

FAMILY: SCHOOL OF LIFE, SANCTITY AND COMMUNION

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Abstract: This article explores the concept family as the basic unit in the Church and the society. The future of humanity passes by the way of the family. The ambience of family is essential for the psychological health of the young ones. Modern families face many challenges that demand proper orientation and pastoral care. The article is originally the Chavara lecture given in DVK, Bengaluru in 2018. It contains three parts. The first part focuses on the changes occurred in the Indian families due to globalization and migration. The second part deals with the insights from the *Chavarul* and other periodical teachings on family by the magisterium of the Catholic Church. The third part analyses the impact of the changing role of women from 'home makers' to 'bread winners' and women empowerment. The indissolubility of marriage shall be fostered and the family has to grow into a school of life, sanctity and communion.

Keywords: Family, Challenges, *Chavarul*, Covenant, Communion, Domestic Pentecost, Vocational discernment, Feminine genius, Inclusive growth.

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1. Introduction

The term family is derived from the Latin word *familia* denoting a household establishment and refers to a group of individuals living together and bound to each other by biological, social and psychological relationship. Man being the head and woman the heart of the family undermines gender equality of mutual love and respect. The family plays its role in generation of human capital resources and is, therefore, a basic unit of study in most social science disciplines such as Sociology, Psychology, Economics, Anthropology, History, Social Psychiatry, Social Work and Political Science. For this reason, the United Nations Organization declared in its Universal Declaration of Human Rights as “the family is the natural fundamental group of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.”¹

The Church has always viewed the family as the most fundamental unit of human society. The opening words of St John Paul II in the apostolic letter to the families announces, “The celebration of the Year of the Family gives me a welcome opportunity to knock at the door of your home, eager to greet you with deep affection and to spend time with you.”² To the Church, family is the school of life, sanctity and communion.

2. Challenges and Chances of Family in Today’s Indian Context

The concept of family and family values are deeply rooted in the Indian culture. All major religions practiced in India hold that marriage as sacred, and encourage and support the members to live a healthy family life. A perusal of varied literature on Indian society and culture, by anthropologists and sociologists, suggests that the twentieth century recorded certain changes of far-reaching importance in the family system under the influence of westernization, industrialization, modernization and migration.

2.1. Challenges

Families in India face challenges, like increasing divorce and separation rates, domestic violence, inter-generational conflicts, social problems of alcoholism and drug abuse, excessive use of social media, the inability to cope with the pressures of the modern life, greater incidence of extra-

¹ *United Nations Bulletin*. 1 January 1949, pp 6-8.

² John Paul II, *Letter to Families*, Rome, 2 February 1994, 1. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1994/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_0202_1994_families.html; accessed on 23.02.2026.

marital relationships, including open gay and lesbian relationships, a delay in the age at marriage, higher rates of marital disruption, a new system of 'live-in-arrangements', dowry related violence, long distance marriages, single parent homes, etc. These challenges are the results of the following changes in family values, perspectives and demands of the passing culture.

2.1.1. The Passing of Joint Family System

The most commonly observed modern features of Indian families are single parent families, female headed households, dual earner families, childless families, and adoptive families. Contrary to the western notion of the nuclear and extended family with the nuclear family being the dominant form, the Indian perspective takes the nuclear nature of family with extension as the key factor.

2.1.2. Changes in Authority Structure

The emergence of the new bread winners, financially independent, career-oriented men and women, who are confident of taking their own decisions and craving for individual achievements have greatly contributed to the disintegration of joint family. The patriarchal set up gets changed slowly to equalitarian interaction among the educated, urban middle classes, and also among some rural set ups. Ganeswar Mishra describes, middle and upper middle-class families have been undergoing a dramatic transformation because the younger generation questions power issues, traditional roles, hierarchical relationships, obligations, loyalty, and loyalty to kinsmen and the elderly.³

2.1.3. Gender Discrimination

Chempakassry makes the following comment: "The man and woman being the images of God are equal to each other and equality is a pre requisite for family life, which is built on interpersonal relationship. The relationship between a master and a slave is not interpersonal and there can be no family built on their relationship."⁴ L. Melina observes: "The

³ G. Mishra, "Reflection on the Continuity and Change in the Indian Family System," *Trends in Social Sciences Research* 1995, 2:27-30.

