

VOCATION AND MISSION OF THE FAMILY
Reflections on *Chavarul* and *Amoris Laetitia*

**VOCATION AND MISSION OF THE
FAMILY**
Reflections on *Chavarul* and *Amoris Laetitia*

Edited by
Shaji George Kochuthara

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Edited by

Shaji George Kochuthara

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	11
<i>Paul Achandy, CMI</i>	

Introduction	15
<i>Shaji George Kochuthara, CMI</i>	

Opening Addresses

Inaugural Address: <i>Chavarul</i> —Testament of a Loving Father	23
<i>Baselios Cardinal Cleemis</i>	

Love Plus Respect Give Joy	29
<i>Sibi, CMC</i>	

Keynote Address 1: Virtue Ethics, <i>Chavarul</i> and <i>Amoris Laetitia</i>	34
<i>James F. Keenan, SJ</i>	

Chavarul: Historical and Theological Context, Vision of the Family and Unique Contributions

Family in the Nineteenth Century Travancore-Kochi: Socio-Religious Context	51
<i>Francis Thonippara, CMI and Joseph Chacko Chennattuserry, CMI</i>	

St Chavara's <i>Chavarul</i> : Historico-Theological Contexts	67
<i>Paul Pulikkan</i>	

St Kuriakose Elias Chavara's Vision of the Family in *Chavarul* 82
Josin Kaithakulam, CMI and Thomas Parayil, CMI

Chavarul from a Virtue Perspective 95
Vimala Chenginimattam, CMC

Moral Formation of Children in *Chavarul* 105
Shiji Varghese

God's Own Family in God's Own Country:
A Brief Exposition of the *Testament of a Loving Father* 117
Thomas Panthaplackal, CMI

Family Prayer and the Lord's Day
in the Making of the Domestic Church:
Reading *Chavarul* in the Light of Papal Teachings 124
Sophy Rose, CMC

Concept of the Domestic Church
in the *Chavarul* of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara 139
Ann Mary Madavanakkad, CMC

Catholic Theological Tradition of the Family; Vision of the Family in *Amoris Laetitia*

Keynote Address 2:
Development of Catholic Theology of Marriage
and Family Ethics in the 20th and 21st Century 157
Peter Hünermann

Continuity and Discontinuity in Catholic Theology of Marriage
and Sexuality from 19th Century 172
Vimal Tirimanna, CSsR

<i>Amoris Laetitia: The Context and Main Features</i> <i>G.A. Arul Raj, CSC</i>	193
The Gospel of Joyful Families: Vision and Vocation of Family in <i>Amoris Laetitia</i> <i>Mathew Illathuparampil</i>	208
Married Love as a Lived Experience in <i>Amoris Laetitia</i> <i>Joseph Loic Mben, SJ</i>	219
<i>Amoris Laetitia</i> and the State of the World's Families <i>Julie Clague</i>	232
Worldwide Reception of <i>Amoris Laetitia</i> <i>Stanislaus Alla, SJ</i>	261
Reception of <i>Amoris Laetitia</i> in India <i>Bishop Lawrence Pius Dorairaj</i>	270
Pastoral Accompaniment: <i>Amoris Laetitia</i> as a Paradigm? <i>Antonio Autiero</i>	281

Family Today: Reflections in Light of *Chavarul* and *Amoris Laetitia*

Keynote Address 3: Family: Challenges Ahead <i>Jose Kuriedath, CMI</i>	295
Life in a Multi-Optional Society as a Pastoral Challenge: Family Ideal and Family Realities in Germany <i>Klaus Vellguth</i>	309

<i>Amoris Laetitia</i> and Marriage and Family in the East Asian Countries	330
<i>Michael Jeong Hun Shin</i>	
Crisis in Values of Family and Marriage in India: Inter-cultural and Interreligious Families at a Crossroad	347
<i>Kiran Prasad</i>	
God in the Temple of Relationships: Interpreting Family Spirituality in the Light of <i>Amoris Laetitia</i> and <i>Chavarul</i>	363
<i>Augustine Kallely</i>	
Challenges in Parenting and the Moral Formation of Children: A Comparative Study of <i>Chavarul</i> and <i>Amoris Laetitia</i>	374
<i>Scaria Kanniyakonil</i>	
Pastoral Care of Homosexual and Lesbian Persons	388
<i>Johnson Pradeep Ruben & Christopher Vimalraj Hiruthya</i>	
The Challenge of Pre-marital Sex and Cohabitation	402
<i>Thomas Knieps-Port le Roi</i>	
Challenges to the Family Today: Interreligious Marriage	410
<i>Astrid Lobo Gajiwala</i>	
Impact of Media and Social Networking Sites on Families: Reflections on <i>Chavarul</i> and <i>Amoris Laetitia</i>	422
<i>Boby George</i>	
Formation of Conscience and Discernment	434
<i>Emmanuel Agius</i>	
Church as Family of Domestic Churches: A New Model of the Church in the Synodal Way	453
<i>Davis Varayilan, CMI</i>	

Family: Priestly and Religious Formation for Ministry <i>Katarina Schuth, OSF</i>	469
--	-----

Marriage Preparation Programme in Light of <i>Chavarul</i> and <i>Amoris Laetitia</i> <i>E. William, MI</i>	485
---	-----

Listening to Families

Witnessing Christ in the Family <i>Mathew Joseph & Jincy Mathew Kaniampady</i>	505
---	-----

Trust, Thanks and Surrender <i>N. Joseph Ashok Kumar and Srividhya</i>	512
---	-----

Challenges to the Family: Responses from Bishops

Challenges to the Family and Response of the Church <i>Archbishop Peter Machado</i>	519
--	-----

Challenges of the Family and Response of the Church <i>Archbishop Antony Kariyil, CMI</i>	522
--	-----

‘In the Beginning was the Human Relation’: Challenges to the Family and the Response of the Church <i>Bishop Jose Puthenveettil</i>	527
---	-----

<i>Homily: Chavarul—150 Years</i> <i>Archbishop Antony Kariyil, CMI</i>	535
--	-----

Epilogue

Reincarnating the <i>Chavarul</i> : A Self-Examination on the Reception and Transmission of the 'Imperishable' Message of the <i>Chavarul</i> <i>Saju Chackalackal, CMI</i>	541
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Appendix

<i>Chavarul</i>	553
A Brief Life History of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara	565
Index	569

FOREWORD

Paul Achandy, CMI♦

Chavarul of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara and *Amoris Laetitia* of His Holiness Pope Francis throw light of discernment and direction for a happy and meaningful family life with a pastoral perspective. Both St Kuriakose Elias and Pope Francis show a profound awareness of the human predicaments and social crises in the institution of marriage and family in their own respective times. With a genuine compassion and a fatherly concern of a pastor, they address the bare realities of family life with an open research mindset of a social scientist and provide insights and inspiration to face them. Though there is a gap of about 150 years between the two documents, the intention of the authors remains the same: to strengthen and empower the vocation of family life and prepare the pastors to accompany the families, with a true reading of the signs and challenges of the time. The very starting sentence of the authors expresses their positive attitude and approach to the vocation of marriage and family. *Chavarul's* proposition of “a good Christian family as the image of heaven” and *Amoris Laetitia's* view of “the Joy of Love experienced by families as the joy of the Church” (AL 1), reveal a renewed appreciation for the gift of marriage and family life. According to St Chavara, “The only sweet consolation for a person experiencing trials and tribulations in the sorrowful valley of this world is to belong to and live in a family where love, order, and peace reign” (*Chavarul*, Introduction).

While appreciating the role and contribution of the family, both St Chavara and Pope Francis, prophetic and pastoral visionaries of the time, are well aware of the challenges and possible evils within the

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context of marriage and family life. *Chavarul* and *Amoris Laetitia* have brought to light the dark and painful realities of family life. That is why St Chavara with a lot of pain writes,

It is most distressing for members to live in a family where order and peace do not prevail and where no one is concerned about the service of God and their own eternal salvation. How sad and unfortunate are the families that have no concern about orderliness in their homes? How many of such rich, famous, and respected families have been ruined? How often have the behaviour and attitude of these families led to quarrels, commission of sins, destruction, and death?" (*Chavarul*, Introduction).

St Chavara has identified the following ills in the families of his times: lack of love, civil litigations among family members, extravagance and borrowing money for celebration and showing off status and wealth, materialistic attitude, choosing partners based on wealth and riches, abuse of children by close relatives and injustice to the poor and the working class. He proposed prescriptions for responsible family life based on gospel values, explains the very purpose and mission of family: "The *raison d'être* of 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" (*Chavarul*, Introduction).

Pope Francis also has spelt out the contemporary challenges in the family life as extreme individualism, secularization, narcissistic attitudes, intolerance and hostility, lack of personal discipline, economic uncertainties, violence in families, exploitation of children, migration, and decrease in marriage and increase in cohabitation. Pope Francis advocates a healthy self-criticism and points out that the overemphasis and exclusive insistence on the duty of procreation overshadows the unitive meaning of marital life, its call to grow in love and its ideal of mutual assistance. He reminds the pastors and the faithful, "Marital problems are 'often confronted in haste and without the courage to have patience and reflect, to make sacrifices and to forgive one another. Failures give rise to new relationships, new couples, new civil unions, and new marriages, creating family situations which are complex and problematic for the Christian life'" (AL 41). He also admits that abstract and artificial theological ideal of marriage without understanding the

concrete situations and practical possibilities of real families have made the marriage less desirable and attractive to the youth. Pope takes a proactive approach to strengthen marriages, to help married couples overcome their problems, to assist them in the mission of raising children and, in general, to encourage the stability of the marriage bond (AL 52). According to Pope Francis, “families are not a problem; they are first and foremost an opportunity” (AL 7).

Pope Francis and St Chavara have emphasized the value of human life and the rearing of children. The family is the sanctuary of life, the place where life is conceived and cared for, and it is a contradiction when it becomes a place where life is rejected and destroyed. The family protects human life in all its stages, including its last. “The Church not only feels the urgency to assert the right to a natural death, without aggressive treatment and euthanasia,” but likewise “firmly rejects the death penalty” (AL 83). St Chavara reminds the parents,

You ought to know that bringing up your children is the most important thing and your primary duty in life. Children are sacred treasures entrusted to you by God Almighty... If any of the children were to be lost in hell due to the fault of their parents, what a serious hindrance will it be for their salvation! (*Chavarul*, Part II, 1).

Both *Chavarul* and *Amoris Laetitia* have emphasized the importance of education of the children (AL 17, 271; *Chavarul*, Part II, 2, 6, 11).

In order to enhance the quality of family life, both *Chavarul* and *Amoris Laetitia* propose a healthy diet of love for strengthening family life. It is worth mentioning that almost a century before the Second Vatican Council, St Kuriakose Chavara identified love as the foundation and centre of the family. According to Pope Francis, the grace of the sacrament of marriage is intended before all else “to perfect the couple’s love” (AL 89). “Marriage is the icon of God’s love for us.” As God is also communion of the three Persons in perfect unity, in the mystery of marriage, “God makes of the two spouses one single existence” (AL 121). In marriage, the joy of love needs to be cultivated (AL 126). As a social institution, marriage protects and shapes a shared commitment to deeper growth in love and commitment to one another, for the good of society as a whole (AL 131).

Pope Francis in *Amoris Laetitia* takes a key initiative to move a step ahead in connecting with couples in irregular relationships with a pastoral discernment. Pope Francis has opened a healthy discussion in

giving communion to the divorced and remarried and is trying to bring them to full communion into the church. According to Pope Francis, “the Eucharist is not a prize for the perfect but a medicine for the sick” (AL, footnote 351). A proper pastoral accompaniment and discernment can bring about a change in the attitude to the members of the Church in irregular situations.

I do congratulate Rev. Fr Saju Chackalackal, Rev. Fr Shaji Kochuthara and Rev. Fr Benny Nalkara, and all who worked for organizing the International Conference, and for the publication of the book *Vocation and Mission of the Family: Reflection on Chavarul and Amoris Laetitia*. The publication has made an attempt to take views from different stakeholders, namely, the pastoral leaders: the Cardinals, bishops, priests, religious and laity—families; theologians, sociologists and psychologists, formators and others who are seriously engaged in the mission of marriage and family. The publication has brought out critical analysis by scholars from various countries and continents on two major revolutionary pastoral documents on family—*Chavarul* and *Amoris Laetitia*—and has given light on contemporary challenges the families face and the insights for an effective pastoral accompaniment in light of the two documents. Pope Francis has been bold enough to open the Pandora’s Box on issues in married life and especially the pastoral issue of communion for the divorced and remarried and others in irregular relationships. Like Jesus, Pope Francis advocates pastoral discernment as a great responsibility of the pastors of today as Jesus addressed people in concrete situations. It is indeed a great challenge and an opportunity for the Church to make the sacrament of marriage appealing and attractive to the youth and accompany the couples throughout their life as a compassionate guide and mentor. May the work, *Vocation and Mission of the Family: Reflection on Chavarul and Amoris Laetitia*, be a guiding light for families, and for pastors in accompanying them in building up responsible and mature families of love and joy!

INTRODUCTION

Shaji George Kochuthara♦

Family, the basic unit of the society and the Church, has been at the centre of the Church's theological reflection and pastoral care. The Church upholds that marriage is a sacred mystery, God's design for humanity, as depicted in the bible. At the same time, the Church acknowledges that marriage is also a human and secular reality. This also signifies that in spite of its sacred nature, marriage and family are subject to limitations, imperfections and failures which are part of any human reality.

The Church's care and concern for families can be seen from early centuries in the writings of the Fathers and other theologians, and in the teaching of the Councils, Popes and bishops. Especially since the last decade of the 19th century, there have been a number of official documents of the Church on the family. Two recent Synods on the Family (2014 & 2015) and the subsequent Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (AL) are the latest contributions in this regard. The Church's response cannot be limited to the magisterial documents alone—there have been a number of pastoral and theological writings on marriage and family.

Chavarul (*Testament of a Loving Father*), a letter written by St Kuriakose Elias Chavara to his parishioners on 13 February 1868, continues to inspire the Church's vision of the family. It can be called a unique document in many ways: it presents the Christian theological vision of

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the family and indicates various challenges and problems families face; offers guidelines to live rooted in love; inspires families to be nourished by prayer and spiritual practices. Chavara's theological vision of the family is clear: "A good Christian Family is the image of heaven..." (*Chavarul*, Introduction). Love is the foundation of this 'image of heaven.' We can appreciate the uniqueness of this vision more when we realise that love becomes central to the theology of marriage and family much later in Catholic theology. At the same time, *Chavarul* is basically pastoral in nature, offering guidelines to the married for leading a life founded on Christian virtues, instructing parents on the upbringing of children, and giving practical advice for a healthy socio-economic life of families. The ideal vision of the family is presented, but it is contextual and practical taking into account the actual problems and difficulties that families face. Although *Chavarul* was not intended to be a complete theological treatise on the family, it visualises the family in its entirety—family as a communion of husband and wife, of parents and children, and family in the web of ecclesial, social, cultural and economic relationships.

