvation of our Christian brethren."⁴¹ In alignment with this goal, he established the Confraternity for a Happy Death, aiming to prepare the faithful for a holy and peaceful end, grounded in a life of grace.

Chavara's discourse on discernment further reveals his deep concern for the salvation of souls and the practical means to attain it. He writes:

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.⁴²

Chavara reminds us to keep two important things in mind. First, we must never forget that death can come at the most unexpected moment, creeping upon us like a thief. Therefore, we must remember the words of our Lord: "Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour" (Mt 25:13). Second, we must avoid mortal sin,

³⁸ *Chavarul*, "Introduction," 184.

³⁹ *Chavarul*, "Introduction," 184.

⁴⁰ Beccaro, Leopold, *A Short Biography of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Edited by Lucas Vithuvatical, Mannanam: St. Joseph's Press, 2003, 12.

⁴¹ CWC, Vol. 4: *The Letters*, 6/3, 71.

⁴² CWC, Vol. 4: *The Letters*, 9/7, 120.

which gives rise to the fear of death. If we become aware that we have committed a mortal sin, we must immediately make a perfect act of contrition and seek forgiveness through confession before going to sleep.⁴³ Another quote from Chavara sheds further light on this understanding of salvation. No matter how great a sinner one may be, if a person repents sincerely at the moment of death—like the good thief who was crucified on the right side of the Lord—the gates of heaven will be opened to them. This, he says, is the greatest happiness a person can receive. Among all the help a person may receive in life, the greatest is the one given at the moment of death.⁴⁴

Chavara exhorts the faithful to entrust themselves entirely to God Almighty and to strive for salvation by preparing to receive the fruits of Christ's redemptive acts. Christ continues His mission in each individual soul through the working of the Holy Spirit in the Church, especially through the sacraments, the liturgical re-enactment of His sacrifice, the sacrament of confession, the preaching of His Word, and the personal inspirations of the Spirit in every human heart.⁴⁵ To attain salvation, one must respond with faith and receive baptism (Mk 16:16), practice detachment (Mt 16:25), engage in good works (Jas 2:14), and cultivate the virtues (1 Thes 5:8). Chavara urges the parents to be role models for their children by practicing detachment, charity, kindness, and faith in God. By doing so, they can guide their children to lead virtuous lives. If not, the negligence of the parents may result in their children's eternal loss, and the parents themselves may be held accountable, with their own salvation placed in jeopardy.⁴⁶

In short, the *Chavarul* offers a profound and precise definition of family emphasizing the relationship with God, with others, and with oneself, that is, transpersonal, interpersonal, and intrapersonal relationships.

The *Chavarul* contains a detailed discussion on transforming families into theo-centric communities, implementing love-centred

⁴³ CWC, Vol. 4: *The Letters*, 9/7, 119.

⁴⁴ CWC, Vol. 4: *The Letters*, 9/7, 118–19.

⁴⁵ Topmoeller, W. G., "Salvation," Pages 994–95 in vol. 12 of *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America, 1967, 995.

⁴⁶ *Chavarul*, II:1, 196.

ethics within the family, and providing integral formation to children.

4. Theo-Centric Family

God created the families that they would not be overpowered by human problems and challenges. As Christians, we are called to discern how best to support and strengthen the families in accordance with the Scripture.⁴⁷ Chavara envisioned families as images of heaven, earthly paradises where mutual love and deep interpersonal relationships are nurtured and cherished.

Christian families receive both the call and the grace to live exemplary lives from the Most Blessed Trinity.⁴⁸ Chavara acknowledged the difficulty of imitating the Holy Trinity, yet he emphasized that modelling family life on the Holy Family – whose love and communion reflect the sublime mystery of the Trinity – offers us a way to glimpse and participate in the hidden mysteries of divine life.⁴⁹

In a theocentric family, the fear of God must be its foundation, the love of God its greatest treasure, and devotion to God the source of faith that sustains a peaceful family life. Such families, in turn, become the foundation of a civilization of love and life.

