

# KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA

## Visionary and Karmayogi of Families

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*Abstract:* This is a short study of the vision of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara on the families. Family, being the smallest of the constitutive elements of the society, it was only natural for Chavara to begin there as he launched his programme for the renewal of the society. In this study, the emphasis is placed on the role of the parents in the shaping of the future of the child.

*Keywords:* Family, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, prayer, parenting, Chavara

### **1. Introduction**

A person of virtues and good deeds finds a place in the hearts of people, society, and the world itself. The fruits of goodness radiate and always find an enduring place in human history. The experience of goodness in a person adheres in a lasting way and such a person leaves an indelible mark. Convinced of the fatherhood of God, Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara sowed the seeds of brotherhood among his fellow beings. Anointed by the fire of divine love, he exemplified in himself deeds of altruism. His life was a unique blend of holiness and humanitarianism. Realizing that a healthy society could be established only by paying attention to the individual and family, he esteemed every human being and catered to the welfare of the families.

His own family played a significant formative role in making of Kuriakose. He was born on 10 February 1805, in the verdant village of Kainakary in Kuttanad, the erstwhile granary of Kerala. He was blessed with a truly Christian family ambiance of love and peace, sharing and caring, fasting and prayer, discipline and personal growth.

The seed of a virtuous life was sown in Kuriakose from infancy itself. The sight of his beloved mother on her knees, engaged in prayer even during the midnight, enabled him to direct his focus towards the

real goal of Christian life.<sup>1</sup> Towards the fag end of life he wrote in his *Compunction of the Soul*: The “very look of my mother was sufficient for me to distinguish between the right and the wrong.”<sup>2</sup> The strong bond between him and his mother led him to the path of love and service. Later, when his life was encircled by crises and challenges, it was the spiritual formation received at home that kept him in good stead. Empowered by the fire of faith, Chavara was able to surrender his life totally in the service of God and man. His life was rooted in the strong conviction of the fatherhood of God and fraternity among human beings. The quality and depth of human relationships experienced at home enabled him to maintain a charitable disposition towards everyone.

Kuriakose Elias Chavara was an enlightened man who could enlighten many with his divine experience. He attained this enlightenment primarily because of the disposition that was facilitated in his family, which, in turn, became the foundation of his own personal growth and Christian commitment. As a result, being a man of great wisdom and holiness, he perceived the unique role that a family could play in the basic formation of a child. In his prayer, he experienced the universal fatherhood of God and the fraternal relationship among all human beings. The time spent in prayer helped him discern many social evils and degrading practices of the times and respond to them adequately. This intuition helped him plan for future with farsightedness, which received its excellent expression in the “The Testament of a Loving Father.” This brief exhortation to the families, which Fr Chavara wrote in 1868, offers a set of directives on family life containing a great deal of modern psychological, moral, sociological, and spiritual insights.

As a genuine and conscientious pastor, after the model of Jesus Christ himself, Chavara realized that the renewal of both the Church and society depended a great deal upon the revitalization of family, which is the smallest unit of any society. In order to get close to the concern that Chavara had for families, we need to have an understanding of how the family functioned in the society of his time.

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<sup>1</sup>*Compunction of the Soul, Dirge, Anasthasia's Martydom, in Complete Works of Blessed Chavara, vol. II: trans., Mary Leo. Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Bl. Chavara, 1989, 53- 56.*

<sup>2</sup>*Compunction of the Soul, Canto I, in Complete Works of Blessed Chavara, vol. II: 83- 84.*

India is the cradle of various cultural practices, traditional values, and customs. In this ancient Indian tradition, a family is considered to be the replica of heaven on earth, which is reflected in the observation made by Pope John Paul II during his visit to India:

The healthy condition of family life is essential to the wellbeing of individual and of society. I am aware that family life in India has traditionally enjoyed the highest esteem and care. Family constitutes much more than a juridical, social and economic unit, a community of love and solidarity, which is uniquely suited to teach and transmit cultural, ethical, social, spiritual and religious values, essential for the development and well-being of its own members and of society. Family life in Kerala and in India has been and continually strives to be just such a community of love and solidarity, and I encourage you to defend and promote the institution of family.<sup>3</sup>

Ideally, each member in an Indian family is unique and revered. It is an abode of God, a centre of mutual respect and submissiveness, and a place where parents are respected and obeyed like God himself. Children are cherished and considered to be gifts from heaven. Each Indian family serves as a mother who teaches the children their first lessons of collectivism, enabling individuals to sacrifice individualism for familial and collective interests.