⁴ P. Chempakassry, "Marriage and family in the Creation Account," *Indian Journal of Family Studies* 2004, 18.

search to enjoy the meeting of the other is replaced by the more immediate, superficial search for pleasure.”⁵

2.1.4. Domestic Violence

Abuse is physical, sexual, emotional, economic or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. This includes any behaviors that frighten, intimidate, terrorize, manipulate, hurt, humiliate, blame, injure, or wound someone. Domestic abuse is related to alcohol, drug and substance abuse to a certain extent. Domestic violence affects people of all socio-economic backgrounds and education levels. In India, the big challenge now is to enforce Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, in its true sense as the responses to the enactment are polarized.⁶

2.1.5. Migration and Problems of the Aged

The problems of the elderly arise from a relatively faster pace of demographic transition, the incredible increase in life expectancy and incremental dependency ratio. Consequently, the traditional values and institutions are in the process of erosion and adaptation resulting in the weakening of intergenerational ties. Wider economic opportunities and modern communication cause young people to migrate especially from rural to urban areas. With the rapidly increasing number of the aged, care of the elderly has emerged as an important issue in India, which was not a problem where joint family system was dominant. The copying capacities of the younger and elder family members are now being challenged resulting in the neglect and abuse of the elderly in many ways both within the family and outside.⁷

2.1.6. Individualism VS Collectivism

Another major challenge faced by the families is the “radical individualism” present in the current culture. Indian society undergoes a rapid transformation under the impact of industrialization, globalization and urbanization. The social and cultural changes have altered the entire lifestyles, interpersonal relationship patterns, power structures and familial relationship arrangements in the current times.

⁵ L. Melina, “Anthropological and Moral Implications of Familiar is Consortio and Its Effects on Subsequent Thinking,” *Indian Journal of Family Studies* 1/1 (2003), 14.

⁶ F. Agnes, Domestic violence act - A Portal of Hope, *Combat Law*, 2005, 4:6.

⁷ Shakuntala C. Shettar, *Problems of Aged in Changing Indian Scenario*, 2013, Para 6-7.

Excessive utilitarianism leads to disposable culture of 'use and throw' resulting in maladjustment more than marital adjustments.

2.2. Chances

Every challenge is an opportunity and every problem is a chance to intervene. We need to make time and space to enter into the everyday dynamics of our own family values like love, care, trust, honesty, kindness, empathy, compassion, perseverance, and many more.

2.2.1. Chances for Psychological Interventions

Effective communication is crucial for understanding each other's needs, feelings, and concerns. It is possible by spending quality time together regularly; engaging in activities that promote bonding and create cherished memories. Prayer, meals, outing, entertainments, recreation, etc., should be in the time outlays with proper credence. Every family is unique, so finding what works best for each one's specific situation is essential, which again demands effort and understanding.

2.2.2. Chances for Prophetic Interventions

The evangelical discernment helps the families to have an orientation for the entire truth and the full dignity of marriage. The situation in which the family finds itself is like as St Augustine puts it, a conflict between two loves: the love of God to the point of disregarding self, and the love of self to the point of disregarding God. What we require is a domestic *kenōsis*, from Greek, means action of emptying, from *kenoun* to purge, empty, from *kenos* empty. The "self-emptying" (Phil 2:5-11) refers to the voluntary pouring out in an act of sacrificial love (2 Cor 5:17-21). It is also the very heart of any vocation including family life.

2.2.3. Chances for Practical Interventions

In the era of changing family power structure, we need wisdom more than the bygone ages for the survival of families. Traditionally, man was the breadwinner and woman, the homemaker. The breadwinner was powerful and was the decision maker, and therefore the subordinates were vulnerable. Though 'power verses vulnerability' seemed apparently to be peaceful, justice was not given to every member of the household. In the nuclear families, the system of 'power versus power' leads to 'power clash' or 'power struggle'. So a third system of give and take is ideal for the survival of families. It means both partners are vulnerable to each other's needs and feelings.