On the occasion of the 150th year of the publication of *Chavarul*, Chavara Central Secretariat, Kochi, along with the Centre for the Study and Research on Chavara at Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore organised an international conference to reflect on the challenges of families and response of the Church, reflecting together on *Chavarul* and *Amoris Laetitia*. The main purposes envisaged were the following:

1. To appreciate the continuing relevance of *Chavarul* for the renewal of families and to strengthen the awareness of their vocation and mission.
2. To highlight connecting links between *Chavarul* and AL, though their historical, socio-cultural contexts of are different: theological vision of a Christian family; a clear understanding of its vocation and mission; practical awareness of the various problems and challenges that families face; a holistic approach to the family, namely, considering family in its interpersonal, ecclesial, social and economic dimensions.
3. To reflect upon how AL is relevant for different contexts, by relating it to a unique document on the family in the Catholic spiritual tradition of Kerala/India.

The conference had three foci: 1. Historical, socio-cultural and religious context of *Chavarul*, and its unique vision and contributions; 2. AL, its context, vision, contributions; 3. Family today—its challenges, Church's responses, evolving theology of family, special situations, etc.—in the light of *Chavarul* and AL.

Basically, the same structure is retained in this book. "Opening Addresses" give a detailed introduction to the whole book. In his inaugural address, Basileos Cardinal Cleemis, after briefly narrating the various contributions of St Chavara, points out the significance of *Chavarul*, which "exhibits his [Chavara's] profound theological vision of the family." Its uniqueness is clear from the fact that "[a]lmost a century before the Second Vatican Council, St Kuriakose Chavara envisioned love as the foundation and centre of the family." He affirms that both *Chavarul* and AL are excellent examples of pastoral sensitivity needed for the ministry for families. Sister Sibi opines that love and respect give joy in the family. The first keynote address by James F. Keenan sets the tone for the entire discussion in this book. Using virtue ethics as a device for interpreting *Chavarul*, Keenan shows that reading *Chavarul* through the key of virtue ethics helps us to read it well for the 21st century. He beautifully connects *Chavarul* and AL, pointing out that *Chavarul* shows how to accompany people, "particularly families who need to form their consciences" and to discern practical matters. According to him, respect for conscience, formation of conscience, discernment, and pastoral accompaniment, which are key to the understanding of AL are also evident in *Chavarul*, and hence reflecting on both these documents together is a mutually enriching exercise that enlightens the pastoral practice today.

The next part of the book presents the historical, socio-cultural, religious and theological context of *Chavarul*, as well as its vision of the family and unique contributions. Francis Thonippara and Joseph Chacko Chennattuserry give an overview of the socio-political, cultural and religious context of the 19th century Travancore-Kochi so as to help us appreciate the background of *Chavarul*. Paul Pulikkan situates *Chavarul* in the broader historical, Catholic theological tradition of the Modern Period. He observes that in writing *Chavarul*, Chavara might have been helped by the Catholic family tradition in Europe. Josin Kaithakulam and Thomas Parayil emphasise that Chavara's vision of the family as centred on love, considered in his historical context, is unique. Vimala Chenginimattam analyses *Chavarul* from the perspective of virtue ethics, and Shiji Varghese, a mother and a school teacher, deals with the moral formation of children envisaged by *Chavarul*, which provides "a great deal of psychological, moral, sociological and spiritual insights." Thomas Panthaplackal offers a brief exposition of *Chavarul*, with the help of a few facts and figures. Reading *Chavarul* in the light of papal teachings, Sophy Rose explains how family prayer and the Lord's

Day help build up the domestic Church. Ann Mary Madavanakkad develops further the concept of the domestic Church in *Chavarul*.

The next part analyses the Catholic theological tradition of the family, especially from the last quarter of the 19th century, and the vision of the family in AL. In his keynote address, Peter Hünemann delineates the profound changes that took place in Catholic theology of the family particularly from the last decade of the nineteenth century up to the beginning of Vatican II, and subsequently in the main post-conciliar documents on family preceding AL. He also indicates how the faithful received the teaching by the magisterium. Vimal Tirimanna continues the discussion evaluating continuity and discontinuity in Catholic theology of marriage especially from 19th century. He underscores that development of doctrine, or its understanding is part of the Catholic tradition.

G.A. Arul Raj invites our attention to the immediate context of AL, especially the two Synods on Family. Besides highlighting the Indian responses to the questionnaire sent out in preparation for the Synods, he points out that the spirit with which issues were discussed in the Synods and the language of AL are very 'promising.' Mathew Illathuparampil shows that AL's vision of the mission and vocation of family is theological, but it is aware of imperfections due to human limitations. According to him, the heart of AL's pastoral approach is the Ignatian principle of discernment. Joseph Loic Mben deals with AL's concept of married love and offers some practical applications of that concept in the African context. Julie Clague discusses some of the global development challenges in the light of AL, as economic well-being and overall human development are closely connected to the overall well-being of families, as can be seen also in *Chavarul*. Stanislaus Alla gives an overview of the worldwide reception of AL, while Bishop Lawrence Pius Dorairaj focuses on the reception of AL in India. Antonio Autiero shows how AL presents a new paradigm of pastoral accompaniment, which is one of the major themes of AL—as already pointed out by James F. as characteristic of both AL and *Chavarul*. Autiero points out that accompaniment opens up moral theology to a salvation-historical dimension, and thus leads to a renewal of moral theology itself as envisaged by Vatican II.

In the keynote address introducing subsequent topics, Jose Kuriedath delineates some of the major challenges that families face today and points out that solutions to problems should emerge from our collective deliberations. The following three articles present the challenges families face in three different contexts. Klaus Vellguth discusses the challenges of

families in a multi-optional society, especially focusing on the German context. In particular, he presents the gap between the family ideal and family realities, emphasising that the “context you live in becomes the *locus theologicus*.” Michael Jeong Hun Shin analyses how religious pluralism, interreligious marriages and other drastic social changes are influencing marriage and family in Korea, and Kiran Prasad examines the challenges of families in the interreligious and inter-cultural context of India.

The following articles deal with some of the key concepts and issues regarding family and marriage in the light of *Chavarul* and AL, and some of the challenges of families today. Observing that for a long time the interior space of the family was occupied by celibate spirituality, Augustine Kallely explicates the unique spirituality of the family and underscores that the core of family spirituality is the loving relationship between its members. Scaria Kaniyakonil makes a comparative study of parenting and moral formation of children in *Chavarul* and AL. Johnson Pradeep Ruben and Christopher Vimalraj Hiruthya venture into one of the debated issues, namely, pastoral care of homosexual and lesbian persons. Analysing the issue from various perspectives, they point out that we need to understand homosexuality as a phenomenon rather than as a pathology.

Thomas Knieps-Port le Roi elaborates upon various theological perspectives on premarital sex and cohabitation, and how AL indicates new ways of responding to them. Astrid Lobo Gajiwala invites us to a critical appraisal of the challenges to family due to interreligious marriage. Reiterating what AL says, she underscores that interreligious marriage is a privileged place of interreligious dialogue in everyday life. Today we are in the age of internet and social networking sites, which were not there at the time of *Chavarul*. However, *Chavarul's* advice regarding books have implications for the use of media today, points out Boby George, and calls our attention to the need of a new media literacy and media discipline for grooming virtuous families.

Emmanuel Agius deals with the formation of conscience and discernment which are central to AL. He also shows how *Chavarul* contains theological and pastoral insights into the formation of conscience and discernment, and emphasises that in pastoral discernment, the key should be charity and mercy towards all. Davis Varayilan discusses how family, the domestic Church, can be a model for the Church—which is the family of domestic Churches—in the synodal way. Making use of the resources of *Chavarul* and AL, Katarina Schuth examines how seminarians are currently being prepared for ministry to families and how they ought

to be prepared. Both the documents invite seminarians to form an adult faith of their own and accept the role of conscience in the Christian life. E. William explores how marriage preparation programme can be made more effective in the light of *Chavarul* and AL.

For understanding the pastoral challenges of families, one of the main sources is the lived experience of couples. We have two couples—Mathew Joseph and Jincy Mathew Kaniampady, and N. Joseph Ashok Kumar and Srividhya—who share how they live their faith in the midst of joys, griefs and challenges. Similarly, three bishops—Archbishop Peter Machado, Archbishop Antony Kariyil and Bishop Joseph Puthenveetil—in the light of their pastoral experience share with us the challenges of families and the response of the Church. In his homily, Archbishop Antony Kariyil presents the models of family in the light of *Chavarul*. Finally, in the epilogue, Saju Chackalackal makes a critical appraisal of the reception of *Chavarul*.

I would like to thank Paul Achandy, CMI (*former Prior General of the CMI congregation and the present Rector of Dharmaram College*), and Saju Chackalackal, CMI (*former Director of Chavara Central Secretariat*) for taking the initiative for the conference. George Edayadiyil, CMI (*former Rector of Dharmaram College*), Kurian Kachappilly, CMI (*President of DVK*), and the members of Dharmaram community who extended their support for conducting the conference. Fr Benny Nalkara, CMI, the director of the Centre for the Study and Research on Chavara, was the associate convenor of the conference. James F. Keenan helped us as a member of the scientific committee. I thank Thomas Chathamparampil, CMI, the Prior General, and Josey Thamarassery, CMI, the Vicar General and director of Chavara Central Secretariat, for extending their support for the publication of this book. Sincere gratitude to Dharmaram Publications for undertaking its publication.

It is providential that as we have been preparing for the publication of this book, on 27 December 2020, on the Feast Day of the Holy Family, Pope Francis has announced a yearlong reflection on *Amoris Laetitia*.¹ Let the reading of these articles reconfirm that “A good Christian Family is the image of heaven...” (*Chavarul*, Introduction), and that “The triune God is a communion of love, and the family is its living reflection” (AL, 11).

¹“Pope Francis Announces a Yearlong Reflection on ‘Amoris Laetitia’ and Family,” <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2020/12/28/pope-francis-amoris-laetitia-year-239602>

OPENING ADDRESSES

Inaugural Address

CHAVARUL—TESTAMENT OF A LOVING FATHER

Baselios Cardinal Cleemis♦

It is a humbling experience as well as an honour for me to do this Inaugural Address of this conference to commemorate the 150th Year of the publication of the *Chavarul (Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul: Testament of a Loving Father)*, organised by the Chavara Central Secretariat, Kochi in collaboration with the Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore. My joy is beyond words because of the relevance of the theme you have chosen, which is at the centre of discussion for our Church in recent times—the family. This theme is close to the heart of our Holy Father Pope Francis and it was also close to the heart of your founder, St Kuriakose Elias Chavara.

St Kuriakose Chavara is one of the greatest luminaries of the Indian Church who does not need an introduction to this audience. There are a few people who contributed to the cultural and educational development and social reform of Kerala as this multi-faceted

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personality. As the one who has been raised to the veneration of the altar of the Universal Church, he is known to the whole world as a man of God who exemplified sanctity through his life. His contributions to the Universal Church in general and the Syro-Malabar Church in particular is admirable.

It is to be noted that St Kuriakose Chavara is among the first in India to admit the “untouchables” to schools and provided them also Sanskrit education which was forbidden for them at that time. In Kerala, our schools are famously known as *Pallikoodams*, that is, houses adjacent to the Church, which was the result of a circular from him in 1864 as the Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Verapoly. He issued that “each parish should establish educational institutions, or else they will be debarred from the communion.”

The writings of St Kuriakose Chavara inspire an innumerable number of people. As we commemorate the 150th Year of the publication of the *Chavarul*, just imagine the myriad of generations who have benefited from this simple but profound book. Reflecting on this book on the basis of another important work, the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis *Amoris Laetitia*, is immensely beneficial not only to the Church but also to all those who love the institution of the family.

Holy Father Pope Francis has dedicated the first two Synods of his Pontificate to discuss matters related to the family. The theme of the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (5-19 October 2014) was “Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization.” The Fourteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (4-25 October 2015) discussed “The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and in the Contemporary World.” The much-discussed Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia* was the result of those two Synods. As a person who witnessed the proceedings of these two Synods closely, I can joyfully attest that these Synods and *Amoris Laetitia*, theoretically and practically equipped the Church to help the families in living the ‘Joy of the Gospel.’ I am sure that you will hear an in-depth analysis of the book *Chavarul* and *Amoris Laetitia* in this conference and the discussions will definitely benefit the whole Church.

It is in his book *Chavarul* that St Chavara outlines his vision of the family. As any child who loves the parents takes their words before death seriously, this last testament of St Kuriakose Elias should be taken seriously by everyone. He wrote this in his own handwriting to the

families of his parish, Chennamkary but with a far greater audience in mind. His love, affection and the concern for the well-being of families are evident in this text, especially on the theme of the pastoral care of the families.

The *Chavarul* exhibits his profound theological vision of the family. His definition of the institution of family is profoundly theological: “A good Christian Family is the image of heaven, where members live together by the bond of blood and affection, duly respecting and obeying the parents, walking peacefully before God and people, seeking eternal salvation according to each one’s proper state of life” (*Chavarul*, Introduction). Almost a century before the Second Vatican Council, St Kuriakose Chavara envisioned love as the foundation and centre of the family. The Vatican Council says: “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... the family is, so to speak, the domestic church” (*Lumen Gentium* 11).

However, St Kuriakose Chavara’s analysis should be understood from the historical context of the families of his time. The havoc done to family life for various reasons, the legal disputes between Christian families, abject poverty of many families, lack of attentiveness to the formation of children are just a few problems he had in mind while writing this book. He warns them that a “family that experiences discord and fight among its members will soon perish. If you are not ready to forgive the mistakes and wrong-doings of your family members, how will they forgive you?” (*Chavarul*, 1:1). These observations he has recorded here demonstrate his close-knit relationship to the ordinary people as priest.

St Kuriakose Elias understands that strengthening the institution of family is the best solution to many of the problems we face. Because of the love a person experiences in the family he would be able to overcome problems in the outside world. He writes: “The only sweet consolation for a person experiencing trials and tribulations in the sorrowful valley of this world is to belong to and live in a family where love, order, and peace reign” (*Chavarul*, Introduction). He continues: “Likewise, it is most distressing for members to live in a family where order and peace do not prevail and where no one is concerned about the service of God and their own eternal salvation” (*Chavarul*, Introduction).

Fear and devotion to the Lord should be inculcated in the minds of the family members from a very young age. This will eventually bring blessings to the family and all those who come into contact with such a family. For this reason, he admonishes his readers not to evade the family prayer even for a good reason. He writes: "Don't interrupt the routine of family prayer even if some important guests or visitors turn up at your house at that time" (*Chavarul*, 1:24). Living in accord also brings honour to the family and dispute among the members opprobrium: "The honour and blessing of a family lies in coexisting without any quarrels and to be on good terms with everyone" (*Chavarul*, 1:1).

How can we connect *Chavarul* and *Amoris Laetitia* in order to help our families in the present age? Many experts, even in the Church argue that in the fast-evolving world the Church should change along with it. But, in my opinion, both these texts are trying to do something unique and special. These texts are trying to transform the world for Christ through good families rather than changing the Church for the world. St Kuriakose Chavara writes: "The most valuable possession of a family consists in fear of and devotion to the Lord. A family in which the fear of the Lord pervades will enjoy the fruit of divine blessings in this world as well as in eternity" (*Chavarul*, 1:19). In the same line of thought *Amoris Laetitia* is aware of the deep crisis that the families face today. However, the Church is convinced that "families are not a problem; they are first and foremost an opportunity" (*Amoris Laetitia*, 7).