## 2. Family in Various Religious Traditions

In order to have a comprehensive view of the family at the time of Chavara, we need to consider how different Indian religious traditions considered family.

### 2.1. Hinduism

Among the Hindus, family is the ideal environment in which *dharma* is passed on from one generation to another. It is in the family that a child begins to learn about religious traditions, epic stories, ethics, norms, and values. This is done by means of examples set by the members of the family. *Manusmriti* - a normative text that shaped the life of Hindus for centuries - and many other Sanskrit treatises give a picture of *ashramas* as the stages of life. It prescribes the way one should live during various stages of one's lifetime. *Grihasthashrama* is the second of these *ashrama* stages. A person in this stage starts to have

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<sup>3</sup>John Paul II, *The Pope Speaks to India*, Bombay: St. Paul's Publications, 1986, 117-118.

a family and carries out specific duties towards the members of his family and the society. *Isavasya Upanishad*, which underlines the identity of the Supreme Soul and the individual self, introduces a different view of family as it teaches that "a family is a consciousness; it is not a bundle of people. It is an awareness of oneself belonging to a total whole which is called a family. It is a conceptual entity, not a physical body."<sup>4</sup> In short, it is because of the sacred nature of the family maintained from time immemorial that Hindu tradition is considered as a fertile ground for noble human values.

## **2.2. Judeo-Christian Tradition**

Christianity holds family in high esteem as taught by both the Old and New Testaments. Mention of family in the Old Testament can be traced to the story of creation in which God said, "Let us make man in our image after our likeness" (Gen 1:26-28). Genesis exemplifies the Yahwistic and priestly tradition of family life and endorses the fact that family as an institution is divinely ordained.

The Yahwistic tradition very dramatically narrates the origin of marriage and family: "Then the Lord God said: 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him; ... the rib which God had taken from the man he made into woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said: 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man'" (Gen 2:18-25). Declaring that it is not good for man to be alone, God created the new being out of man himself. Thus, the first family was born, where man and woman are ordained to be companions, and experience and share joy and peace, sharing and helping each other and contributing in mutual growth. Through these noble human beings, created in the very image and likeness of God, God wanted to continue the mystery of creation.

Mutual acceptance and submission are the quintessence of a family in the tradition of the Old Testament in which families were patriarchal. However, the patriarchs were very considerate, loving, and tolerant towards their children. Hereditary rights were passed on from father to son. Father led the family in divine worship; he, along with the mother, shared the duties of bringing up children, equipping

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<sup>4</sup>Swami Krishnananda, *Lessons on the Upanishads*, Rishikesh: Divine Life Society, 1991, 79-80.

them for a balanced way of life. Mothers also were accorded due respect in the household.<sup>5</sup>

The Jewish outlook on marriage and family as part of the salvific plan of God was continued and reinforced in the New Testament. Jesus makes two fundamental instructions about marriage (Mt 19:6). The first one is that marriage and family are rooted in the act of creation. With this teaching, he reaffirms the idea of the Old Testament. The second one is based on the new circumstances emerging with the arrival of Christ. In the Old Testament, marriage was symbolic of the relation between God and His people whereas in the New Testament, it is symbolic of the intimate union between Christ and the Church. Consequently, family is the replica of the union between Christ and the Church (Eph 5:22-28; Col 3:18-19).