3. Insights from the *Chavarul* and the Theological Tradition

The creation narratives reveal that God doesn't want human beings to be alone, and hence He wanted them to live in companionship (Gen 2:18). Both the Canon law and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* provide a straightforward definition of marriage: "The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered to the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring..."⁸

3.1. The Testament of a Loving Father

Kuriakose Elias Chavara, the 'Champion of Families' had a deep sense of Christian foundations for leading a genuine family life. He wrote *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul (Testament of a Loving Father)* in 1868, which stands as a guiding light for the families, especially for the parents and the children, to lead a pleasant and holy life even in today's context. He tried to renew the families through regular Sunday sermons and parish retreats.

According to Chavara, "A good Christian family is similar to heaven. It is a community of people joined together by a bond of blood and love, where the members manifest respect and obedience to elders and walk in peace with the Lord and the people, and seek to attain eternal salvation, living peacefully according to his proper state of life."⁹ He codified the Testament as a practical guideline in forty paragraphs (part 1 with 24 paragraphs and part 2 with 16 paragraphs), addressing three vital perspectives to be maintained in every Catholic family, namely, (1) the place of a family in the redemptive plan of God, (2) the role of family in the mission of the Church, and (3) the mission of family in social networking.

3.1.1. Multi-Faceted Contributions

In the *Chavarul*, while talking about parenting, we find Chavara reaching out to the families in various aspects.

⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1055, 1; *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1601; cf. Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes*, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html; accessed on 23.02.2026.

⁹ *Testament of a Loving Father*, Introduction.

As a Holy Man, he emphasized the essential worth of the family that consists in its holiness and fear of God. Such a family would enjoy divine blessings both in this world and in the next.

As a Mentor, he urged the parents that they must remember their primary duty and responsibility to bring up the children. They are 'Sacred Treasures' entrusted to them, by God, to be trained up in His service and to be returned to Him on the judgment day.

As a Psychologist, he counselled the parents not to be very stiff or very lenient towards their children. Too much affection would make them proud. Excessive stiffness, anger and punishment would make them desperate, dejected and even unashamed.

As an Economist, he proposed the parents that they should make partition of properties before they grow too old. They would be held accountable for dissensions between children, arising on account of their failure to do so in time. He taught both extravagance and miserliness as sinful.

As a Professional one, he stated that work should become the status of life. It is not suitable for a noble person to refuse to work. Laziness is the mother of all other vices; especially the father of drunkenness, a disgraceful before the world, and sinful before God.

As an Advisor, he exhorted, when children are grown up a little, send them to school. Enquire their progress in studies from time to time, also what type of companions they do have.

As a Tutor, he suggested the parents to evaluate the children on every Sunday, what they learned during the week days. If they wished the children to be good and helpful to them in old age, take care to give them training as good Christians when they are young.

As a Reformist, he opined not to go for law suits even for a just cause. It would destroy the families. Agnostic books spread error and ignorance. Keeping such books in our house, is like hiding fire in haystacks.

Chavara also gave guidelines for the children, parents and also on vocation, true knowledge, character formation, friendship, etc., to follow and grow in wisdom and purity.

3.2. Family: Ecclesial, Canonical and Theological Dimension

The Magisterium of the Catholic Church holds marriage as a sacrament creating an indissoluble union between a man and a woman. The Church wishes to live it faithfully and hence the magisterium, in addition to Vatican II, provides guidelines through various Encyclicals, Apostolic Exhortations and Apostolic Letters like *Familiaris consortio* (1981), *Letter to families* (1994), *Mulieris Dignitatem* (1988), *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992), *Letter to women* (1995), *The letter to Bishops from the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith* (2004), *Amoris laetitia* (2016), etc.