4.1. Fear of God as the Basis of the Christian Family

The *Chavarul* teaches that the most valuable possession of a family lies in its fear of God and piety. A God-fearing family will enjoy the fruit of divine blessings both in this life and in eternity.⁵⁰ Chavara urges the families to avoid forming relationships with those who lack order and reverence for God.⁵¹ He further instructs that not everyone should be welcomed into the home, but only those who are well-mannered and God-fearing.⁵²

⁴⁷ *Chavarul*, I:1, 185; Titus, "Families in God's Plan: Biblical Perspectives," 355.

⁴⁸ *Chavarul*, "Introduction," 184; Eattaniel, John, "Families of the Postmodern Society: Relevance of Chavara's Vision on Family," *Herald of the East* 13. 2 (2017): 183–98, 184.

⁴⁹ *Chavarul*, II:1, 196.

⁵⁰ *Chavarul*, I:19, 192–93.

⁵¹ *Chavarul*, I:7, 188.

⁵² *Chavarul*, I:9, 188.

He identifies two kinds of fear. The first is reverential fear, the kind of fear the citizens feel towards good rulers; and that we should have towards God. It is also the fear that right-minded children show towards their parents. The second type is the fear rooted in hatred or compulsion, such as the slaves might feel towards the harsh masters. When we speak of the fear of God, we refer to the former: reverential fear. Where there is true fear of God, there is also seriousness and a sense of honourable, thoughtful diligence.⁵³ This fear is a gift of the Holy Spirit. A soul moved by this gift is overwhelmed by God's greatness and clings more deeply to His goodness. It leads to a reverence that compels a person to avoid anything that would threaten the union with God the Father. This is filial fear, a loving reverence that causes the soul to shun not only sin but even the inclination to deny God in anything.⁵⁴

When Chavara advises cultivating the fear of God, associating only with those who share that reverence, and keeping company with God-fearing individuals, he envisions a community of people who respect both their own lives and the lives of others, striving not to offend either God or neighbour. When the fear of God diminishes, faith and moral values inevitably deteriorate.⁵⁵

Christian teaching holds that every human life, from the moment of conception, is a gift of God and possesses immeasurable value in His eyes.⁵⁶ When individuals lose their spiritual vision or fear of God, they are more likely to live without moral restraint. In the face of the overwhelming demands of daily life, the *Chavarul* calls the families to pause, reorient themselves spiritually, and rediscover the truth of their vocation as a divine gift.⁵⁷ It urges them to protect and cherish the life at any cost. Such a faith perspective cannot be sustained without a spirit of prayer and meditation. Only through total

⁵³ Bercot, David W., ed., *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs: A Reference Guide to More Than 700 Topics Discussed by the Early Church Fathers*, Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998, 279.

⁵⁴ Mulhern, P. F., "As a Gift of the Holy Spirit," Pages 864–65 in vol. 5 of *The New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, Washington D. C.: The Catholic University of America, 1967, 864–65.

⁵⁵ David, *Sacredness of Human Life*, 33.

⁵⁶ Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, AAS 58 (1966): 1025–1115.

⁵⁷ *Chavarul*, I:1, 184.

surrender in love and obedience to God can we experience the happiness and peace for which we were created. Therefore, Chavara strongly encourages the parents to gather their families regularly for prayer, especially the family prayer.⁵⁸

According to Pope Francis, the transmission of faith within the family depends largely on the parents' own relationship with God, how sincerely they trust in Him, seek Him, and recognize their need for Him. They must understand that faith is a gift of God, yet one entrusted to their care. Through their faithful and creative commitment, they collaborate in God's saving plan. In this sense, parents become the primary agents of catechesis and evangelization within their own families.⁵⁹ Pope Benedict XVI also emphasized that education in the Christian faith is fundamentally about entering into a living relationship with Jesus Christ and the Father, a relationship that is nurtured through prayer and personal communion. Only those who truly know and love Jesus can introduce others to such a relationship.⁶⁰ It is from their parents that the children experience human and divine love in its most formative and profound way.