As far as the New Testament understanding of family goes, the holy family of Nazareth remains the role-model of a Christian family. The fact that Jesus was born and brought up in a family has ennobled the very substance of family life. Very often Jesus exemplified the love of God by means of familial stories and parables (see, for example, Lk 15:11-32). The New Testament Church was predominantly a family-church. It is interesting to note that before the Church was institutionalized, it was in families that the early Christians gathered for prayer and the breaking of bread (Acts 2:46; 5:42; 12:12).

### **2.3. Islamic Tradition**

According to the Muslim beliefs, the beginning of human civilization on this planet started with a husband and wife, in an atmosphere of high moral standard, divinely guided knowledge and wisdom.<sup>6</sup> The Quran teaches that the ultimate goal of a believer's life is pleasure and forgiveness one obtains. Ideally, within the family each one's responsibilities are stipulated. The father is the shepherd over his family, protecting the members, providing for them and striving to be their role-model and guide in his capacity as head of the household. The mother is the shepherdess over the house, guarding it and engendering in it the wholesome, loving environment that is necessary for a happy and healthy family life. She is also the one who is primarily responsible for the children's guidance and education. As for the children, fruits of their parent's love, the Islamic way of life

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<sup>5</sup>*Bible Vijnanakosam: Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Malayalam), Kottayam: OIRSI and Biblia Publications, 1993, 219-222.

<sup>6</sup>Holy Quran, Surah An-Nisa: 1.

stipulates comprehensive morals enjoining parental responsibility and the child's reciprocal dutifulness to the parents.

Islam reminds members of a family to learn their role and responsibility within the family, ideally built upon love and mercy. In a spirit of love and sacrifice, members of a Muslim family help each other. Religion also gives much importance to mutual consultation and communication between the members of the family.<sup>7</sup>

### 3. Family a Replica of Heaven: Chavara and the Church Documents

Kuriakose Elias Chavara dreamt of the formation of ideal families in the society. Since family is the basic unit of a society, Fr Chavara was convinced that the constitution of a good family would lead to the development of a healthier society and value-based nation. He proposed the renewal of families as a means to ensure the welfare of the society and nation. He believed that the role of family is to give a good sculpt to the individuals within, ensuring the edification of the society. In "The Testament of a Loving Father," addressed to the people of Kainakary, his home village, Fr Chavara reflects on the rules and regulations of a family, the right upbringing of children, and a life based on moral values. The love and concern of a caring father is revealed in these guidelines as they contain the essential instructions for the wellbeing of families. Personal, social, educational, and psychological concerns of this great visionary are present in his Testament, which is divided into two parts. The first part contains rules for family life with 24 instructions and the second part has directives on the upbringing of children with 16 instructions.

Basically, Fr Chavara considers that a family is an earthly facsimile of heavenly kingdom.<sup>8</sup> According to him, "A family is the community of a few people joined together in blood relation and bound together by a bond of love, where the members exhibit mutual respect and practise obedience to parents and walk in peace before the Lord and his people."<sup>9</sup> He believed that family is the *sanctum sanctorum* of a society. This bedrock of society is the abode of self-emptying and other-empowering love. It is founded on a spirituality that enables us to go beyond one's own self, and reaching out to the other after the

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<sup>7</sup>Faizullah, "Ingredients of Happy Family," <http://www.fiqh.org/resources/an-ideal-muslim-family/> (access 09.11.2014)

<sup>8</sup>*The Letters*, in *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara*, vol. IV: IX/6, trans., Mary Leo. Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Bl. Chavara, 1990, 102.

<sup>9</sup>*Letters*, in *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara*, vol. IV: IX/6, 102.

example of Jesus, the good shepherd. Pope John Paul II had a real passion for the family:

Family is a communion of people and this communion is rooted in the natural bonds of flesh and blood. The family has the mission to guard, reveal and communicate love, and this is a living reflection of and a real sharing in God's love for humanity and the love of Christ the Lord for the Church His bride. Family communion can only be preserved and perfected through a great spirit of sacrifice. It requires a ready and generous openness of each and all to understanding, to forbearance, to pardon and to reconciliation.<sup>10</sup>

Pope Francis, his successor, extols family as the "the foundation of coexistence and a remedy against social fragmentation."<sup>11</sup> A healthy relationship in the family always leads to the birth of a new generation imbued with a positive and morally sound formation. Mutually satisfying family relationships can promote social cohesion and prevent social exclusion.