3.2.1. Family - The Dream of God

The family is the fundamental institution of human society. At the creation of Adam and Eve, God made it pretty clear that families are significant. The creation narratives present that Adam was in the Garden of Eden. He named all the other creatures as a sign of his dominion, his clear and undisputed power, over all of them. Nonetheless, he felt alone, because he did not find a helper fit for him. At Adam's loneliness, God said: "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him" (Gen 2:18). Reflecting on the creation account, Pope Francis urged the families to build a solid and fruitful relationship of love. "This is God's dream for his beloved creation: to see it fulfilled in the loving union between a man and a woman, rejoicing in their shared journey fruitful in their mutual gift of self."¹⁰ It is the same plan which Jesus presents in the Gospel: "From the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female'. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two but one flesh" (Mk 10:6-8; cf. Gen 1:27; 2:24).

From a different perspective, Bible can also be seen as a written account of faith experience of the chosen families like Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Tobit and Anna, Thobias and Sarah, Joseph and Mary, etc. Jesus entered into human history through the family, His first miracle was at a wedding feast and even during the moments of Calvary he tried to restore family relationships, "behold your Mother" and "behold your son" (Jn 19:26-27)

¹⁰ Pope Francis, Opening Homily for the Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, 2015. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20151004_omelia-apertura-sinodo-vescovi.html; accessed on 21.02.2026.

3.2.2. Family - The Way of the Church

Pope Francis in *Amoris Laetitia* states, 'The Joy of Love' experienced by families is also the joy of the Church" (AL 1).¹¹ Hence the family constitutes "The Way of the Church." John Paul II in *Familiaris Consortio* invited the 'families to become what they are.' He exhorted: "The family finds in the plan of God the Creator and Redeemer not only its identity, what it is, but also its mission, what it can and should do. The role that God calls the family to perform in history derives from what the family is; its role represents the dynamic and existential development of what it is. Each family finds within itself a summons that cannot be ignored, and that specifies both its dignity and its responsibility: family, become what you are" (FC 17).¹² *Gaudium et spes* affirmed: "God did not create man a solitary being. From the beginning 'male and female he created them. Their companionship produces the primary form of interpersonal communion. For by his innermost nature man is a social being and unless he relates himself to others he can neither live nor develop his potential."¹³

3.2.3. Family - The Domestic Church

Lumen Gentium describes the family as the 'Domestic Church', *Ecclesia Domestica*, because it is the first place where young, baptized Christians learn about their faith. From the wedlock of Christians there comes the family, in which new citizens of human society are born, who by the grace of the Holy Spirit received in baptism are made children of God. *Lumen Gentium* goes on to explain that "The family, is so to speak, the domestic church. In it parents should, by their word and example, be the first preachers of the faith to their children; they should encourage them in the vocation which is proper to each of them, fostering with special care vocation to a sacred state" (LG 11).¹⁴

¹¹Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*. https://www.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf; accessed on 21.02.2026.

¹²John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio.html; accessed on 21.02.2026.

¹³*Gaudium et Spes*, 52.

¹⁴https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html; accessed on 23.02.2026.

At the 9th World Meeting of Families held in Ireland in 2018, Pope Francis stated that in order to become domestic Church, it needs to have two things: a Domestic Pentecost experience and training in Evangelical Discernment.¹⁵ To foster the faith life and vocations, Pope Francis gave a missionary mandate to the families to relive in a domestic Pentecost. The process of determining God's will for life in each situation is known as discernment. In terms of vocational discernment, every family has a collective vocation outwards and each family environment is a seedbed for vocational discernment by the children, aided by the parents who are conscious of their own vocation. The theme of youth synod held in 2018 was on accompanying youth in their faith journey for vocational discernment.¹⁶

3.2.4. Family - The Civilization of Love

Generally, the very word 'family' evokes warm and happy feelings in human hearts. Therefore, the Council states that the wellbeing of the individual person and of both human and Christian society is closely bound together with the healthy state of conjugal and family life. The conjugal covenant of marriage leads the spouses to a lasting communion of love and of life, appreciate its values and capabilities, and foster them in their daily living. Pope John Paul II comments, "Unfortunately various programmes backed by very powerful resources nowadays seem to aim at the breakdown of the family. At times it appears that concerted efforts are being made to present as 'normal' and attractive, and even to glamorize, situations which are in fact 'irregular'."¹⁷