These two documents are reflections of two cultural and historical contexts, both of them show a deep awareness of the life of the family, the importance of the Church's ministry to the family, the need of understanding, compassion and discernment in the ministry to the family. Pope Francis writes: "For this reason 'to want to form a family is to resolve to be a part of God's dream, to choose to dream with him, to want to build with him, to join him in this saga of building a world where no one will feel alone'" (*Amoris Laetitia*, 321).

The organizers of this conference also asked me to offer some personal reflections from the Indian context. Some of these ideas I also have shared in my reflections at the Bishops' Synod in Rome.

Because of the socio-cultural and religious context of India, there are rapid changes happening, in lifestyle, values, mainly because of the technological development. But we should not forget that we are part of a two-thousand-year-old Christian tradition and history. Our forefathers

have taken diligent care in handing over this 'flame of faith' from generation to generation. We also have the responsibility to keep this flame burning brightly through our families and must give careful attention in transmitting this to posterity. The younger generation must be given adequate training in not extinguishing this light or from keeping it long without the fuel. According to the *General Directory of Catechesis* faith formation "is nothing other than the process of transmitting the Gospel, as the Christian community has received it, understands it, celebrates it, lives it and communicates it in many ways" (GDC 105).

The contemporary 'crisis of faith' which is linked to a 'crisis in education' also created a 'crisis in the family.' The key to overcoming this crisis is the renewal and strengthening of the Christian family life as it is envisioned by St Kuriakose Chavara and Pope Francis. One of our noblest traditions is the family prayer, especially in the evening. These family prayers are the expression of the faith life of our Church in its basic level. The children draw their vitality and vigour from praying together and they mostly continue this habit as part of their family tradition. Despite the strong waves of globalization and materialism, the families of our Church by and large manifest an overall stability, witnessing to the indissoluble nature of the Christian marriage and generating a peaceful atmosphere for the spiritual growth of the members.

The Indian Christian tradition does not see marriage and family a private affair of the individuals involved but as a unit within an interconnected whole. Every child is born and brought up in a wider environment of relationships, surpassing the narrow confines of 'nuclear family.' It is through self-giving or through a life of self-sacrifice that the family members should fulfil their great task of maintaining the moral and physical rhythm of the human society at large.

An effective catechism on marriage and family contributes further strengthening of the family life. The St Thomas Christian tradition of daily evening gathering of the family for regular Bible reading, hymns, canonical prayers of the hours and rosary is a strong factor that enrich and sustain the Christian spirit of the family. As we see in *Amoris Laetitia* we should be compassionate to the pastoral needs of those who live in separation, divorced, failed marriage, and those who have sought

to marry outside the Church. While the pastor seeks for a helpful solution for their cases within the legal/sacramental possibilities, he is strengthening them in the assurance that God loves them. Thereby they are helped to feel that the Church loves and needs them. We leave open the door of Church to them and encourage the children of these parents for all spiritual services.

We should also learn from the pastoral practices of St Kuriakose Chavara. Just like he was present to the pastoral needs of his people of that time the presence of the parish priest is of great significance in the member families of his parish. The parish priest must be available to his parishioners at any time. This advice is equally applicable to the Bishops also. The visits of Bishops to the parishes and even the work fields of the faithful of their dioceses and also to families really serve to attest the place of family in the Church and strengthen the family life of the faithful.

We are also confronted by the dangers ensuing from nuclear families. The Church should give spiritual, moral, as well as means for financial support for the education of the children from poor families. The Church should make strong efforts for the renewal of the families by propagating a lifestyle based on the Gospel. Our experience shows that in order to save our families, especially the derailed and broken ones, we need a special pastoral program of care and accompaniment. It is by generating the presence of Jesus by living the Word of God, and especially the commandment of mutual love, that we can renew our families. When Jesus is vibrantly present in a family it becomes an evangelizing family. The family members will then conform themselves not to the spirit of the world but to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Family of Nazareth remains our model, inspiration and also the source of solace and strength. Both these documents invite us to respond to the challenges, keeping a clear vision of the Christian family, its vocation, accompanying it with commitment and hope.

May the Holy Spirit strengthen and inspire all of you and the Church in India to meet the needs and face the challenges of the family and let the light from the Domestic Church—Family illuminate the whole Church and the world at large.

God bless you! God bless India!

LOVE PLUS RESPECT GIVE JOY

Sibi, CMC♦

St Kuriakose Elias Chavara wrote *Chavarul (Testament of a Loving Father)* on 13 February 1868 and after 148 years (19 March 2016) Pope Francis wrote *Amoris Laetitia (The Joy of Love)*. ‘Testament of a Loving Father’ and ‘The Joy of Love’ both have a common factor in their titles, namely love. Basing on this headline theme ‘LOVE’ I would like to discuss one of the major thrusts of this conference “Vocation and Mission of the Family: Reflections on *Chavarul* and *Amoris Laetitia*,” namely, love. I propose a formula for Joy—Love plus Respect give Joy, that is, Love + Respect → Joy.

Signs of the times provoke us to work seriously for the radical paradigm shifts to happen and most important among them is to denounce over focusing on the patriarchal model to build up and thus allow families to arise and shine through mutuality. Challenges faced by families in the changed context of the contemporary world are signboards for us to tread through the right path for possible solutions to remedy current alarming crisis faced by families. This conference is one of the effective platforms for the same since the two major works, namely, *Chavarul* and *Amoris Laetitia* we discuss these days dovetailed essential ingredients for an authentic family life and I pick up three key words from them: Love, Respect and Joy. I formulate from the essence

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of these two books a lifeline formula—*Love + Respect → Joy*. I hope this brief exposition will shed some light to display the continuing relevance of the unique work *Chavarul* of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara, on the occasion of its 150th anniversary, especially in light of the challenges faced by the families and the Church's response expressed through *Amoris Laetitia*.

In *Chavarul* we read,

The only Sweet consolation for a person experiencing the trials and difficulties in the valley of tears is the membership and life in a family where love, order and peace reign. Likewise, it is most distressing to live in a family where there is no order or peace and where the members are unconcerned about the service of God and their own salvation. How unfortunate the families are that have no concern over peace at their homes which breeds disrespect and often generates quarrels, sins, destruction and death (*Chavarul*, Introduction).

Chavarul ensures its intention to prevent such unfortunate developments through the observation of a code of conduct for families.

150 years back St Kuriakose Elias Chavara framed this mandate to promote true love in families which is the only command of Jesus and in the present era it become more evident that love and respect are two sides of the same coin, which are necessary for peaceful living that radiates joy in the life of each individual and the family as a whole. He urges: "love one another and forgive mutually each one's faults and shortcomings. When diseases, trials and difficulties face you, resign yourselves to the will of God" (*Chavarul*). Those who respect each other, trust, support and value each other's independence. They also have the freedom to be themselves, talk honestly and freely, and make decisions and compromises together. They respect boundaries and encourage each other to spend time with friends and family. Mostly the awareness and practice of respect, which is equally important and crucial as love, will strengthen the family life.

Love is not all you need, nor all your spouse or child needs; consider respect. Appreciation and expressions of love strengthen respect and, they further contribute for self-improvement which would emanate joy. Some people may argue that love can exist without respect, and respect can exist without love. I would say that bliss lies in the combination of the two. That is, love along with respect brings bliss to the relationship between husband and wife, and between parents and children. Love

adds joy and provides the emotional bonds that help carry the relationship through hard times. We all need respect, especially from those who are the closest and the most intimately connected with us. I have read elsewhere of studies indicating that women want love more than respect and men want respect more than love. It fits an old stereotype, it seems to me that women, even more than men, suffer when love directed toward them is not accompanied by respect.

Respect is rooted in love and fidelity. A synonym for respect can be gentleness. We see Jesus as the model for respect and gentleness; for instance, care and concern for his disciples; gentleness with the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn 4:1-11); his kind and sensitive treatment of children. The Apostle Paul teaches us to mutually submit to one another out of respect for Christ (Eph 5:21). Clearly, we are to be people of mutual respect not only outside family but also within the family which produces love and joy. Every day provides us with opportunities to relate in multiple ways with family—for instance helping each other would build mutual respect and trust which are key ingredients for strong family ties. Initiative should be taken by parents to build positive relationships. As I mentioned in the introduction, it is high time to denounce patriarchal model and practice ‘Love *plus* Respect *give* Joy’ formula not only to save our families but also to build up and bear good fruits. Accordingly, let me invite your attention to some key actions required to realize the formula.

The key factors which can act as catalyst to increase true joy and to have life in abundance in our families are: Availability, Honesty, Transparency, Dependability and Self-Respect. (i) Availability: Make sure you are available to your partner and children. Be an active listener so that they would recognize that you care for and value their thoughts and feelings. These moments take us in the direction of building strong relationships and bond. (ii) Honesty and Transparency: When you consistently demonstrate a genuine openness in your interactions and communications with your children, you increase their confidence and trust in you. Even though you are the adult and are expected to have the answers, it is okay to admit a lack of knowledge on a particular question. Let your child know that you can figure it out together. Children are innately sensitive and often pick out from your body language when you are not being truthful. However, as long as they know they can depend on whatever you say, you will be building a

powerful bond with them. (iii) Dependability: Children look to you for dependability and reliability. These two cornerstones of any healthy relationship are especially important for children. Such parents lay the foundation for children to feel comfortable to face the world with all its pros and cons because they know you are there for them who walked amidst the realities with peace and joy. They can depend on you means that they can trust you. And when your actions align with your words, children can rely on you to be honest and respectful. (iv) Self-Respect: Self-respect is acceptance of yourself as a whole person. You have worth and value just because you are you. Self-respect means you hold yourself to your own standards, and you try not to worry too much about what other people think of you. You take care of your body and mind that honour who you are.

Thus, our families become the place for “Sweet consolation for a person experiencing the trials and difficulties in the valley of tears is the membership and life in a family where love, order and peace reign” (*Chavarul*, Introduction). And do not forget the precept that follows:

Likewise it is most distressing to live in a family where there is no order or peace and where the members are unconcerned about the service of God and their own salvation. How unfortunate the families are that have no concern over peace at their homes. How often these have led to quarrels, sins, destruction and death. To prevent such unfortunate developments, I urge our families to pray for God’s light and peace (*Chavarul*, Introduction).

Pope Francis says: “Young love needs to keep dancing towards the future with immense hope” (AL 219). I endorse with St Chavara and Pope Francis that what is important is the love you share, strengthened and sanctified by grace sealed by trust in God and mutual respect.

Our above discussion on *Chavarul* against the background of the changing and challenging family situations of today is complemented and perfected by the exhortations in *Amoris Laetitia*. I would invite your attention to some of the relevant concerns in it. Without any doubt, we should uphold this message: “Love needs time and space; everything else is secondary” (AL 224). Few human joys are as deep and thrilling as those experienced by two people who love one another and have achieved something as the result of a great, shared effort of mutual respect, gentleness and trust (cfr AL 130).

I wholeheartedly congratulate Chavara Central Secretariat, Kochi, in collaboration with the Centre for the Study and Research on Chavara, Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore for organizing this conference to unearth the vision and mission of *Chavarul* which surpasses time. I wish and pray that this endeavour be hundredfold fruitful to spread the priceless vision and mission of *Chavarul* and to evaluate new challenges and responses in the changed context as well in light of the recent documents and theological developments, especially that of *Amoris Laetitia*. Concluding this message let me urge you once again to hold firmly this lifeline formula: Love *plus* Respect *give* Joy.

Keynote 1

VIRTUE ETHICS, *CHAVARUL*, AND *AMORIS LAETITIA*

James F. Keenan, SJ♦

This paper is in four parts. First, I describe the most important development in method in moral theology over the past thirty years, virtue ethics. Second, I show briefly how virtue ethics has helped us to read older texts like the Scriptures, making them instructive for us today. This helps us to see why we would use virtue ethics as a device for interpreting the *Chavarul*. Third, and this is the longest section, I show that reading the *Chavarul* through the key of virtue ethics helps us to read it well for the 21st century. Other presenters at this conference like Sr Vimala Chenginimattam discuss the virtues in the *Chavarul*, but I want to talk about how it is a rich virtue ethics text and in this way I will give you a more introductory paper for those succeeding mine. Finally, I want to suggest how functional a virtue ethics text would be for a church in the midst of receiving and developing *Amoris Laetitia* and in this sense too my paper attempts to lay the ground for subsequent papers on this topic, especially those by Peter Hünermann, Joseph

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Mben, Mathew Illathuparampil, Julie Clague, Stanislaus Alla, Antonio Autiero, Emanuel Agius, and Bishop Lawrence Pius.

Virtue Ethics

“Every human act is a moral act.” When I read that statement in Thomas Aquinas’s *Summa Theologiae* (I.II.1.3c) during my graduate studies at the Gregorian University in Rome in the mid-1980s I realized I loved ethics.¹ “Every human act is a moral act.” Think of it. Every human act is morally considerable. The way you read this paper. The way you talk with friends. The way you study and work. The way you treat others daily. The comments you make about other people. The greetings you make or withhold. All of these are human acts.

I read this phrase in the *Summa* at the same time that the field of virtue ethics was emerging.² Virtue ethics would allow me to think about how these ordinary human acts could become actual moral acts.

Renewed interests in virtue ethics arose from a dissatisfaction with the way we had been doing ethics. In the 1960s-90s, most of ethics was about specific controversial actions: birth control, sterilization, abortion, assisted suicide, homosexual relations, etc. We found ourselves facing unexpected quandaries and spent all our time discussing them. But ordinary events like family life, dating, school life, and work life, were rarely considered. Basically ethics was about significant, unanticipated, problematic acts and not ordinary human actions as Thomas hoped we would consider.³

Today we virtue ethicists are primarily concerned with persons and then their actions. We believe that the real discussion of ethics is about who should we become and what virtues we need to become that person. Of course, *Chavarul* suggests quite a few.

¹Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I.II.1.3c.

²For an introduction to virtue ethics, see the following: Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981); Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991); Jean Porter, *The Recovery of Virtue: The Relevance of Aquinas for Christian Ethics* (Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 1990); James F. Keenan, *Virtues for Ordinary Christians* (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1996); Joseph Kotva, *A Christian Case for Virtue Ethics* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1996).

³Edmund Pincoffs, *Quandaries and Virtues: Against Reductivism in Ethics* (Lawrence, University of Kansas Press, 1986).

In fact, virtue ethicists like myself expand the question by asking three related ones: Who are we? Who ought we to become? How are we to get there? I now turn to each of these questions.⁴

No question is more central for virtue ethics than the identity question “who are we?” To virtue ethicists, the question is the same as “how virtuous or vicious are we?” To answer this first question we must first have some virtues. In the *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas Aquinas offers us the four cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude.⁵ Together with these he adds the three theological virtues, faith, hope and charity.⁶ Thus if you want to know who you are, examine yourself against each of these seven virtues.

The second question embodies a vision of the type of person we ought to become. Certainly, if we are honest in the first question, then some virtues are not as fully acquired by us as are the others. In fact, for the honest person the virtues are not what we acquire in life; they are what we pursue.