Fr Chavara considers that the intimacy and love among family members is an imperative that determines the potency of a family. He held a deep conviction that "in this world of tears, torn by pains and sufferings the greatest consolation is to live in a family where there is love, peace, charity, and order."<sup>12</sup> He always held that the stronghold and mainstay of a person is his family. Hence, he insisted that the relationships within the family must be open, intimate, meaningful, and lasting. They become durable when members of the family respect each other and are able to listen to and be submissive to each other in love.<sup>13</sup> This is because, as John Pauls II points out, "Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it."<sup>14</sup>

Family is fundamental to what Pope Paul VI called the "civilization of love," an expression which has entered the teaching of the Church.<sup>15</sup> Civilization denotes the advanced way of social development that evolves into a culture. Family serves as an institution which edifies

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<sup>10</sup>John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 21.

<sup>11</sup>Address to the Community of Varginha (Manguinhos), 25 July 2013.

<sup>12</sup>*Letters*, in *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara*, vol. IV: IX/6, 103.

<sup>13</sup>*Letters*, in *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara*, vol. IV: IX/6, 103-104.

<sup>14</sup>Pope John Paul II, *Redemptor Hormis*, 10.

<sup>15</sup>*Letter to Families from Pope John Paul II*, 13.

and widens the “culture of love” in the absence of which humanity plunges into a collective feeling of pain. In this regard, Mother Theresa notes: “the great pain of humanity is not cancer and such fatal diseases, but the feeling of rejection and loneliness. ‘No one loves me,’ ‘no one understands me.’ This cry echoes everywhere.”<sup>16</sup> Only living beings or their lively relationships of love can make a meaningful response to this cry.

Family is that interior source which provides a spirit of intimacy to relationships. It functions as a forum to give and take love. However, in many instances, everybody prefers to receive and forgets to give knowing not how much to give. It is not easy to practise the ‘Art of Love’ which enriches the relationships. In his writings, Chavara reveals the secret of this art. According to him, love enables one to forgive the shortcomings of others: “Be charitable to each other. Love one another and forgive mutually each one’s faults and shortcomings. The honour and good fortune of a family lies in avoiding all factions and living in perfect amity and peace with all.”<sup>17</sup>

The sound and healthy atmosphere of a family relationship enabled Fr Chavara to develop a very positive and constructive relationship with the society around him. He was ever loyal to his authority, showed great warmth to fellow seminarians, and accepted God’s people as his own. He cultivated a maternal regard for women religious as he was keen to empower and enlighten them in a unique manner. Moreover, in compassion, he wiped out the tears from eyes around him.

Fr Chavara related to people in a genuine manner and maintained the relationship in true Christian love. The *Testament* that he wrote during his ailment reveals the true spirit of selfless love that motivated him. He wrote to his confreres:

My dear brethren, let the vicars of each of our monasteries foster real charity among themselves and maintain a true bond. However, numerous the monasteries be, all must be like the members of one family, children born to, nursed and brought up by the same mother. Never let this love weaken, but let it grow stronger from day to day.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Naveen Chawla, *Mother Theresa*, K. Jayakumar and M. P. Sadasivan (trans.), Kottayam: DC books, 1997, 225.

<sup>17</sup>*Letters, in Complete Works of Blessed Chavara*, vol. IV, IX/6, 103-104.

<sup>18</sup>*Letters, in Complete Works of Blessed Chavara*, vol. IV, VI/4, 71.