3.2.5. Family - The Cradle of Communion

The family by definition is a "communion of persons", and its proper way of existing and living together is "communion." Acknowledging the absolute transcendence of the Creator with regard to his creatures, we see the family's ultimate relationship to the divine. Conjugal communion is characterized not only by its unity but also by its indissolubility. Jesus affirms: "The man shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one" (Mt 19:5; cf. Gen 2:24) the very word "to be joined" or "to cleave", in the original Hebrew, bespeaks a profound harmony. As the psalmist says, "My soul clings to you" (Ps 63:8) The

¹⁵ Pope Francis, Address of 9th World Meeting of Families, Ireland, 2018.

¹⁶ Pope Francis, *Christus Vivit*. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20190325_christus-vivit.html; accessed on 22.02. 2026.

¹⁷ *Letter to Families*, 7, 9-10.

Christian family springs from marriage, which is an image and sharing in the partnership of love between Christ and the Church.

3.2.6. Family - Custodian and Basic Unit of Transmission of Faith

The family is the custodian and primary educator of faith and morals to next generation. The parents have the primary responsibility of the education of their children. They are educators as they are parents.¹⁸ The psalmist sings: "All that we have heard and known, that our fathers have told us, we will not hide from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders which he has wrought (Ps 78:3-6). As the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger wrote about the families: "Since it is here above all that the features of a people take shape; it is here that its members acquire basic teachings. They learn to love in as much as they are unconditionally loved, they learn respect for others in as much as they are respected, and they learn to know the face of God in as much as they receive a first revelation of it from a father and a mother full of attention in their regard. Whenever these fundamental experiences are lacking, society as a whole suffers violence and becomes in turn the progenitor of more violence."¹⁹

3.2.7. Family - A Path to Holiness

The family is the primary place and context where love is given and received. The family is the place where "one learns endurance and the joy of work, fraternal love, generous – even repeated – forgiveness and above all divine worship in prayer and the offering of one's life."²⁰ The theme of the World Meeting of Families held in June 2022 in Rome was 'Family Love - a Vocation and a Path to Holiness.'²¹ In his video message, the pope Francis affirmed that "the family is the place where we learn to live with one another, to live with young people and with those who are older. And by being united young people, the elderly, adults, children, by being united in our differences, we evangelize with our example of life."²²

¹⁸ *Familiaris Consortio*, 40.

¹⁹ Cardinal Ratzinger, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World, 13.

²⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1657.

²¹ Pope Francis, World Meeting of Families, Rome, 2022.

²² Pope Francis, Video Message, June 2022

3.2.8. Family - For Society and Governance

The Christian family has an evangelizing and missionary task. *Lumen Gentium* defines lay apostolate as “The laity is called in a special way to make the Church present and operative in those places and circumstances where only through them can she become the salt of the earth. Lay people, through baptism they are incorporated into Christ sharing thereby the priestly, prophetic and kingly offices of Christ, and therefore they too have a responsibility in the mission of the Church.”²³ So fundamental duty of a Christian as per this document is to illuminate the world and put order there in order to cultivate solidarity and harmony in the society. Pope Francis states, “If someone helps an elderly person cross a river, that is a fine act of charity. The politician, on the other hand, builds a bridge, and that too is an act of charity. While one person can help another by providing something to eat, the politician creates a job for that other person, and thus practices a lofty form of charity that ennobles his or her political activity” (FT 186).²⁴

3.2.9. Family: Pastoral Care of the Church

The Church is called to carry out her mission in fidelity, truth and love in defending faithful love, the sacredness of life, the unity and indissolubility of the conjugal bond as a sign of God’s grace. At the level of ecclesial structures, the concern for the families should permeate. But the most important and immediate structure which can effectively attend to the needs of families is the parish community. It is at this level that the pastoral care of the families can be carried out with tangible results. Hence the importance of marriage preparation courses, marriage enrichment seminars, pro-life, campaigns, etc.