Pope Francis emphasizes, for faith education to be effective, parents must adopt methods appropriate to each stage of their children's development. For young children, this may include the use of symbols, actions, and stories. For adolescents, however, the approach must become more personal, encouraging them to explore and articulate their own experience of faith in a way that resonates with their maturity and individuality. In both cases, the compelling witness of the parents plays a vital role. They teach most convincingly not through theoretical instruction, but through the authenticity of their lives and example.⁶¹ Therefore, properly organizing moments of family prayer is essential to the transmission of faith. When faith is genuinely lived and faithfully passed on, its fruitfulness extends beyond the confines of the family. It naturally radiates outward,

⁵⁸ *Chavarul*, I:24, 195-96.

⁵⁹ Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 287 (AAS 108: 426).

⁶⁰ Benedict XVI, "Address to the Participants in the Convention of the Diocese of Rome."

⁶¹ Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 288 (AAS 108: 427).

spreading the light of faith to the surrounding community. In this way, an evangelized family becomes an evangelizing family.

Accordingly, the *Chavarul* highlights the importance of cultivating transpersonal relationships within families and upholds the “fear of God” as the most precious possession. It advises the families to associate only with God-fearing individuals, to choose such people as friends, and to prefer them when hiring servants. Thus, it is highly fitting to use the maxims of the *Chavarul* as a guide for reshaping and renewing contemporary families, forming them into reflections of the heavenly ideal, true “heavens on earth.”

4.2. Love of God as the Wealth of the Family

In the *Chavarul*, Chavara urges the families to love one another and to forgive each other’s mistakes and shortcomings.⁶² The Christian family is the first school in which a person learns to love both God and the neighbour. To illustrate this, Chavara uses the parable of the miser, demonstrating charitable acts done out of love for God are the true source of a family’s wealth, while those who neglect such acts ultimately suffer the loss.⁶³

Love is the fulfilment and goal of the law and all divine Scripture.⁶⁴ Love of God and love of neighbour are intimately intertwined. Since God first loved us (1 Jn 4:10), love is no longer merely a command; it is our response to the gift of God’s love, which draws us to Himself.⁶⁵ To love God more than we love others is, paradoxically, the most loving thing we can do for them because God’s love is the true treasure of the family. It is this love that inspires and motivates the family to do good to others. Recognizing love as the family’s true wealth compels them to acts of charity.

All dimensions of love are embraced in Chavara’s teachings. He exhorts the spouses to love each other even when they have been hurt. This includes, to a certain extent, loving one’s enemies, not in the sense of approving of wickedness or ungodliness, but in loving the ungodly and the wicked as persons. When someone loves God

⁶² *Chavarul*, I:1, 185.

⁶³ *Chavarul*, I:15, 191.

⁶⁴ Aquinas, Thomas, *Teaching Christianity*, I/II, Translated by Edmund Hill, New York: New City Press, 1996, 123.

⁶⁵ Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 1 (AAS 98: 217–18).

with all their heart, soul, and strength, they enter into communion with God, and God, in turn, fills them with His love.⁶⁶ Thus, parents who love God are empowered to love others and perform the acts of charity in the name of that divine love.

When the parents strive to live in harmony, righteousness, truth, and patience, their children are inspired to do the same. Likewise, children learn to practice charity, preserve fellowship, endure insults, show patience, hold no grudges, comfort the sick, respect the elderly, admonish sinners, and refrain from oppressing debtors or those in need.⁶⁷ In this way, they discover that true wealth lies in loving and serving God and others.

When the families realize God's love as the greatest treasure, couples are better able to resolve the challenges they face in their relationships, including those involving in the care of elderly parents.⁶⁸ Thus *Chavarul* presents the family as a school of mutual love and respect, a cradle of life and love, and affirms love as the key to all marital and familial relationships.

4.3. Devotion to God as the Strength of the Family

Chavara considered devotion to God the strength of the family. He exhorted that at least one member of the household should attend the Holy Eucharist daily to obtain blessings for the entire family.⁶⁹ Aware of this practice required sacrifice, Chavara nevertheless encouraged the families to embrace it, stressing that maintaining a close relationship with God demands commitment and dedication, but also brings abundant blessings.⁷⁰

The *Chavarul* urges the people to have genuine devotion to God which will strengthen them through life's trials and difficulties.⁷¹ Chavara emphasized that, alongside participation in the liturgy and sacraments, the reading and meditation of the Sacred Scripture are

⁶⁶ Bercot, ed., *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, 409.