He preached about genuineness of relationship and translated his preaching into practice and made his life a message. He wrote in the *Testament of a Loving Father*: "Even animals are capable of wreaking vengeance on those who cause pain and displeasure to them. To be unaffected by such ill doings and to forgive them completely is a mark of great strength and prudence."<sup>19</sup> The fact that towards the end of his life, Fr Chavara pleaded in favour of Mathen Kalapurackal, an adversary of the monastery, shows the presence of divine love in him that inspired and invited him to forgive. He assured his confreres that by doing this, they would become true disciples of Christ and set a model for Christian life.<sup>20</sup> However, it is sad to see that we live and move in a culture where everything and everybody is used for the selfish enjoyment of others. This is clearly reflected in families and it leads to brokenness in the society.

Parental relationship is the ultimate cornerstone of any family. The cohesion and loving understanding among family members lead to a beautiful and intimate relationship between parents and children and among the children themselves. The fast pace of life, which eats into the modern life, often turns relationships into burdens. The emergence of nuclear family is criticized as a major threat to family relationships. However, it is not the number of family members that matters but the quality of relationship among the members. The open communication and a give-and-take policy in the household go a long way in building up holistic personalities and integral families.

Strong family ties teach the members to exercise mutual love, respect, and understanding that nourish family life. Fr Chavara, in his *Testament*, reminds his parishioners of the need for parents to love and respect each other, in the absence of which children also will fail to love and respect them: "The mother must set an example to them in loving and respecting the father and the father should teach them to love and respect the mother. If parents do not love and respect each other, the children cannot be expected to love and respect."<sup>21</sup>

The parents of Fr Chavara, who lived in love and unity, bequeathed a sound value system to their children. This enabled him to interact with diverse types of people with openness and warmth. Hence, he emphasized the importance of parental love and unity as the cornerstone of family. Sound families constitute the cradle of sound

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<sup>19</sup>Letters, in *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara*, vol. IV, IX/6, 104.

<sup>20</sup>Letters, in *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara*, vol. IV, VI/4, 73.

<sup>21</sup>Letters, in *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara*, vol. IV, IX/6, 114.

societies where social wellbeing is taken care of by members who are conscientious and socially committed.

Family is the sprouting ground from which a child absorbs the meaning and depth of relationships. In the depth of his heart, Fr Chavara realized that family was the interior space where relationships are rooted, grow, and mature. It is the melting pot of relationships which are characterized by understanding, appreciation, recognition, encouragement, healing, and building up. This kind of a healthy relationship opens up new dimensions in one's life. It enables a person to share her innate goodness with others and reciprocate the same in sharing with each other.

Fellowship in a family is a crucial factor that empowers a person. It imparts confidence and strengthens the bonding, which enables a person to effectively tackle the ups and downs of life. The strength of this fellowship deepens when all members of a family wholeheartedly involve in its routines.<sup>22</sup> Chavara, in his *Testament*, gives clear cut guidance about routines in which he considers family prayer and meal times as of great importance. Family routines do not denote a set of hard and fast rules and regulations, but a humane and mature prop that enables the members to proceed towards a common goal in peace and harmony.

In the *Testament*, Fr Chavara solemnly points out that family prayer is the soul of the family and he repeats that each member has to be at home in the evening for family prayers.<sup>23</sup> Pope John Paul II gives the following reason for regular family prayer, which is justified by Christian theology and studies in psychology:

Family prayers are the moments for sharing joys and sorrows, hopes and disappointments, births and birthday celebrations, wedding anniversaries of the parents, departures, separations and homecomings, important and far-reaching decisions, the death of those who are dear, etc., – all of these mark God's loving intervention in the family's history. They should be seen as suitable moments for thanksgiving, for petition, for trusting abandonment of the family into the hands of their common Father in heaven.<sup>24</sup>

Along this line, Vatican Council II teaches that God himself has given the family the mission to be "primary and vital cell" of the society. However, this mission is accomplished only if the family, by the

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<sup>22</sup>Letters, in *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara*, vol. IV, IX/6, 111.

<sup>23</sup>Letters, in *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara*, vol. IV, IX/6, 114.