4. Formation of Family: The Role of Woman Today, Enlarging Horizons

The world gets changed rapidly. The families and the role of women in the families and the society also gets changed. The gender perspective of human rights is not simply a question of giving any special concession or merely keeping the women always in a state of beneficiary alone. It is by enabling them to have better participation in decision making at policy level and its implementation. The end result is that they become critical agents of development. According to Amartya Sen, development

²³ *Lumen Gentium*, 31- 33.

²⁴ Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html; accessed on 22.02.2026. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 208.

means "Expansion of Capabilities"²⁵ both human and material. Hence, development if not engendered it is endangered.

4.1. Awakening of Gender Justice

The declaration of women's year in 1975 and the women's decade during 1975-85 resulted in the official commencing of all women empowerment programmes globally.²⁶ It led to various studies, and the findings in the economic sector literally startled the economists and social thinkers. It was found that women constitute nearly 1/2 of the world population. They perform 2/3rd of world's work including the household domestic work, which is never acknowledged and accounted. But they receive 1/10th of world's income and own only 1/100th of world's property. According to the World Economic Forum in 2016, only 59% of the gender gap in economic opportunities has been closed around the world.²⁷ This led to the emergence Women Commissions, Women Development Corporations, and Ministry for Women affairs. UN Women's Global Conferences Mexico (1975), Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985) and in Beijing (1995), etc.

4.2. Women Empowerment - A Conceptual Analysis

The word empowerment is frequently used in development circles, but as a concept, seldom defined properly. The word empowerment literally means to cause power. Empowerment is a process of helping to discover the potentialities and utilize them for the betterment of society and family. It enables women to lead a life with more dignity and self-respect. Empowerment in the real sense is the quality of life one really has. An empowered woman is an asset to the family and 'social capital' for the nation.²⁸ It is no longer a question of fighting for equality with men, but for a new vision of the world which will involve both men and women. This is not a struggle of women alone, but of the entire humanity. In fact, women empowerment is human empowerment itself.

²⁵ Amartya Sen, "Equality of what? In Tanner Lectures on Human Values. S. M. McMurrin, ed., vol. I, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980.

²⁶ The United Nations General Assembly 1975, Resolution 31/136.

²⁷ World Economic Forum: The Global Gender Gap Report 2016, Insight Report, quoted in *Gender Equality in Decision-Making Positions: The Efficiency Gains*, by Paola Profeta, Milan: Bocconi University, 2.

²⁸ Kochurani Joseph, *Women Empowerment, a Conceptual Analysis*, 2005, 90.

4.2.1. Measurement of Empowerment

Empowerment can be measured by quantitative and qualitative indices. It is linked with various tangible quantitative indicators like the levels of income, saving, property, etc. But all wealthy women cannot be termed as empowered women. The qualitative indicators are like the power to make decisions, ability to interact with the people, power to create and control the resources, feeling of self-worth, dignity for one's own life, having a sense of self and vision of a future, mobility and visibility, status and decision-making power, participation in non-family groups, and ability to cultivate a sense of purpose beyond one's own life.

4.2.2. Facets of Empowerment

Neither the development without empowerment nor the empowerment without development is meaningful. So, it is relevant to find its facets like spiritual, psychological, economic, intellectual, physical, educational, social & political empowerment. These facets cannot be treated as isolated rather they are inter linked as one leads to the other. The empowerment of women can be measured by analysing the status of women within the family and the community, and in terms of their contribution to decision making in the public bodies.

4.3. Widening Horizons

Although motherhood is a key element of women's identity, it does not mean that women should be considered only in the perspective of procreation. The motherhood can find forms of full realization also where there is no physical procreation. The harmony of the organization of work and the laws governing the work stemming from the mission of women within the family is a challenge. The question is not only legal, economic and organizational; it is above all a question of mentality, culture, and respect.