We use the virtues, therefore, to set the personal and social goals that we encourage ourselves to seek. Thomas and others call this goal the “end.” That is, the middle question sets the ends that we should seek. Those ends concern the virtues that will shape us as persons or communities. Setting this end means that the fundamental task of the moral life is to develop a vision and to strive to attain it. Inasmuch as that vision is who we ought to become, then, the key insight is that we should always aim to grow ethically. As a person and a community-oriented ethics, virtue ethics insists that without growth, we cannot become more moral.

Turning to the third question, in order to get to the end, we need prudence. For many years prudence has had a terrible reputation, being thought of as caution or self-interest. “Be prudent” meant “Don’t get caught,” “Be extra careful,” “Watch out!”

For Thomas prudence is not simply caution. Prudence is rather the virtue of a person whose feet are on the ground and who thinks both

⁴James F. Keenan, “Virtue Ethics,” in *Basic Christian Ethics: An Introduction*, ed. Bernard Hoose (London: Chapman, 1997), 84–94.

⁵To this date, the finest introduction to the cardinal virtues is Josef Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues* (Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1966). For a contemporary set of cardinal virtues, see James F. Keenan, “Proposing Cardinal Virtues,” *Theological Studies* 56, 4 (1995): 709–729.

⁶See Josef Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love* (Chicago: Ignatius Press, 1997).

practically and realistically. Prudence belongs to the person who not only sets realistic ends, but sets out to attain them. The prudent person is precisely the person who knows how to grow.⁷

Prudence is even more complicated when we try to figure out the appropriate ways of becoming more virtuous. It must be attentive to detail, anticipate difficulties, and measure rightly. Moreover, as any one who has watched children knows, we are not born with prudence. Actually we acquire it through a very long process.

Finding prudence is finding the middle point: all of prudence is precisely getting to the middle point or the “mean” between extremes. Following Aristotle, Thomas believes that virtue is the mean. The mean is located where there is adequate tension for growth, between too little and too much. That mean is not fixed. The mean of virtue is not something set in stone: rather, it is the mean by which only specific persons or communities can grow. This is another reason why prudence is so difficult: no two means are the same.

Finding the mean of the right tension depends on who the persons or communities are. In a matter of speaking, a virtue ought to fit a person the way a glove fits one’s hand. There is a certain tailor-made feel to a virtue, which is like one’s second nature.

Virtue ethics is, therefore, a pro-active system of ethics. It invites all people to see themselves as they really are, to assess themselves and see who they can actually become. In order both to estimate oneself and to set desired goals, it proffers the virtues for both. Moreover, it invites all people to see that they set the agenda not only of the end, but also of the means to accomplish that end. Virtuous actions, like temperate drinking or courageously facing our fears, are the prudential means for achieving the end of becoming more virtuous persons.⁸

Virtue ethics encompasses our entire lives. It sees every moment as the possibility for acquiring or developing a virtue. That is why Thomas held that every human action is a moral action. Every human act is the possibility of making us more virtuous or vicious. That is, any action that we knowingly perform is a moral action inasmuch as it further realizes or inhibits our growth in the moral life.

⁷James F. Keenan, “The Virtue of Prudence (IIa IIae 47-56),” in *The Ethics of Aquinas*, ed. Stephen Pope (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2002), 259–271

⁸See Kathryn Getek Soltis and William Werpehowski, eds., *Virtue and the Moral Life: Theological and Philosophical Perspectives* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014).

Virtue Ethics as a Way of Helping us Understand Sacred Texts

Before turning to the *Chavarul*, it is important for us to appreciate how virtue ethics has helped us in reading sacred texts, like the Scriptures. The first work on Catholic biblical ethics appeared in 1937 in Germany, but was later translated in 1960 as *The Master Calls*.⁹ Its author, Fritz Tillmann, suggested the virtues as the primary place to begin our life as disciples. He pointed to the preaching of Jesus who saw in our “interior disposition” the beginning of every moral act, whether good or bad.

Tillmann stayed within the discourse of virtue and proposed an integrated view of the moral challenges for a disciple; this view focused more on the character traits, inner dispositions, or virtues that the disciple should pursue, rather than on specific external actions to be avoided which had been the focus of the moral manuals of the seventeenth to the twentieth century. And, throughout, Tillmann recognized that the specific development of the person can never be isolated from the needs and goods of the community.

Wisely Tillmann turned to the virtues, most appropriately because as any reader of the New Testament will note, virtue is the language of Paul and the Evangelists. Moreover, virtue is the language of the Hebrew bible as well. Thus, entering into moral theology, he did not abandon Scriptural language, but found in virtue the worthy bridge between Scripture and moral theology.

Later William C. Spohn published a sustained argument for this model. In *Go and Do Likewise*, Spohn insisted that virtue ethics was “the most appropriate avenue to approach the Scriptures and the life of Jesus” for an approach to Scripture.¹⁰

Virtue ethics takes its lead from Aristotle who argued that moral action derives from moral persons. Thus virtue ethics seeks to develop first in the person and the community the proper character traits or suitable virtues to promote right moral action and the right moral goals or ends of the good life. As Spohn wrote: “virtues are means to the good life and components of it.”¹¹

⁹Fritz Tillmann, *The Master Calls: A Handbook of Morals for the Layman*, translated by Gregory J. Roettger (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1960).

¹⁰William C. Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 1999), 28.

¹¹Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 42.

In this ethics, moral rules and norms for action derive from the virtues being developed in the person and the community. Rules for action are integral to the system, but the point of departure always concerns the needed virtuous qualities for people and their communities.

Spohn offered three reasons for his claim regarding the appropriateness of virtue ethics for biblical theology:

- (a) It fits the narrative form of the New Testament and can explain how the particular story of Jesus shapes the moral character of individuals and communities.
- (b) It attends to the deeper levels of moral existence which the teaching of Jesus addressed: the heart, the personal center of convictions, emotions, and commitments.
- (c) It fits the dominant mode of moral discourse in the New Testament, namely, paradigms that establish certain patterns of disposition and action that guide action.¹²

The third point highlights the role exemplary figures play in defining particular virtues. As he wrote earlier “we learn how to be virtuous by the example of others in the community when their witness inspires us to be virtuous.”¹³

Later, Lúcas Chan furthered the arguments of Tillmann and Spohn, Chan studied and worked with Daniel Harrington and me as we wrote two books on Scripture and virtue ethics.¹⁴

In *Biblical Ethics in the Twenty First Century: Developments*, Chan addresses the need for an ethical hermeneutics in order to interpret sacred texts and proposes that the best yield for any ethical investigation of such texts is through virtue ethics.¹⁵ There he argues that virtue ethics among all ethical systems is the most able to translate exegetical insight into contemporary moral guidance. The writing is a tour-de-force. With extraordinary economy and perception he lays out his case of why virtue ethics needs to be appropriated. First he offers a brief history of virtue ethics influence. Then he names the four

¹²Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 28.

¹³William C. Spohn, *What Are They Saying about Scripture and Ethics?* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1984), 82.

¹⁴Daniel Harrington and James F. Keenan, *Jesus and Virtue Ethics: Building Bridges Between New Testament Studies and Moral Theology* (Lanham, Md.: Sheed and Ward, 2002); *Paul and Virtue Ethics* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010).

¹⁵Lúcas Chan, *Biblical Ethics in the Twenty First Century: Developments, Emerging Consensus, and Future Directions* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2013).

dimensions of virtue ethics that ought to be used in the application of virtue ethics to sacred texts. These four dimensions become Chan's mantra: Dispositions and character formation; for individuals and community alike; through practices and habits; and constantly offering embodied exemplars, along the way. He expands on each. First virtue ethics' primary function is to be effective: it not only describes dispositions but shapes them and effects a character formation. Second, it forms the dispositions and characters for both the individual and the community. Third it does this by instilling particular practices that can evolve into personal and communal habits that effectively train the person and the community into becoming the embodiment of the virtue. Finally virtue recommends always exemplars or types who incarnate the virtue itself. These four categories allow us to see how virtue is teachable and formative, not only for persons but for societies. They can be found in any of the biblically ethical work that Chan did.

Next he turns to three issues concerning historical, cultural and theological adaptation. Here he raises the question of whether virtues are themselves too culturally relative. He notes "a spectrum of views, ranging from those who believe in cultural contextualization to those who want to transcend the boundary of local culture."¹⁶ Then he locates his own position,

I am inclined to take the more progressive view here: though virtues are context sensitive, they are not ultimately relative to a limited context or culture but remain open to revision in light of new circumstances. And it is centered on this view that the undertaking of bringing a virtue-based reading of Scripture into other cultural and religious systems becomes possible.¹⁷

Through hermeneutics the specificity yet the suppleness of virtue theory allows for its ability to translate a text's meaning at one time to a moral practice in another time and place. Not only that but the Scriptures themselves are congruent with the virtues and their ends. Chan writes, "Scripture not only reveals moral virtues, values and vision, it actually promotes them."¹⁸ I think here, we can add, the same can be said of the *Chavarul*.

¹⁶Chan, *Biblical Ethics in the Twenty First Century*, 92–93.

¹⁷Chan, *Biblical Ethics in the Twenty First Century*, 93.

¹⁸Chan, *Biblical Ethics in the Twenty First Century*, 109.

Chan concludes arguing that the work of the ethicist then is to investigate the text and to apply the insights through the method of virtue ethics, that is by naming and identifying the virtues that emerge from the text, demonstrating and promoting relevant practices that could sustain the development of habits and virtues within the readers of the text, providing exemplars who embody the virtues being counselled, and registering the impact these lessons have on the community as well as the individual. When Chan applies his argument to his own investigation of the commandments and the beatitudes, he uses each of these four categories to roll out his ethical application.¹⁹ His method is instructive as we turn now to the *Chavarul*.

Reading the *Chavarul* through the Lens of Virtue Ethics

Knowing this allows us to read the *Chavarul* through the key of virtue ethics. Let me first suggest why I think we should read it in that key and then tell you what I find. First, we find in it quite a number of virtues: fear of God, love, humility, industriousness, patience, justice, a forgiving spirit, generosity, mutual respect, prudence, and mercy.

Second, the *Chavarul* loves exemplars: you cannot teach what generosity is unless you think of proper role models and the *Chavarul* has plenty of those. Not only that, but the *Chavarul* also has plenty of vicious exemplars, whom we should avoid. I will return to these shortly.

Third, the *Chavarul* refers to prudential judgment quite a bit but not always explicitly. Remembering that prudence is about the safety between two extremes, you will see that the *Chavarul* directs us to that mean.

Fourth, though virtue ethics offers plenty of precepts, it is more interested in general instructions to guide us as well as giving us teachable maxims to remember on our own. More often the *Chavarul* generally tells us how to act than what exactly to do. Let me repeat that for I think it is key: More often the *Chavarul* generally tells us how to act than what exactly to do. When *Chavarul* does invoke precepts (mostly when speaking about prayers in the home and proper times for rising and sleeping), they are usually marked by specificity. Instead it generally offers broad guidelines for prudential implementation and occasionally tagging on maxims that remind us of the general guidelines.

¹⁹Yiu Sing Lúcas, Chan, *The Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes: Biblical Studies and Ethics for Real Life* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2012).

Let us look at the virtues, the exemplars, the prudential mean, and the personal and social/communal maxims and precepts in the *Chavarul*.

The very first sentence invokes an exemplar: A Good Christian family is the image of heaven. Notice: the exemplar is the Good Christian family! They are the image of heaven. Such a family requires people who are “prudent” and able to overlook faults. The *Chavarul* invokes another exemplar, the Emperor Constantine who refused to yield to a commoner’s slap to highlight such a person (1).

In the beginning the *Chavarul* upholds an orderly family, recommending that we avoid excesses. About loans he gives general prudential advice, don’t borrow habitually, don’t go into debt, and then the maxim: “The wealthiest family is not in debt” (4). Then, warning people to be humble he argues that they should be modest about their assets and not be like the vicious exemplar King David in *Samuel* 24 whose pride led his people to be smote by divine wrath. He finishes the section with another maxim from Democritus, “The one who least exhibits himself is the greatest” (6). One wonders why he does not invoke the Gospels (Mt 23:12; Lk 14:11).

The *Chavarul* has a perpetual suspicion for rich relatives (8). The worst is the son of the ambitious man who helps his son marry up (through effectively what we today call a dowry)²⁰ and then the son (another vicious exemplar) throws him out when the dowry dries up and the father is now forced to eat the scraps tossed out of his daughter-in-law’s house (8). The story is a vicious inversion of the virtuous account of the prodigal son. *Chavarul* offers a maxim: “show me your friends and I will tell you who you are” (9). He then offers general guidelines to assure that one’s home is free of grumbling, indecent talk, and unchristian conversations, and concludes with another vicious exemplar, reiterating the point that like virtue, vice is its own reward: the man who spoke ill so often of others who “ended up mad and began to bite his own tongue which was infested with worms and boils” (10).

The recurring preoccupation with wealth emerges when the virtue of industriousness is raised with general guidelines against becoming “too materialistic,” offering the exemplar of the modest man who worked hard on his land which was transformed into gold (11). Virtue has its

²⁰Shaji George Kochuthara, “Dowry as a Social-Structural Sin,” in *Feminist Catholic Theological Ethics: Conversation in the World Church*, eds. Linda Hogan and A.E. Orobator (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2014), 108–122.

own vice and laziness “the mother of all vices” is the contrary of industriousness (12). I, the son of working class parents, enjoyed this section particularly. I loved the exemplar of the two tradesmen who confess their trickeries and abandon their dishonest practices and became successful (13).

After industriousness, *Chavarul* turns to charity reminding us of the general guideline, “Let no beggar leave your home empty handed” and the exemplar who dedicated everyday to a charitable act. Then he turns to the mean between extremes, “extravagance and miserliness,” and adds the vicious exemplar who turns away from charity as he prospers and finds himself with costly ill health forgetting the maxim that “those who amass wealth by refusing to do charity will face inordinate instances of spending money” (15). Rightly he concludes charity with friendship, extolling the exemplary friendship of David and Jonathan while reminding us of the maxim, that, “Those who do not love God will not truly love you either” (16).

From charity, *Chavarul* moves to justice and tells us of the dishonest dying man who surrenders his soul and the souls of his family members who were complicit in his thievery. Here it is worth noting that in much of contemporary virtue ethics, as we saw in Chan, for instance, virtues are not primarily for individual persons, but rather for social collectives. Throughout the *Chavarul*, one sees as in this instance of the dishonest household, a collective attribution. We have seen others, most notably the opening line of the *Chavarul* that raises up the harmonious family as opposed to the grumbling household.

He concludes this very rich section on justice by the general admonition to not “delay just wages.” Insisting that such injustice is a “grave sin,” the *Chavarul* warns of God’s retribution (yet again, divine wrath!) on those who humiliate and trouble the poor. Then it turns to Leuven(!) and the story of the rich householder who harassed and saddened a poor widow and her four children who were tenants on his estate. Having enough of it, the mother prays on her knees for deliverance and “instantaneously, the rich man dropped dead” (18).

Not surprisingly, *Chavarul* rightly turns, after that lesson, to fear of God and immediately turns not to it as a personal virtue, but again as a collective one for the whole household. As I noted earlier, here as in other instances of prayer in the family household, the *Chavarul* eschews general directives and gets very specific in its precepts about mass

attendance and prayer posture. *Chavarul* returns to these matters, as we will see in the second part.