⁶⁷ Holmes, Michael. W., ed., *The Apostolic Fathers, Greek Texts and English Translation*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007, 531.

⁶⁸ Which are discussed in section 4.2.1 Problems in Spousal Relationship and 4.2.5 Issues Confronted by Elderly Parents.

⁶⁹ *Chavarul*, I:19, 192-93.

⁷⁰ Mampra, "Chavarul of Chavara: A Precious Gift to Families," 11.

⁷¹ *Chavarul*, "Introduction," 184.

essential to authentic Christian living.⁷² Families are strengthened when the members are united in a shared relationship with God. This collective commitment to God's Word instils a sense of meaning and purpose, enabling the families to persevere through challenges and gain a right perspective on life.⁷³ It also offers practical guidance for daily living, shaping a household founded on faith and love.

In his apostolic exhortation, Pope John Paul II challenges the parents regarding the religious formation of their children. He affirms that parents teach life's most important lessons by their own example through honest thoughts, truthful actions, and shared prayer. They become acts of worship of singular value, bringing peace to the home and contributing to the building up of the Church.⁷⁴ These same principles are echoed in the *Chavarul*, where Chavara instructs the families to maintain a structured daily routine that gives priority to family prayer, honest labour, and spiritual reading. Such a lifestyle helps them to preserve a pure and vibrant relationship with both God and others.⁷⁵

Pope Francis also highlights the power of family prayer, affirming that it has a greater impact on faith formation than hundreds of sermons or catechetical lessons. Prayer becomes a beautiful moment of encounter with the living person of Jesus, an experience woven into the fabric of daily life. These vibrant moments of prayer transform the family into a domestic church that is open to the universal Church and becomes a true missionary presence.⁷⁶ Chavara further reminds the parents that as children grow older, they must be prepared for the sacraments and be instructed in devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

In transmitting devotion to God, the family becomes an agent of pastoral activity. It proclaims the Gospel not only in word but through a diversity of witness: solidarity with the poor, support for struggling families, stewardship of creation, promotion of the

⁷² *Chavarul*, I:24, 195; I:3, 187.

⁷³ Raina, "Family Relationship-Importance and How to Build Healthy Relationship." [Online]

⁷⁴ John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 60 (AAS 74: 152-53).

⁷⁵ *Chavarul*, I:24, 195-96.

⁷⁶ Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 289-290 (AAS 108: 427-28).

common good, transformation of unjust structures, and the practice of the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.⁷⁷ These acts are not merely expressions of human compassion but an "expression of profound Christian belief in the love of the Father who guides and sustains us."⁷⁸ Through such witness, families proclaim that the love of the Father revealed in the total self-gift of Jesus Christ remains present among them, empowering them to face life's storms with courage and hope. This is the Good News that must be heard and lived within every family, at every moment, a source of light and life that illumines their path.⁷⁹

This experience truly makes the family a domestic church and a leaven of evangelization in the society. Chavara's maxims and his insistence on sincere daily devotion to God, along with the spiritual practices he recommended, remain very significant and relevant for the contemporary families facing the erosion of faith and moral values.

5. Conclusion

In an era where the families often struggle with identity, purpose, and cohesion, the *Chavarul* offers a prophetic voice and a clear path towards spiritual renewal. It envisions the Christian home as a sacred space where divine love is lived, shared, and transmitted. Far from being a relic of the past, the *Chavarul* is a living guide, a spiritual compass that challenges the families to rediscover their God-given vocation. By fostering God-centeredness, reverential fear of God, and faithful witness to Christ, Chavara's spiritual legacy calls for the Christian families to become evangelizing communities, homes where faith is lived in love, and love is expressed through action. It is a clarion call to reform our homes, not only for personal sanctity but also for the transformation of the society through the families that are truly images of heaven on earth.

⁷⁷ Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 290 (AAS 108: 428).

⁷⁸ Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 290 (AAS 108: 428).

⁷⁹ Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 290 (AAS 108: 428).