<sup>24</sup>John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, Encyclical Letter, 59.

mutual affection among its members, and by family prayer, presents itself as a domestic sanctuary of the church.<sup>25</sup>

A cordial communication is to be practised when family members come together in fellowship, in prayer, and in dining. This fellowship leads to mutual sharing, understanding and acceptance. Recognition and appreciation are a must in the growth of relationships. The absence of the above leads to identity crisis and lack of self-confidence, which is a major problem faced by the modern times. Lack of acceptance makes relationships a matter of bondage and burden. On the occasions of family get-together, prayer, meals, recreation, etc., the anxieties and aspirations of individual members are shared, discussed, and resolved. This will save a family from many complications, burdens, and tragedies.

#### **4. Parenting in the Family**

Parents are the bedrock of families. Each generation that forms the foundation of a nation is formed in families under the watchful and loving guidance of the parents. It is they who shape the wellbeing and survival of families. Fr Chavara reminds the parents that children are treasures entrusted to them by God.<sup>26</sup> It is their right and duty to groom them well. Reiterating the gravity of the role of parents, Fr Chavara gratefully records how he was moulded by the painstaking efforts of his parents; he gratefully remembers the disciplining of his mother that contributed in the making of his person. Even at the age of 65, during times of ailments, he treasured love and gratitude towards his parents: "My parents always kept me mindful of the Holy Family, which was ever my protection... Mercifully, it so protected me that I did not ever lose the baptismal grace."<sup>27</sup>

As stated above, Fr Chavara repeatedly introduces children as the "sacred treasure of God" entrusted to the parents.<sup>28</sup> However, often, children are not treated as a gift of God entrusted to the stewardship of parents.

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<sup>25</sup>*Apostolicam Actuositatem* "Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People" 11, in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents*, ed. A. Flannery, Bombay: St. Paul Publications, 1975, 676-702, p. 686.

<sup>26</sup>*Compunction of the Soul*, Canto I, in *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara*, vol. II, 123-124.

<sup>27</sup>Valerian, C. D., *Malankara Sabhamathavinte Oru Veera Santhanam*, Mannanam: St. Joseph's Press, 1938, 315.

<sup>28</sup>*Letters*, in *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara*, vol. IV, IX/6, 112.

There was a dark period in the history of Kerala, when human beings were treated worse than animals and chattels due to feudalistic dictatorship, caste rules, slavery, and persecutions. People were valued on the basis of caste, colour, and wealth. But in the midst of this tragic social milieu, Fr Chavara was convinced of the dignity of human beings based on birth and wealth. He strongly believed in the worth of each person who has the right to be handled with care and moulded into worthy human beings. He conveyed this serious message to parents through his *Testament*. At a time when some human beings were not considered human, a time when people were denied the freedom to be themselves, Fr Chavara dreamt of the freedom to be the birth-right of every child.

Parents are advised to refrain from over strictness as well as over indulgence as they are detrimental to the growth of children. Harsh treatment makes them fearful, indifferent, shameful, and dull or aggressive. Disciplining is done with care and compassion, giving proper awareness to children. Fr Chavara exhorts parents to give sufficient freedom to children in the choice of their vocation. It is God's plan, but the choice should be made by the children. Similarly, the opinion of the children should be respected before decisions are made regarding their life, including their marriage.<sup>29</sup> Modern studies testify to the relevance of these guidelines offered by Fr Chavara although many in our contemporary society are yet to imbibe their true spirit.

Pope Francis points out the importance of family as he wonders: "How precious is the family as the privileged place for transmitting faith."<sup>30</sup> Parents are the primary tutors to their children. In the writings of Fr Chavara, the theme of the upbringing of children holds an important place. He insists on the religious formation of the children at home. He reminds parents that, along with material food, spiritual nourishment to their children is unavoidable.<sup>31</sup> Pope John Paul II justifies it when he observed that the concrete example and living witness of parents are fundamental and irreplaceable elements in educating their children.<sup>32</sup> Parenting is the noblest and the preeminent

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<sup>29</sup>*Letters, in Complete Works of Blessed Chavara*, vol. IV, IX/6, 114-115.