As he moves to the conclusion of these instructions on families he turns to the virtue of patience. Reminding us of the maxims that patience is not only for delight and that in this world, we ought to wish only what God wills, the *Chavarul* tells the story of St Ambrose who visits a home where he learns no one there has ever experienced suffering. Ambrose senses divine wrath on the horizon and flees leaving the poor house to collapse, “killing everyone inside.” We are then informed that the providential will of God lets divine wrath fall on the just and the unjust, for the former it is “a sign of love” (20).

The First Part closes first with an admonition for parents to buy books that lead to piety, while accompanying it by the lovely exemplar of the book-buying, illiterate beggar, who managed to find people to read to him (21). The section ends with again specific precepts for family prayer.

The Second Part begins with the admonition to parents “that bringing up your children is the most important thing and your primary duty in life” (1). Divine wrath appears in the teaching of Origen that parents condemned to hell on judgment day due to the evil legacy of their children are considered responsible for their children. This seems like another inversion, this time of original sin working in reverse!

Then the admonition to ensure that your children are trained at an early age accompanied by the maxim, if your children do not heed you when they are young they will not love you later. Again, when dealing with children the *Chavarul* offers specific precepts to parents as we see in the 2-8 paragraphs. But once the child becomes 7 years of age, the tone returns to virtuous instruction for parents. In paragraph 9 is the prudential mean between “extreme strictness and too much leniency” and then the instruction that before inflicting corporal punishment, parents should “prudently make their children understand why they are being punished” (9). Finally the text encourages husband and wife to be exemplars of their mutual love and respect for each other.

Throughout this section parents should not only be prudent but they should not surrender their authority. They should never transfer the management of household affairs: regardless of how erudite and competent your children become, “As far as possible, don’t entrust them the management of the household” (15).

The text closes with the most beautiful of the 40 paragraphs, first advising parents to allocate rightly their estate before their deaths, avoiding childhood jealousies, and then warns children to uphold throughout their lives the fourth commandment warning them of God's wrath in either this life or the next, but closes with the lovely exemplar of the three extremely poor Japanese children who plot brilliantly together that one of them will die so as to save their mother's life (16).

Why Virtue Matters and How does *Amoris Laetitia* Fit in?

Shortly after the release of Pope Francis's apostolic exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*, a young married, moral theologian, Conor Kelly, wrote an important article arguing that moral theology has now been challenged by the pope to reassess its work; rather than a ministry of teaching we were called to help train pastoral ministers to understand how they were to accompany others in "moral discernment" as lay people formed to follow their "consciences."²¹ Assuredly, Kelly's argument runs right along the very type of ministry that the *Chavarul* encourages us to do.

Still, not only is the call to ministry refreshingly different but the language of *Amoris Laetitia* seems new as well. These words from the exhortation, "accompany," "moral discernment," "consciences" are being used in fairly new ways. Even conscience, which had been taught singularly to follow church teaching, is being used in ways that empower the laity as is made clear in the most quoted line from *Amoris Laetitia*: "We have been called to form consciences, not to replace them" (37).

Amoris Laetitia insists that contemporary ministry must be defined by accompaniment and that it upholds the primacy of the conscience of the laity in a way that other papal teachings never did. Indeed, Pope Francis is unsparing in his concern for conscience: The "individual conscience needs to be better incorporated into the Church's praxis in certain situations which do not objectively embody our understanding of marriage" (AL 303).

Kelly adds that with *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis is shifting the entire competence question of moral theology by acknowledging a double competency for conscience. Not only does conscience

²¹Conor M. Kelly, "The Role of the Moral Theologian in the Church: A Proposal in Light of *Amoris Laetitia*," *Theological Studies* 77, 4 (2016): 922–948.

acknowledge moral truth in the past, but it discerns and articulates its course for the future. Kelly leads us to *Amoris Laetitia's* oft-quoted paragraph 303:

Yet conscience can do more than recognize that a given situation does not correspond objectively to the overall demands of the Gospel. It can also recognize with sincerity and honesty what for now is the most generous response which can be given to God, and come to see with a certain moral security that it is what God himself is asking amid the concrete complexity of one's limits, while yet not fully the objective ideal. In any event, let us recall that this discernment is dynamic; it must remain ever open to new stages of growth and to new decisions which can enable the ideal to be more fully realized.

Kelly highlights Pope Francis' discerning competence of conscience as resonant with conciliar theology, notably in *Gaudium et spes*.²² Kelly writes: "By taking this conciliar idea seriously, *Amoris Laetitia* significantly advances the magisterial understanding of conscience, representing another step in an ongoing process of development and reclamation of the tradition that has been active in the church since Vatican II."²³

Theologically, conscience is the centre of our moral responsibility. For most of us, our first experience of conscience is in fact when we discover a discomfort within ourselves over something we did or failed to do. We find ourselves blaming ourselves, recognizing that there is within us something that holds us accountable. It is a disquieting discovery.

In time we realize that conscience not only looks back at past failures but ahead, directing us in making choices about relationships, work, and most things that matter. As we mature, conscience eventually becomes a moral beacon illuminating the landscapes of both our past and possible futures.²⁴

²²*Gaudium et Spes* (December 7, 1965) 16, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.

²³Kelly, "The Role of the Moral Theologian," refers to David DeCosse, "The Primacy of Conscience, Vatican II, and Pope Francis: The Opportunity to Renew Tradition," in *From Vatican II to Pope Francis: Creating a Catholic Future*, ed. Paul Crowley (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2014), 156–169.

²⁴James F. Keenan, "Redeeming Conscience," *Asian Horizons* 9, 1 (2015): 25–56.

One of my mentors, the late Fr Klaus Demmer, claimed that the church spends too much time telling us what to do, instructing us on specific matters, while ignoring more important, fundamental responsibilities.

Demmer said that the first moral task for the church is to teach loud and clear, early and often, that we each *have* a conscience! As we all know we forget often that we have a conscience until it once again kicks in and wakes us up about something we should have addressed much better than we did. The church should not tire of reminding us that we have a conscience.

The second task is to remind us that we must *form and follow* our consciences! Clearly, we need to spend our lives humbly learning what constitutes right and wrong, good and evil, virtue and vice. But we must also obey our consciences as we are forming them.

As Thomas Aquinas teaches us, we cannot disobey our consciences without sinning.²⁵ Think of it: if we go against our conscience, what moral reason could we possibly have for contradicting our moral reason?

The lesson of forming and following our consciences is a life-long one and one that the church, like the *Chavarul*, cannot stop teaching.

Demmer added, then, if the church has any time left after all its evangelizing on the first two lessons, then it can occasionally turn to the third one and offer particular moral instruction.²⁶

For the past five years Pope Francis refers to the pastoral work of the church effectively as accompaniment. Accompaniment provides a beautiful image: ministry as a sense of walking with another. Pastoral work is not so much teaching from the pulpit or from the front of a classroom, it is more an engagement, a listening and a responding, a sharing. The model of pastoral ministry is moving from a teacher guiding a pupil to one among others on a journey, a sharing between one pilgrim and another.

Mind you, ministry as accompaniment is not about ministers relinquishing their authority; it is rather recognizing that the other person, the ones being accompanied, have competency too!

Pastorally, accompaniment is only genuine and true if the competency and therefore the consciences of both the minister and the

²⁵Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I. II. 19.5 and 6.

²⁶Klaus Demmer, *Living the Truth: A Theory of Action* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University, 2010), 143.

laity are respected. On this matter, as we have seen, Pope Francis returns time and again.

If we say someone is accompanying another without respecting their consciences then there is something deeply manipulative and condescending about the accompaniment. But when we respect the source of another's moral core, we become humble pilgrims searching for wisdom together with that light that illuminates our way. Assuredly such a journey is a very promising one.

Accompaniment then is about helping people develop or form their consciences and then guiding them to discern matters about their lives.

Saying this, I want to conclude that I think we here understand why the *Chavarul* was written. It was written so that Carmelites might know how to accompany the people whom they serve and to help them learn general lessons of virtue so that their families might become "the image of heaven."

The *Chavarul* is a fine document for accompanying people, particularly families, who need to form their consciences and who need to discern practical matters within the household. Instead of instructing families on specifically what they should do, the *Chavarul* offers ways of growing in virtue, the perfect way of forming the conscience. It allows families to grow in moral responsibility and helps them to understand prudence, exemplars, both virtuous and vicious ones, along the way. At no point does it inhibit the family from their judgment, but rather encourages them to become what the virtuous lessons afford. It is a fairly successful model for implementing *Amoris Laetitia*.

CHAVARUL

**HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT
VISION OF THE FAMILY AND UNIQUE
CONTRIBUTIONS**

FAMILY IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY TRAVANCORE-KOCHI: SOCIO-RELIGIOUS CONTEXT

Francis Thonippara, CMI & Joseph Chacko Chennattuserry, CMI♦

Chavarul or the *Testament of a Loving Father* presents the picture of an ideal Christian family. Written by St Kuriakose Elias Chavara of Holy Family (1805–1871), an ardent devotee of the Holy Family, the founder of the CMI and CMC Congregations, to his native parishioners in Kainakary, *Chavarul* gives concrete suggestions and proposals as to how to lead a good Christian family life in the context of the Kerala society. In two parts, the Testament of a Loving father deals with a rule for Christian families and an instruction to begin a charitable association of confraternity of St Joseph for a happy death. With an intention to renew Christian families, it is a set of spiritual commandments and directives for families.¹ In fact, his

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¹Thomas Valavananickal, "The Apostolic Zeal of Chavara: A Reflection on his Writings," *Herald of the East, Dharmaram Journal of Chavara Studies* 12, 1 (January-June 2016): 25–44.

Thonippara, Francis and Joseph Chacko Chennattuserry. "Family in the Nineteenth Century Travancore-Kochi: Socio-Religious Context." In *Vocation and Mission of the Family: Reflections on Chavarul and Amoris Laetitia*, edited by Shaji George Kochuthara, 51–66. Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2020.

earnest intention was to educate the Christians on the model of ideal Christian living and its expressions in day-to-day life. For him a good Christian family is the image of heaven.² The advices reflect the prime importance given by St Kuriakose Elias Chavara to a value-driven family and the need to concentrate on certain aspects of human life, especially Christian life. The major themes emerging from the *Chavarul* are family, focusing on the relationships among the members of the family and good parenting, education, religious upbringing and social justice, just wage, etc. These themes reflect the need of a Christian family to take strides to reach the perfection of an envisioned and ideal position. They also reflect the socio-religious contexts in which the families existed and were surviving. In order to have a better understanding of the meaning and nuances of *Chavarul* it is important to understand the context in which it was written. The present paper is a moderate attempt to reflect on the political, social and religious context of the nineteenth century Kerala particularly that of the Princely states of Travancore and Kochi.

Geographical Setting

Kerala or traditionally known as the Malabar Coast, is a narrow strip of land on the South-West Coast of India lying between the Western Ghats and the Arabian Sea. It extends from Kanyakumari in the South to Ezhimala or Gokarnam in the North. Three major units of administration of this territory in the 19th century include Travancore, Kochi and Malabar. Since the topic under discussion covers mainly the first two units of administration, we focus only on Travancore and Kochi. British administration had control over all the three units of administration and Malabar was under the Madras Presidency.

Travancore covers the modern-day civil districts of Kottayam, Idukki, Pathanamthitta, Kollam, parts of Alappuzha and Trivandrum and Kochi encompasses the modern-day civil districts of Ernakulam and parts of Alappuzha. Travancore in 1805 became a protectorate of the English East India Company and was ruled indirectly by the British. On the Alappuzha–Changanacherry route is located Kainakary, the home village of the Chavara family. It is in lower Kuttanad, which is today a great tourist attraction. Kuttanad is the granary of Kerala

²Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Chavarul* (Kakkanad, Kochi: Chavara Central Secretariat, 2018), 9.

because of the extensive paddy cultivation. Because of the charming and intricate waterways and of the water transportation, Kuttanad was given the title 'Venice of the East.'³

Political Leadership and the Impact on Travancore and Kochi

The Kingdom of Travancore had enlightened rulers compared to many other princely states of India. Although traced from eighteenth century with the reign of Marthanda Varma (1729-1758), the long list and contributions towards a progressive state was more reflected in the nineteenth century with rulers like Rani Gowri Lakshmi Bhai (1811-1815), Parvathi Bhai (1815-1829), Rama Varma (Swathi Tirunal) (1829-1847), Marthanda Varma (Utram Tirunal) (1847-1860), Rama Varma (Ayilliam Tirunal) (1860-1880).⁴ The inspiring presence of many British officers like Col. Munro and Indian administrators were crucial in bringing many progressive and liberal reforms in the nineteenth century Travancore. Col. Munro was the Resident and in 1811 the administration of Travancore fell into the hands of the Resident. The introduction of British style secretarial system, giving proprietary rights to many groups of former tenants which gave rise to many new landowners, expansion of trade in spice and hill produces, increase in government related job opportunities leading to the demand for general literacy skills, judicial reforms, stopping of slave trade, etc.⁵ led Travancore to grow as a modern State.

A very important feature of Travancore kingdom was its Hindu nature and the rulers tried to be faithful to the tradition of their ancestors.⁶ In 1750 the kingdom was dedicated to Sri Padmanabha, the local appellation of Vishnu.

³A.M. Mundadan CMI, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara* (Dharmaram Publications, Bengaluru, 2008), 34–35.

⁴A. Sreedharamenon, *A Survey of Kerala History*, (Madras: S. Vishwanathan Printers and Publishers Pvt. Ltd. 1991), 276–284; Cfr Also, V. Nagam Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol. I. (Thiruvananthapuram: Gazetteers Department, Government of Kerala, 1999 [Reprint]), 333–586.

⁵P.K. Michael Tharakan, "Socio-Economic Factors in Educational Development: Case of Nineteenth Century Travancore," *Economic and Political Weekly* 19, 45 (Nov. 10, 1984): 1913–1928; Nagam Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol. I, 455–586.

⁶P. Shangoonny Menon, *History of Travancore from the Earliest Times* (Madras: Higginbotham and Co., 1878), VII.

The kingdom of Kochi traces its shift towards a progressive modern state from the reign of Saktan Tampuran (1790-1805) and introduced many newer steps towards reforms and administrative re-organisation especially during the rule of Col. Munro as Diwan (1812-1818) which included setting up of vernacular and English schools, safeguarding the interest of minority community, abolition of slavery, comprehensive programme of public works, etc.⁷

Social Context of Travancore and Kochi

Kerala or Malabar has an independent geographical and political entity from early days and its peculiar geographical position helped the Keralites to develop a unique social set up. The social set-up of Travancore-Kochi in the period under discussion was a quasi-feudal one, composed of various castes or social groups, each one was having its specific profession. Kerala society till the late nineteenth century was not based on the principles of social freedom and equality. There was deep gap between the high castes and the low castes. The Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Nairs continued to enjoy several privileges and immunities. St Thomas Christians who trace their origin back to Apostle Thomas, stood next to Brahmins in the social scale. They were called *Nasrani Mappilas*, Christians of noble status. The political and social system became more complicated with caste system. In the caste ridden society untouchability was prevalent, even among the St Thomas Christians. The caste system was important in determining the economic status of an individual. The caste system in Kerala was much more oppressive than that prevailed in other parts of India. Untouchability and unapproachability were very common and government offices, schools and courts were not opened to the lower castes and thus social mobility was stopped which resulted in the loss of individual initiatives and enterprises.⁸ Principles of social freedom and equality was not practiced in the nineteenth century Kerala Society.⁹ Slavery in its primitive form existed in the Malabar Coast.¹⁰ In the caste-ridden society child marriage and polygamy were common.