4.3.1. The Feminine Genius

The dignity and the vocation of women has been a subject of constant concern in the statements of the Church's magisterium and is present in various documents of the Second Vatican council. John Paul II states: "The hour is coming, in fact has come, when the vocation of women is being acknowledged in its fullness, the hour in which women acquire in the world an influence, an effect and a power never hither to achieved. That is why, at this moment when the human race is undergoing so deep

a transformation, women imbued with a spirit of the gospel can do so much to aid humanity in not falling" (MD 1).²⁹

The magisterium of the Catholic Church uses the phrase "Feminine Genius" to express the unique nature of womanhood. John Paul II's landmark '*Mulieris Dignitatem*' brought the term feminine genius to our lexicon. Pope Francis continues the same as "The Church acknowledges the indispensable contribution which women make to society through the sensitivity, intuition and other distinctive skill sets which they, more than men, tend to possess. I readily acknowledge that many women share pastoral responsibilities with priests, helping to guide people, families and groups and offering new contributions to theological reflection. But we need to create still broader opportunities for a more incisive female presence in the Church and in the various other settings where important decisions, are made, both in the Church and in social structures" (EG 103).³⁰

4.3.2. God's Creation of Human Beings

"God created man in his own image, male and female he created them" (Gen 1:27). This concise passage contains the fundamental anthropological truths: crowns the whole work of creation; both man and woman are human beings to an equal degree. God has raised the dignity of women by entrusting life in the womb of a mother. When the time had fully come, God sent forth his son, born of a woman. Bible depicts strong purpose driven women like mother Mary, Mary Magdalene, Esther, Ruth, etc.

4.3.3. Role of Women in the Church

The Church upholds the glorious heritage of preserving the dignity of women through active involvement in women's education by realizing the importance of education as a catalyst for change. The Church has established healthcare facilities to improve the Physical Quality of Life Index [PQLI] of women. Many are engaged as catechism teachers, office bearers of family units and members of women organizations as a vital force of collaborative pastoral administration. Self Help Groups [SHGs],

²⁹ John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1988/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19880815_mulieris-dignitatem.html; accessed on 23.02. 2026.

³⁰ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html; accessed on 23.02. 2026.

the Income Generating projects [IGPs], etc., help to tackle the macro-economic problems like household poverty and unemployment at the grass root level.³¹ The whole concept revolves around the theme of inclusive growth.³²

Despite these advances, the concerns of women are still given second priority in the Church as it is in the society. They continue to face both subtle and blatant discrimination and marginalization.

4.3.4. Equality of Rights and Roles Expanded

The traditional concept of viewing men as breadwinners and women as homemakers gets altered. The role of women in the workforce has expanded exponentially in recent decades from caretakers to entrepreneurs. The book of Proverbs presents an Ode to a capable wife (Prov 31:10-31). This passage describes a wife who is not only virtuous and wise but also entrepreneurial and financially savvy. It is a fact that all women work, but only some are paid. Cardinal Ratzinger, wrote "Indeed, a just valuing of the work of women within the family is required. In this way, women who freely desire will be able to devote the totality of their time to the work of the household without being stigmatized by society or penalized financially. Also those who wish also to engage in other work may be able to do so with an appropriate work schedule, and not have to choose between relinquishing their family life or enduring continual stress, with negative consequences for one's own equilibrium and the harmony of the family."³³ The United Nations Charter refers to this dignity in the same instance as it acknowledges the equal rights of men and women.³⁴

5. Conclusion

In the light of the challenges and opportunities the families of today face, the article tried to highlight the sound teachings of Chavara and other magisterial teachings. The future of humanity passes by the way of the family. The family originates in a marital communion of persons as a "covenant", in which a man and a woman give himself or herself to each

³¹ Kochurani Joseph, Prospects of Empowering Women, FABC Conference on Women, Dhakka, 2010.

³² Kochurani Joseph, Prospects of Empowering Women, FABC Conference on Women, Dhakka, 2010.

³³ Cardinal Ratzinger, Letter to bishops on man woman collaboration in Church and society, the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, 2004.

³⁴ Cf. United Nations Charter, Preamble. 2

other in order to constitute an exclusive and lifelong marital partnership. Marriage by its very nature is an unbreakable covenant between persons; and it demands the mutual love of the spouses. Therefore, marriage persists as a whole manner and communion of life, and maintains its value and indissolubility.³⁵ For that we require experience of a domestic Pentecost and an approach of evangelical vocational discernment that demands proper orientation and pastoral care.

³⁵ *Gaudium et Spes*, 50, 3.