<sup>30</sup>Address to the Community of Varginha (Manguinhos), 26 July 2013.

<sup>31</sup>*Letters, in Complete Works of Blessed Chavara*, vol. IV, IX/6, 113.

<sup>32</sup>*Gravissimum Educationis*, "Declaration on Christian Education," 3, in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents*, ed. A. Flannery, Bombay: St. Paul Publications, 1975, 645-682.

act of life, because, parents mould a shapeless, formless being into someone extraordinary, mystical, and beautiful. His dictum that good families bring forth good children points to the fact that first and foremost good families have to be reared. It is possible only when parents take genuine care to maintain good families.

During his visit to Kerala, Pope John Paul II appreciated the people for the Christian tradition they follow: "I was pleased to learn that among the Saint Thomas Christians there existed a tradition of whispering the name of Jesus in the ears of new born baby, together with its own name."<sup>33</sup> Just as Fr Chavara strictly advised parents to teach their children to cultivate devotion to the holy names, Pope Paul VI made an earnest appeal:

Mothers, do you teach your children the Christian prayers? Do you prepare them, in conjunction with the priests, for the sacraments that they receive when they are young: Confession, Communion and Confirmation? Do you encourage them when they are sick to think of Christ suffering to invoke the aid of the Blessed Virgin and the saints? Do you say the family rosary together? And you, fathers, do you pray with your children, with the whole domestic community, at least sometimes? Your example of honesty in thought and action, joined to some common prayer, is a lesson for life, an act of worship of singular value. In this way, you bring peace to your homes. Remember, it is thus that you build up the Church.<sup>34</sup>

The erosion and disappearance of model parenting have caused human consciousness to grow cold and have led to the tragic degradation of society. The social media present certain distorted role models and the youth imbibe them and tend to develop an affinity towards such peer ideologies. Children develop a sort of mercenary attitude towards parents and use them merely as a means to get their things done. Parents, on the other hand, are so busy with providing things for the children that they show no love and readiness to listen to them and be with them. This leads to a youth formation guided by their own thought processes, without any experienced guidance or direction. The erosion of values in the family leads to its sad demise and, in turn, leads to anarchy and callousness.

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<sup>33</sup>John Paul II, *The Pope Speaks to India*, Bombay: St Paul's Publications, 1986, 118.

<sup>34</sup>In Segnamenti di Paolo VI, XIV (1979), 640.

## 5. Conclusion

Fr Chavara held families in high regard and believed that a family attains heaven like peace and happiness only when it follows the principle that children should be brought up on a sound moral foundation.<sup>35</sup> Such morally sound families turn out to be the enlightening force in a society. He held that family was the most effective means for humanizing the society. Vatican II calls family the “principal school of social virtues,” which is necessary to every society.<sup>36</sup> It is the cradle of a value system that keeps the society going. The qualities imbibed from the parents lead one to strong commitment towards others, the society, and the Church. This altruism goads one to various action plans for the uplift of the weak and the marginalized.

In the twenty-first century, we move towards a gloomy state of affairs as human beings are increasingly getting alienated in their homes. While media asserts the supremacy of human beings, fellowship in the families and in the larger society is on the decline. When the media takes up the centre of attention in a homestead, obviously communication within gets side-lined. Freedom of the family with acceptance, understanding and sharing gets eroded with the dearth of communication. Persons tend to withdraw into their own shells. Many of us withdraw into ourselves and such a world makes life more complicated especially as families degrade themselves into the sprouting grounds of a culture of withdrawal.

Fr Chavara was a person filled with concern for families and was a beacon light of solace and comfort to the church or the society. Only when families, which are the sources of sound social life, become the abode of love and goodness, can we hope to foresee the blooming of heaven on earth, which is the dream of Chavara.

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<sup>35</sup>*Letters, in Complete Works of Blessed Chavara*, vol. IV, IX/6, 114.

<sup>36</sup>*Gravissimum Educationis* 3, p. 645.