⁷Sreedharamenon, *A Survey of Kerala History*, 285–290.

⁸Sreedharamenon, *A Survey of Kerala History*, 321.

⁹Sreedharamenon, *A Survey of Kerala History*, 317.

¹⁰Sreedharamenon, *A Survey of Kerala History*, 320.

One of the reasons for the good status and economic advantage of Syrian Christians was their proximity to high caste groups.¹¹ Christians were asked to work for the Brahmins as and when Shudras were not available and they were allowed to settle near to the Brahmin residences.¹² Slavery prevailed even in the early part of the nineteenth century. The tenant class was oppressed by the Brahmins, Kshatriyas and the Nairs. Untouchability was very strong and if one touched Pulayas and Parayas, he/she was considered polluted.

The work of the Western Christian missionaries and the spread of Western education helped to bring about radical social changes. The enlightened rulers of Travancore and Kochi welcomed the Western concept of universal and all-inclusive education which helped to transform the social structure of their subjects. The emergence of a new middle class in the nineteenth century Travancore was the result of the impact of the West on the complex social structure of the society with the spread of English education and the shift in preference from food crops to cash crops.

The characteristic feature of an agrarian society was the monopoly of landlords which was very strong in Travancore-Kochi area. In Travancore the ownership of property underwent a drastic change in the nineteenth century. In 1865, under the Pattam Proclamation, full ownership rights were given to the tenants allowing unrestricted transfer of their properties.¹³ In Kochi such kind of land reforms were already introduced in 1863.¹⁴

While narrating the role of the Hindu rulers of Travancore and the activities of the Western Anglican missionaries in reforming the social, economic, religious and administrative systems of Travancore, the historians and social analysts failed to give due importance to the unique role played by St Kuriakose Elias Chavara in the social reform activities of Kerala. He was practically marginalised and was confined as a reformer of the Syrian Catholic community only. Of course, we understand that his social reforms had certain limitations like establishing separate churches for the

¹¹Samuel Nellimukal, *Keralathile Samoohyaparivarthanam* (Kottayam: K.S. Books Publisher 2003), 54.

¹²Quoted by Nellimukal, *Keralathile Samoohyaparivarthanam*, 54.

¹³Sreedharamenon, *A Survey of Kerala History*, 331.

¹⁴Sreedharamenon, *A Survey of Kerala History*, 331.

new converts,¹⁵ etc. However, his drastic steps in starting a Sanskrit school where all were admitted, and founding a printing press to popularise literacy, etc. could not be ignored. While appreciating the socio-religious reformers of Kerala in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, one should not forget the fact that almost all these reformers started their reform initiatives only after the death of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara, except Vaikunta Swami, as is clear from below. Thus, St Kuriakose Elias Chavara may be respected as the native pioneer in the Renaissance of the 19th century Kerala.

It is also good to mention other social reformers who were natives of the present Kerala State: Vaikunta Swami (1809-1851), Sri Chattambi Swamikal (1854-1924), Sri Narayana Guru (1856-1928), Ayyankali (1863-1942), Vakkam Abdul Khadir Maulavi (1873-1932), etc. In 1836 Vaikunta Swami founded an organisation called *Samatva Samajam* in order to fight for the redressal of the grievances of the *Avarnas* as well as against the shortcomings and lapses in the State administration.

Syrian Christian Family

Family is the source and strength for a healthy human life. To renew the society we need good and mutually respecting families. The Indian family is a centre where the sanctity and serenity of the Indian spiritual traditions are stored and are traditionally handed down to the future generation orally and by example by the parents. This is all the more true in the case of the Indian Christian families. The family is a catalyst in transmitting the rich and noble traditions and spiritual heritages of India.¹⁶ According to the Christian understanding, family is a sacramental sign in the world. The Christian family by virtue of its sacramental grace is a living act of worship to God. Christian marriage is an effective means of sanctification and the family shares in the divine plan of the sanctification of the world. Let us see how this vision of the family was put into practice by the Syrian Christian tradition in their socio-cultural context.

Although the Syrian Christians lived in the midst of a multi-religious context, they tried to preserve their Christian identity by being faithful

¹⁵Due to the strong opposition from the traditional Christians, St Chavara was forced to start separate Churches and thereby the Syrian Christian community in Kerala failed to integrate the new converts to the mainstream Church.

¹⁶Cfr Xavier Kidangan, *Family and Priesthood in the Syro-Malabar Church* (Kottayam: St Thomas Apostolic Seminary, 1993), 18.

to the Christian teachings such as marital fidelity, unity and love in the family, and proper faith formation of the children in the not very favourable Christian social set up. Unity was to some extent maintained because of the strong leadership and commitment of the husband/father in the family. They tried to keep up the property in the male lineage.

Although a modern reader may criticise the caste consciousness of the St Thomas Christians this should be understood in the social context of those days. A close similarity in social practices is noticeable between the Syrian Christians and the high caste Hindus. Only men of same status or caste were admitted to eat with the family. Rice is the common food. They took their meals squatting on the ground.¹⁷

No food is prepared in house where a death has occurred. A memorial was conducted after the burial at which only vegetable food is taken. Owing to death, pollution is incurred which lasts for seven days; on the eighth day the *Pulakuli*¹⁸ feast is held. These and many other practices are the remnants of Hindu practices. Low castes could not enter the houses of the Syrian Christians.¹⁹

The ornaments of the Christian women were of the same kind as those of the Brahmin ladies. The girls stopped studies with the primary education and then got married. *Kalari* was the place where the boys learned literacy and use of arms. The children were brought up in obedience, humility and discipline. The Syrian Christians were good neighbours and succeeded in getting the cooperation of the whole neighbourhood in matters of common interest. Religious tolerance and communal harmony were very dear to their hearts. Onam, traditionally a Hindu religious festival celebration, was and is very popular among the St Thomas Christians. In some places Christian churches were built by local rulers, which can be considered an evidence of the social acceptance and position that Christians enjoyed.

The Syrian Christians were devout and were famous for their hospitality. The guests used to visit the families without prior notice

¹⁷Cfr Leslie Brown, *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982 [Revised with additional chapter]), 198–199.

¹⁸*Pula* means defilement. All the close relatives of a dead person were considered defiled for a given period of time. At the close of this period, they would bathe and offer sacrifice and would hold a feast. The name of the feast is *pulakuli* (bath after the defilement).

¹⁹Cfr D. Ferroli, *Social Practices, The St Thomas Christian Encyclopaedia of India*, Vol. 2, ed. George Menachery (Trichur, 1973), 127.

and still they were well looked after. Regarding the community traits, one notices high consciousness of self-identity and independence, each one having independent landed property and house.

The modesty of the Syrian Christian women in their dress and behaviour contributed much to the sanctity and solidarity of the family life. Women were confined to their houses and they were renowned for their modesty, nobility and chastity. The devotion of the wives to the husbands was proverbial. Dowry system was very common and *makkathayam*—the son inheriting the property from the father—was in practice.²⁰ The Syrian Christians never wanted to get rid of the dowry system²¹ as they thought that the share of property to daughters would lead to subdivisions of estates and thus reduce the total possessions of the family.²² Contrary to the existing practice, Kuriakose Elias Chavara allowed his brother's daughter to heir the property and continue his family line,²³ an ideal that has not yet been fully assimilated and honoured by the Syrian community even today. The houses of the Syrian Christians were modest and in proper order.²⁴

As the head of the family, the father was the supreme authority in the daily running of the family. Following the local tradition of the Hindu religion, the Syrian Christian women did not appear before strangers and they did not eat with their husbands. Children never sat in the presence of the father. St Thomas Christian community was a strongly patriarchal community. "In short, women were expected only to work and do their duties as daughter, wife and mother; they had no rights and no voice either in the family or in the society."²⁵

²⁰Samuel Mateer, *Njan Kanda Keralam* (Native Life in Travancore) (Thiruvananthapuram: State Institute of Languages, 2010), 249.

²¹Refers to a system by which money was paid to the bridegroom and his family as part of the family share or heir of the bride.

²²Francis Day, *The Land of Perumals, or Cochin—Its Past and Present* (Madras: Asian Educational Services, 1990 [reprint]), 261.

²³Traditionally in the Syrian Christian families, women were not the inheritors of the family property. To maintain the family lineage, which was very much patriarchal in nature, the Syrian Christians hardly allowed their daughters to occupy their family property. In a situation where there were only girl children, they preferred to adopt a male from their own family tradition to continue the family lineage.

²⁴Quoted by Nellimukal, *Keralathile Samoohyaparivarthanam*, 54.

²⁵Navya Maria, CMC, *Empowered Womanhood* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications), 2014, 407.

The Thomas Christians used to maintain a joint family system. They followed the patriarchal system where father was the head of the family. The children were brought up in Christian faith and the elderly parents were looked after by the children. The parents chose the partners in marriage for their children.²⁶ The main occupation of the Syrian Christians was farming, and they were very good traders and proprietors of pepper. They were also very good warriors. Agriculture and trade were their main occupations and other traditional occupations were ayurvedic treatment, priestly service and *mantravadam*.²⁷ They were allowed to extract oil which was even denied to the people below the group of Izhavar.²⁸ Slavery in Travancore was abolished in 1855, but until then the Syrian Christians too had slaves.

Some other notable features of the Syrian Christians are the following: their costume did not essentially differ from that of the surrounding Hindus, a piece of cloth descended from the waist to about the knees, the quality of which depended upon the wealth of the wearer. The women had bangles of silver, brass, or copper, on their legs; a cross suspended from their necks. A jacket reached from their necks below the waist, and a cloth descending from thence nearly as low as their ankles. When they went to church, they covered themselves with a long white muslin scarf which was put over their heads. It was considered an expression of their modesty.

The Syrians were a fine race of people, lighter in colour than the other inhabitants, and in most respects very superior to the surrounding gentiles. However, they were prone to intoxication and quarrelling. The women were modest and retiring and kept themselves away from evil practices prevalent in the society which were not in agreement with Christian morality. According to the custom of those days, when two men would meet on the road, the inferior uncovered his head and incline his body a little forward, and this mark of respect was always shown to the clergy of the St Thomas Christians, showing again the respect that they commanded.²⁹

²⁶Mariamamma Joseph, *Marriage among Indian Christians* (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 1994), 68.

²⁷Quoted by Nellimukal, *Keralathile Samoohyaparivarthanam*, 54. *Mantravadam* refers to superstitious magical practices.

²⁸Quoted by Nellimukal, *Keralathile Samoohyaparivarthanam*, 54.

²⁹Cfr Day, *The Land of Perumals*, 257–265.

St Chavara noticed some of the practices in the family which were not of an ideal family and by writing *Chavarul* he wanted to rectify the practices which were not conducive to the Christian living. His ideal family was a heaven on earth and through the instructions in the *Chavarul*, he wanted to regain the lost/about to be lost identity of the Christian families.

Ecclesial Context of Travancore and Kochi

St Thomas Christians were the only Christian community till the sixteenth century. However, by the nineteenth century there were three distinct Christian communities in Kerala, the Latin Catholics, which is the result of the mission work of the Western missionaries, the Catholic St Thomas Christians and the Orthodox or the Jacobite Thomas Christians, including a small group of the Thozhiyur Church.³⁰ With the domination of the English East India Company, Anglicans started arriving in the Malabar Coast in the nineteenth century. The missionaries of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) and London Missionary Society (LMS) played a key role in the social, religious and educational transformation of Travancore–Kochi with the establishment of the educational institutions and the promotion of the universal education.

The Jacobites or the *Puthenkuttukar* came under the influence of the Anglican missionaries and the Mulanthuruthy Synod of 1836 decided not to have any contact with the Anglican Church. However, in 1876 a group of Jacobites under the influence of the Anglican missionaries got separated from the Jacobite Church and formed the Mar Thoma Church. They are highly Anglicised, and they had the advantage of securing English education.

In the Catholic Church, the Padroado–Propaganda jurisdictional conflict adversely affected the life of the Church. The secular regime in Lisbon clashed with the authorities of the Catholic Church in Lisbon, which eventually led to the suppression of the Padroado system in 1838 by Pope Gregory XVI with the famous document *Multa Praeclare*. Thus, the dioceses of Kodungallur, Kochi and Mylapore were suppressed and Catholics were put under the jurisdiction of the neighbouring Propaganda Vicariate Apostolic. The Catholics in Kodungallur and Kochi jurisdictions

³⁰Now known also as Malabar Independent Syrian Church, a splinter group from the Jacobites, in 1772.

were brought under the Varapuzha Vicariate Apostolic. This led to a revolt among the Padroado Catholics and the effects of this crisis continued throughout the nineteenth century, although efforts for reconciliation were effected by the Concordat of 1857. Again, the caste conflict was very strong even among the different groups of the Latin Church.

Catholic Thomas Christians were not very happy with the Latin Carmelite rule under the Propaganda jurisdiction of Varapuzha. They earnestly struggled for native bishops and the attempts for native bishops were looked upon with suspicion by the Carmelite missionaries. A small group among the Catholic Thomas Christians even contacted the Chaldean Patriarch and the presence of Bishop Thomas Rocos caused confusion among the Catholic Thomas Christians. Majority of the parishes followed Rocos. In an attempt to bring back the rebel group, St Kuriakose Elias Chavara was appointed the Vicar General of the Catholic Thomas Christians. He worked hard for bringing back the followers of Rocos to the Obedience of the Vicar Apostolic. Under the effective leadership of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara, the mission was a successful one. Roman authorities even thought of appointing Kuriakose Elias Chavara as the bishop of the Catholic St Thomas Christians to avert the future interventions and claims of the Chaldean Patriarch. However, the Carmelite missionaries raised strong objections and the proposal was not realised.³¹ After the suppression of the Padroado the Catholic Thomas Christians were under the Vicariate of Varapuzha and the Vicariates Apostolic were Carmelites. The prominent among them were Bernardine Baccinelli (1853-1868) and Leonard Mellano (1868-1897).

Innovations in Education in the Nineteenth Century Travancore and Kochi

The traditional system of education in Malabar was *Kudipallikudam*, village primary school and *kalari*, for training in fencing, archery, etc. Traditional education proved to be more of an agency for social preservation rather than an opening for thinking outside the boxes. Other cultural forces and contacts brought about changes in traditional thinking and British system of administration and English education

³¹Cfr Paul Pallath, *Vicariate Apostolic of Verapoly and the Thomas Christians in 1867–Kuriakose Elias Chavara Unworthy of Episcopate?* (Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications), 2018.

brought changes in the thinking patterns and eventually led to the social transformation.

Anglican Christian missionaries supported the social reforms. In 1859 the Travancore Raja issued a proclamation allowing Nadar Christian (low caste converted Christians) women to cover their bosom³² and in 1936 Raja Sri Chitra Tirunal Balarama Varma³³ issued the famous temple entry proclamation by which all the Hindus were allowed to enter the temples, irrespective of their castes.

The CMS and LMS missionaries promoted the use of the vernacular language, Malayalam, and began printing Christian books in Malayalam, which were largely popular. The CMS founded the first College and Seminary in 1813 in Kottayam, a stronghold of the Syrian Christians. The CMS Missionaries started a grammar school in 1817, which later became the CMS College, and a Seminary, now known as the Old Seminary, at Kottayam. The first girls' School was started at Kottayam in 1821. In Kochi area the first school was started at Mattanchery by an English missionary Rev. J. Dawson in 1818 with the aid of grant received from the government.

Many schools were set up in many parts of the State and men with educational qualifications were appointed as teachers and were paid salaries from State Treasury. In 1817 Rani Gouri Parvati Bai, with the help of her Diwan Col. Munro started free and compulsory education under State control. It was Swati Tirunal who started the first English medium school at Trivandrum in 1834 with Mr Roberts of the CMS Mission. The Trivandrum Maharaj's College and the Ernakulam Maharaja's College were started in the year 1866 and 1875 respectively. Other educational openings were the Law College in Trivandrum in 1874, Ayurveda College in Trivandrum in 1889 and the Sanskrit College in Trivandrum in 1889.³⁴

In education, the Syrian Catholics were lagging³⁵ compared to the Syrian Jacobites and the Marthomites as the latter two communities

³²Custom of those days did not allow the low caste women to cover their bosom.

³³Chithira Thirunal Balarama Varma (1912-1991), popularly known as Sree Chithira Thirunal, was the last ruling Maharaja (King) of the Princely State of Travancore. He ruled until 1949 and later became the titular Maharaja of Travancore until 1991.

³⁴Cfr T.K. Velupillai, *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol. III (Thiruvanthapuram: Kerala Gazatteers Department, 1996 [Reprint]), 692-733.

³⁵Charles Pyngott, *Kerala Sabha Pathonpatham Noottandil* (Kerala Church in the Nineteenth Century, Report of Ignatius Persico) (Kottayam: Deepika Book House, 1997), 99.

made use of their close contacts with the British officials and missionaries in acquiring English education.

Religious Life

Religious Practices

It is interesting to note that the Syrian Christians (St Thomas Christians) even today follow many of the social and religious (of course, not pertaining to faith) practices of the land and of the Hindu brethren. Although Portuguese missionaries under the leadership of Dom Alexis Menezes, the Archbishop of Goa, in the Udayamperur Synod in 1599 condemned many of these practices, some are being followed even today. Francis Day,³⁶ an officer in the English East India Company, gives lot of information about the religious practices of the Christians of Malabar, especially of the nineteenth century. Fasting was very rigorous and the Syrian Christians had a number of fasting days. During Lent they abstained from flesh, fish, eggs, milk, butter and spirituous liquors. On Wednesdays and Fridays they had fasts commencing at sunset of the preceding day, and lasting 24 hours. Eucharist was celebrated with full solemnity. Feast of St George in some churches was celebrated with the full participation of the non-Christians. Annual pilgrimage to Malayattoor was very popular and the solemn feast of Malayattoor was on the Sunday after Easter.³⁷

At Palliport (Pallipuram) some of the Virgin Mary's hair is believed to be preserved and an annual feast is held there in her honour and celebrated much in the Hindu fashion. Marriages took place at a very early stage, and were negotiated for by the family, whose business it was to provide what they considered an eligible alliance for the children.

Church Reform

St Kuriakose Elias Chavara introduced and popularised forty hours adoration, vespers, *ladinj*, various benedictions, Holy Saturday services, office for the dead, etc. with all good intentions to revitalise the Catholic Thomas Christians in Malabar, which according to him was a barren

³⁶Day, *The Land of Perumals*, 259–261.

³⁷A holy place for the St Thomas Christians, where according to the tradition, St Thomas spent time in prayer and seclusion.

Church. With the establishment of a printing press in 1846 at Mannanam, number of devotional books had been printed and published, some of them were translated from Tamil. He popularised *Vanakkamasam* (monthly devotions to saints), devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, etc. Preaching of the Word of God and the conducting of retreats were followed with greater intensity in the Church which was disturbed by the presence of Bishop Rocos sent by the Chaldean Catholic Patriarch without the approval of the Pope. Annual parish retreat preaching was popularised by St Kuriakose Elias Chavara aiming at the spiritual renewal of the parishioners. This practice was not very popular even in Europe during those days. St Kuriakose Elias Chavara and his fellow religious tried to establish the practice of preaching sermons on Sundays and feast days. To improve the quality of the priestly life of the diocesan clergy annual retreats were introduced at Mannanam towards the end of May every year and these retreats were preached by Kuriakose Elias Chavara and his companions. *Pidiyari* system and *kettuthengu* were other means St Kuriakose Elias Chavara employed to improve the financial stability of the Varapuzha Vicariate.³⁸

Priestly Formation

Among the St Thomas Christians, traditional *Malpanate* system was followed in the field of priestly formation. It was almost like the Indian *Gurukula* system. *Malpan* is a learned and exemplary senior priest of the St Thomas Christians. There were twenty *Malpanates* for the Catholic Thomas Christians by the middle of the nineteenth century. Msgr. Bernardino Baccinelli, the Vicar Apostolic of Varapuzha, suppressed all of them and the students were sent to one of the monasteries in Mannanam, Vazhakulam, Elthuruth or Pulincunnu, seminaries attached to the CMI monasteries. Already in 1833 a seminary started functioning attached to the Mannanam monastery. In 1866 a seminary was established at Puthenpally for the training of the Syrian and Latin candidates. In 1932 it was transferred

³⁸Cfr Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 224–279. *Pidiyari* is a practice among the Christians of setting apart a handful of rice to support the church activities while getting ready to cook the rice. *Kettuthengu*, a practice by which one or certain coconut trees were tied with notable knot and the coconuts of these trees were spared for the church activities as a contribution from the part of the Christian families.

to Mangalapuzha. The focus on seminary formation by St Kuriakose Elias Chavara reflects his concern for the family as Chavara was strongly convinced that well-educated priests could play a prominent role in the renewal of the families through their homilies, instructions, spiritual accompaniment, etc.

Catechumenates

To reawaken the missionary consciousness, in 1864 a catechumenate was established attached to the Mannanam monastery. Almost all the monasteries of the congregation followed the Mannanam model and through the missionary zeal of the members of the Congregation during the period between 1866 and 1931 more than 20,000 baptisms were administered.³⁹ This new initiative was to share the Good News of Our Lord Jesus Christ to the people around and to deepen the family ties.

Literature, Architecture, Performing Arts, etc.

St Chavara realised the importance of Christian Literature for the renewal of the families and he translated a few books in Tamil language for the same. He was very much inspired by the CMS missionaries who established a printing press in Kottayam to facilitate deepening of Christian living through their publications.

St Chavara's spiritual and literary works reflect the need of educating and strengthening the families in Christian values. They also reflect the lack of deep understanding of the Christian teaching and the practice of the same in the daily lives of the faithful. In order to enlighten the faithful about the importance of a life focused on heavenly bliss, he wrote *Maranaveettil Paduvanulla Pana* (Dirge/Song of Mourning).⁴⁰ The motive of composing the *Martyrdom of Anastasia* was to make the community to remain firm in faith even in the context of trials and tribulations. The work also reflects the intention of St Chavara to instill the value and importance of suffering to the faithful, which might have been less visible among them. Through this work he tried to

³⁹Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 252.

⁴⁰Benny Paul Thettayil, "St. Chavara, A Father of the Eastern Church: Biblical and Theological Perspectives," *Herald of the East, Dharmaram Journal of Chavara Studies* 12,1 (January-June 2016): 3-24.

enrich the virtues of faith and fortitude in the minds of those who were led by the evils of the world.⁴¹

Ecologues were written with the intention of deepening the spirituality and to impart the Gospel message in young people.⁴² The emphasis in *Chavarul* about the core values as a code of conduct of Christian families,⁴³ reflects the lack of the same in the society or the laxity in practicing Christian values.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, Malayalam literature produced great writers like Kerala Varma Koil Thampuran (1845-1914), A.R. Raja Raja Varma, Kunjikuttan Thampuran (1865-1913), etc. Christian contributors include Joseph Cariattil, Thomas Paremakkal, Herman Gundert, Benjamin Baily, St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara, etc.

Portuguese and Kerala style of architecture was very common in the church buildings. The specific performing arts the Christians developed include *Margamkaali Pattu* and *Chavittunatakam* which was developed after the arrival of the Western missionaries.⁴⁴

Conclusion

St Kuriakose Elias Chavara wrote the *Chavarul* to the parishioners of Kainakary. However, it is written in the context of the society of those days taking into account the unique role of family in the social order and Christian life. The moral and spiritual degradation of the modern society as we witness today is mainly because of the decline of the moral and social values in the families. Therefore, the message conveyed by the *Chavarul*, although addressed to the Kainakary parishioners, is universally valid even today for the renewal of the family life, especially of the Christian family life. The above narrated historical context will locate the *Chavarul* in a new perspective for a better understanding of the message of *Chavarul* in the post-modern era.

⁴¹Sebastian Kalapura, "Spiritual Compositions of Chavara: Poetry Powered with Hope," *Herald of the East, Dharmaram Journal of Chavara Studies* 12, 1 (January-June 2016): 46–63.

⁴²Thettayil, "Spiritual Compositions of Chavara," 19.

⁴³Thomas Valavananickal, "The Apostolic Zeal of Chavara," 37.

⁴⁴Cfr Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 9–14.

ST CHAVARA'S CHAVARUL: HISTORICO- THEOLOGICAL CONTEXTS

Paul Pulikkan♦

St Kuriakose Elias Chavara's *Chavarul* has been a moving force in the catholic spiritual tradition of family in Kerala in the last 150 years: its legacy is attested today by the stability, prayer practices and human values, traditionally associated with the catholic family in Kerala. In this paper, our attempt is to situate *Chavarul* (written in 1868) in the broader historical, catholic theological tradition in the Modern period. As a learned church leader, Chavara would have been quite familiar with the sources of this tradition. In the introduction of *Chavarul*, he reminds his future readers that God's favours on them are also due to the true love and trust of their forefathers. Chavara wanted to bequeath this legacy to the posterity.

In writing of *Chavarul*, St Chavara seems to have been helped by his own personal study of the catholic family tradition in Europe and his personal contact with the European Carmelite missionaries of his times who were active in Kerala. There are only a few geographical references

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Pulikkan, Paul. "St Chavara's *Chavarul*: Historico-Theological Contexts." In *Vocation and Mission of the Family: Reflections on Chavarul and Amoris Laetitia*, edited by Shaji George Kochuthara, 67–81. Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2020.

in *Chavarul*. Twice it refers to France (ns 8, 19), once to Louvain (Belgium; n. 18) and once to Japan (upbringing of children n. 16). Of the personalities mentioned, besides the biblical figures of David and Jonathan, we have St Ambrose, Origen, Emperor Constantine, Philosopher Democrates, Kathon (?) (a Roman chieftain). These references show that Chavara was familiar with sources far and wide.

Theological Developments in 17th and 18th Centuries

In the first millennium, when Christianity was gradually introduced into Europe, the values such as “chastity, consecrated virginity, marital stability, the equality of the sexes before God and the value of human life, particularly of the unborn and infants” were stressed.¹ Marriage became a stable institution when the couples fulfilled Christ’s plan for them, being open to the special grace they received in the sacrament of marriage.

In the middle ages, the Christian family made a gradual evolution basing on different currents like Hellenic, Jewish, Christian, and Teutonic elements. Renaissance thinkers sharply questioned many areas of church teaching on family but significant break with the tradition occurred in Reformation, whose leaders denied the sacramental nature of the marriage bond, placing the marital contract under the state jurisdiction and permitting the divorce legislation.² The new developments in science, medicine, the age of industrialization, new insights from theology and philosophy, the new awareness of the role of women and children re-shaped the structure of the family in the 17th century.

One of the key moral factors of the 17th century catholic world was Jansenism. It was a rigorist approach towards spirituality, propounded by Cornelius Jansen (1585–1638). According to Jansenists, the soul is weighed down by the force of damnation; sacramental absolution did not remit sins but simply stated that one was forgiven, and confession was valid only if the penitent loved God perfectly. A certain perfection was necessary for the reception of the communion. Only the worthiest may partake of the Eucharist. A dichotomy between the sensual and spiritual was in effect caused by Jansenism as it downplayed the human

¹J.L. Thomas, “Family,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 5 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1967), 825–833, at 829.

²Thomas, “Family,” 829.

in the church and the world.³ Jansenists attributed their teachings to St Augustine.

The 18th century saw a vibrant Catholic Enlightenment,⁴ which was already part of a global religious revival, as a reaction to the rationalism of the previous century. The movement tried to purify from the church, superficial practices and institutions. However, many of these attempts failed in the aftermath of French revolution (1789) and absence of a strong political and ecclesiastical reaction.

St Alphonse Liguori (1696–1787), one of the greatest moralists of all time, opposed this rigorism. He led the movement within the Catholic Church that downplayed the severe condemnation of human nature which was attributed to the Augustinian teaching, and accepted a more optimistic view of human nature. Besides his voluminous contributions in pastoral and spiritual theology, Liguori developed his moral teaching for the use of the religious and priests engaged in pastoral ministry and to be of help in the confessional. His *Theologia moralis*, which ran into 82 editions, is a monumental work in catholic moral theology.

The theology Liguori confronted was a French upper class ideology, influenced by Jansenism and one that stressed individual devotion at the expense of collective spirituality. “It privileged the internal light of reason over external authority and denigrated the sensual in favour of quiet reflection and meditation.”⁵ It is in this background when a clear sign of spiritual solace was lacking for the *common people*, that Liguori pleaded that Eucharist—the deposit of eternal happiness—be provided to them. As against Jansenists, Liguori carefully stated that for the reception of the Eucharist, one needed to be in the state of grace, with a vibrant desire to grow in love for Jesus Christ.⁶ He believed that this would be possible only by the easy and frequent reception of the Eucharist. This was a time, when one also notes the tendency from the Enlightenment moral philosophers to separate morality from revelation and church, as they focused on the role of conscience. It was here that Liguori firmly grounded the place of the institutional church in the

³B. Matteucci, “Jansenistic Piety,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 7, 824–826.

⁴Michael Printy, “The Intellectual Origins of Popular Catholicism: Catholic Moral Theology in the Age of Enlightenment,” *The Catholic Historical Review* 91, 3 (2005): 438–461, 441.

⁵Printy, “The Intellectual Origins,” 444.

⁶Printy, “The Intellectual Origins,” 445, fn 21.

ethical life of the common people. According to Liguori, the principal effect of the sacrament is to ignite the flame of the holy love of God—and this *lex caritatis* was for Liguori the supreme law of his moral system. Liguori's practical approach is seen in this maxim *God is charity*. This virtue helps us control our behaviour and inclinations. By this law, the individual conscience is called to order. Liguori adds that for this charity to be effective, the sacramental apparatus of the Catholic Church is needed.⁷

How did Liguori's moral approach affect popular spirituality? Liguori is known for his theory of equiprobabilism: when there are two equiprobable opinions, one favouring the law and the other liberty, one is free to make his own decision. Liguori affirmed the moral value of human liberty. Human person, created in the image of God, imitates his Creator in doing good freely.⁸ Liguori called for a gentle approach towards the Confessional and believed that it should help believers to receive Eucharist, the true medicine. His works, especially *Theologia moralis*, focused on the role of individual conscience, linking it to the sacraments. The rigorist approach in moral theology would be denying the spiritual solace and way to salvation to thousands of ordinary people.⁹ Gradually, the popular religiosity that linked Confession, Eucharist and moral life was accepted in the universal church. As a great moralist and as a key inspirer of the Eucharistic and Marian devotions, Liguori could be said to be the architect behind the spiritual/moral reform of his time and later of 19th century. The spiritual revival, made possible with the treatises of Liguori, continued in the Catholic world, as by 19th century Liguorian moral theology formed the core of catholic moral theological reflection. And this would have been evidently a theological source for Chavara. We may note that in 1866, a new inter-ritual central seminary was opened at Puthenpally, meant both for Latin and the Syrian students. The formation was done according to the rules of the Congregation of Propaganda Fide, Moral theology being an important part of the curriculum.¹⁰

⁷Printy, "The Intellectual Origins," 445–446.

⁸L. Verecke, "Alphonsus Liguori," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 1, 336–341.

⁹Printy, "The Intellectual Origins," 459.

¹⁰T. Puthiakunnel, *Syro-Malabar Clergy and their General Obligations* (Ernakulam: Vincentian Publishing Bureau, 1964), 80.

Marriage and Family in 17th and 18th Centuries: Sociological Changes

In the wake of industrialization of Europe, 17th century brought many changes in family and society.¹¹ The arranged marriages, normally from the same class, were still the norm. The upper classes practiced primogeniture whereby the title and most of the property were passed on to the eldest male, with a view that the family asset would not be lost by being diminished. Daughters were married off with sizable dowry whereas the younger sons were given considerable assets of different types. Among the lower classes also, marriage meant status and property. The marriage age, according to canon law, was normally fourteen for a boy and twelve for a girl, although many married only in their twenties. The social role in the marriage was important and what counted was the “abiding commitment that retained its power and authority independent of the feelings of the participants.”¹² The family was predominantly patriarchal in character and the husband had a dominating role, which was recognized by law. The divorce was generally absent, especially because of its financial implications (wife and children assisted the father in trade/ agriculture). The annulment of marriage was mainly accessible only to the aristocracy. Divorce was more permissible in the protestant countries, especially in the case of adultery and desertion.

The Role of Children

Children had few legal rights, were subjected to strong disciplinary measures at the family, school, places of work and apprenticeship. Infant mortality rate was high—even 50% in some regions and what is shocking is that many of these deaths could have been prevented. There seems to have been a “fatalistic callousness”¹³ on the sufferings of the children. Still, there were many homes for the abandoned children since many parents did not have enough means to support them. It is said, the mortality rate in these homes sometimes reached 90%. In this case, most of the children were illegitimate while the rest were not or could not be supported by the parents. Even there were deliberate infanticides

¹¹J. Hitchcock, *The Emergence of the Modern Family*, in G.W. Olsen, ed., *Christian Marriage, A Historical Study* (Crossroad: New York, 2001), 302–331.

¹²Hitchcock, *The Emergence of the Modern Family*, 304.

¹³Hitchcock, *The Emergence of the Modern Family*, 305.

in the 16th century England due to poverty. Children were generally excluded from the parents' lives. Even in aristocratic families, the children did not eat with their parents.

Increasingly, family was seen as an economic unit. While father tilled the land, the elder sons helped him in this, while the younger boys did other household duties, the wife and daughters did the cooking and other jobs in the farms. "The success of a marriage was judged less by qualities of personal satisfaction than by how efficiently the family members discharged their allotted tasks."¹⁴ As we saw, divorce was rare, as the prime concern of family was economic. Since not many reached advanced age in those times, the care of the elderly was not a grave issue. A high proportion of widows and widowers remarried especially in view of the economic dimension of the family. Many of the daughters and younger sons remained unmarried as the marriage market demanded more economic settlements which normally went to the elder ones.

Since the family was task and money oriented, love and companionship was often absent in marriage. In several cases, this led people going against the traditional teaching of the church with regard to premarital chastity and marital fidelity. Among the aristocratic families, the moral norms in this regard were breached. The religious ideals of family were often attacked by the Enlightenment forces. The attempts from the church to counter these attacks in the 18th and early 19th century were minimal.

Towards the middle of the 18th century, in the marriage and family establishment, the concept of love—companionate marriage—was getting focused, together with the requirements of the family and the canon law. 18th century French monk moralist Antoine Blanchard asked husbands to treat their wives with kindness and understanding. Alphonse Liguori also called for the dimension of love as secondary end of marriage.¹⁵ Towards the end of the 18th century, personal love, emotional fulfilment and friendship characterized spousal relationships.¹⁶ At this time, children also were given separate identity, corporal punishment was declining and emphasis was given for exhortation and instruction.¹⁷ Distinctive events

¹⁴Hitchcock, *The Emergence of the Modern Family*, 307.

¹⁵Hitchcock, *The Emergence of the Modern Family*, 310.

¹⁶Hitchcock, *The Emergence of the Modern Family*, 312.

¹⁷Hitchcock, *The Emergence of the Modern Family*, 313.

such as first Holy Communion were started to mark one's progress toward adulthood. Even it is said the present 'ragging' started at the beginning of 19th century: there was harsh and bullying treatment by the elder boys to prepare the younger ones to the realities of life.¹⁸ The youth also began to rise as a group, with the increasing economic opportunities and the lessening of expression of patriarchal authority. As a result of French Revolution in 1789, the role of women was rediscovered but still within the confines of 'selfless mother.'

Family in 19th Century

Increasing Industrialization and urbanization separated the workplace and the living space. Slowly, with the ideal of domesticity, home was seen as "a comfortable and loving environment where family members preferred to spend their time and invest their energies."¹⁹ The family became a centre of spiritual strength with family devotions and prayers. Although family was still patriarchal in character, the family members were seen as equal members of the family. The family gave more importance to the ideal of chastity before marriage and fidelity during marriage, especially among the middle class. Affirming the love dimension as a key constituent of marriage and seeking that love in one single partner became the norm. And yet at the same time, easier divorce also began to set in since it was thought that "if marriage was not simply a binding contract but a mating of souls, relief had to be available to those who chose badly."²⁰ The role of women now came to be purely inside the home, being a moral guide to the children and managing the household. One also notes that the new identity of children also led some parents to look for birth control: each child was cherished and so their number had to be limited.²¹ Evidently, these changes were reflected in the life of catholic faithful also of this time.

The Revival of Catholic Family

Catholic spirituality had a revival in 19th century, after the frontal attacks resulting from the French Revolution had subsided and as we saw, it was a movement inspired by the work of Liguori. There were

¹⁸Hitchcock, *The Emergence of the Modern Family*, 313.

¹⁹Hitchcock, *The Emergence of the Modern Family*, 317.

²⁰Hitchcock, *The Emergence of the Modern Family*, 317.

²¹Hitchcock, *The Emergence of the Modern Family*, 321.

two elements in this renewal.²² 1. The renewed thrust for the ministry at the diocesan and parish levels, led by bishops and clergy, supported by missionary orders of both men and women and their active preaching. 2. Besides the normal obligatory practices, there was an upsurge in the participation in pilgrimages, devotions to the Blessed Sacrament, participation in catholic lay associations, etc. The Marian devotion was the crowning of this popular religiosity and the Marian apparitions of the century (e.g. La Salette in 1846, Lourdes in 1858) were seen by the believers as a rebuke to the secularism of Enlightenment rationalism and the liberal attitudes of the catholic humanism.

Family and the Rights of the Church

Together with this revival, the 19th century is also marked with Ultramontanism, which was both a tendency to be freed from the interventions of the liberal state and to be based on the centralized church authority—the papacy. In this century, the church highlighted marriage with equal rights for both partners. The tendency to keep marriage in the purview of State and denying it the sacramental character, was strongly criticized by the *Syllabus of Errors* (1864) of Pope Pius IX and later by *Arcanum divinae sapientiae* of Pope Leo XIII (1880). In the *Syllabus of Errors*, the claims of the State against Christian marriage and family (ns. 66–74) were strongly opposed by the Church. While it denied the State the right to dissolve the sacramental marriage, certain impediments that the State placed for marriage were accepted also by the Church: e.g. minimum age, family ties, etc.²³ The *Syllabus of Errors* opposed the idea “that domestic society or the family derives the whole principle of its existence from the civil law alone; and, consequently, that on civil law alone depend all rights of parents over their children, and especially that of providing for education.”²⁴ The chief errors condemned were those that denied the sacramental character of matrimony restricting the sacramental aspect to a mere blessing (No. 66), that denied the indissolubility of marriage bond, and that which stated that the State could allow divorce in the strict sense (No. 67). The document also opposed the idea that only civil authority had the right to state diriment matrimonial impediments and that those determined

²²Printy, *The Intellectual Origins*, 442.

²³Hitchcock, *The Emergence of the Modern Family*, 321.

²⁴W.F. Hogan, “Syllabus of Errors,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 13, 854–856.

by the Church were based on the power received from the State (Nos. 68, 69). Later, in *Arcanum divinae sapientiae*, Leo XIII praised marriage as a companionship in which the husband ruled but the wife was not a servant.

Another important feature at the close 18th century family is its pursuit of privacy.²⁵ The village communities and larger households' intervention in the affairs of the married couples steadily declined. It is said, in the earlier construction of the house, while one room directly opened to another, now the corridors began to be built whereby the personal room was shut for the outsiders. Increasingly, screens and curtains were used. Now the marriage ceremonies ceased to be public ones and the wedding dinner was combined to a selected few. 'Home was valued as a refuge from a cruel world.'

J. Hitchcock observes:

Thus already by about 1825 the major contours of modern family life were discernible: spouses freely chosen according to romantic expectations..., an ideal of spousal friendship and mutual personal fulfilment, the separation of work from home, clearly separated spheres of activity for wives and husbands, tender solicitude for children and responsibility for their upbringing, a modified idea of patriarchal authority.²⁶

Christianity did play a significant role in all these developments. Evidently, we can notice that these values and practices have influenced St Chavara as we reflect on *Chavarul*.

The Missionary Education in Kerala

We may also remember that Chavara lived and worked during the British Raj in the Victorian era (1837-1901). At a time when the English royal family itself was in moral disarray—Victoria's predecessor William IV did not have a child by his wife but had 10 by his mistress—, the nineteen year old princess queen Victoria wanted to restore values to family and public society. The aristocracy however sneered at the middle class Victorian standards of respectability—premarital chastity, fidelity to the husband, passionate love between the couples, endearing attitude to the children and a great concern for respectable image.²⁷ Although Victorian age has been criticized as

²⁵Hitchcock, *The Emergence of the Modern Family*, 322.

²⁶Hitchcock, *The Emergence of the Modern Family*, 322.

²⁷Hitchcock, *The Emergence of the Modern Family*, 324

puritanical and hypocritical, often disregarding the inner feelings and struggles, it was known for its stability, moral rectitude, fidelity, etc. in family.²⁸ These values were transmitted in the many schools that the English protestant missionaries started in Kerala.

The pioneer of English education in Kerala was William Thobias Ringeltaube, a German native who came with London Missionary Society to India in 1803.²⁹ His educational enterprise was started at Miladi, near Nagercoil, part of the Travancore kingdom in 1806. The institution admitted all students without any caste or religious distinction at a time when racial and religious bigotry was ruling the Kerala society. The traditional *Gurukula* education catered only to the rich upper class. Despite the opposition from this elite group, Ringeltaube set up six such schools in Nagercoil. Slowly the children of the upper class also began to join these schools.

Ringeltaube's educational system was not merely a religious one. English literature, Health and Hygiene, Family budget, Child upbringing, History and Moral Science were topics in his school, which incorporated also Vedic and biblical teachings. The girls' education was started in 1819 by Mrs Charles Mead, wife of illustrious protestant missionary Charles Mead. The couple started 50 schools in Travancore (only by 1870, Government started schools for girls). Lessons on family life, sewing, embroidery, mat knitting and basket making were also taught there and the products were sent to foreign countries.³⁰

In 1817, the Travancore government itself adopted the missionary model in education. According to the royal decree of Queen Gouri Parvathi Bhai, schools were set up in every village of the kingdom. Two teachers were appointed in each of this school, teaching Malayalam, Mathematics and Astrology.

However, the educational facilities were reserved to the upper castes till 1870. The children of lower castes were denied admission in government schools, as the whole society was ruled by the Brahmin (higher caste) aristocracy. With the help of protestant missionaries, education slowly spread to the people of low castes. While Brahmins regarded English as of lower quality, the Muslims thought of

²⁸Hitchcock, *The Emergence of the Modern Family*, 325.

²⁹K. Kumbalakuzhi, "Christian Contribution to Education," *Eastern Journal of Dialogue and Culture* 1, 2 (2008): 54–61, 55–57.

³⁰P. Bhaskaranunni, *Pathompatham Noottantile Keralam* (Kerala in the 19th Century) (Thrissur: Kerala Sahitya Akademi, 2012), 1073.

Malayalam as an inferior language.³¹ For the Syrian Catholics, English education was discouraged. The missionaries in fact thought that one who desired to learn English language ‘was not led by the right spirit.’³² But the missionaries allowed it for the Latin Catholics!

Christian schools were different from other schools in that they also focused on social customs and job opportunities.³³ As the Kerala historian K.P. Padhmanabha Menon states in *Kochi Rajya Charithram*, the advent of English education inaugurated in the erstwhile Kerala society a thirst for modern ideas, “a development of intellect and mind, dissatisfaction with the current state of things and a questioning of fatalistic attitude.” Among the contribution of the British, what was considered foremost was the insistence on pursuit of justice irrespective of any personal consideration; other values were: freedom of mind, patriotism, persistence and punctuality, and abandoning of many superstitious practices.³⁴ The untouchability and the social evils were strongly resisted by the missionary schools.

At Mannanam, St Chavara started in 1846 a Sanskrit learning centre and in 1864, a Malayalam school. Remarkably, in 1865 when he was appointed the Vicar General of the Malabar vicariate (Varapuzha), he issued a historic order in consultation with the Vicar Apostolic Msgr Bacinelli, to all Catholic churches that schools must be set up along with churches, in the absence of which that community will not be allowed to organize as a parish.³⁵ He followed this measure with two more circulars. Chavara wrote to Baccinelli:

The Protestant missionaries have already started schools at many places. However, the Syrian Christians are yet to get the benefits of modern education. It is my dream to give good education to the Syrian Christians of Kerala, as well as the other people—basic education for all; higher education for at least a few. If people learn English, it would open a wider world for them.³⁶

³¹Bhaskaranunni, *Patthompatham Noottantile Keralam*, 1076.

³²C. Paingott, *Kerala Sabha Pathompatham Noottantil* (Kottayam: OIRSI, 1977), 128.

³³Bhaskaranunni, *Patthompatham Noottantile Keralam*, 1087.

³⁴As quoted in Bhaskaranunni, *Patthompatham Noottantile Keralam*, 1235.

³⁵K. Kumbalakuzhi, “Christian Contribution to Education,” 58.

³⁶Benoy P. Jacob, *Multifaceted Life of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, in *Light on the Burnt Horizon, Chavara the Reformer Saint*, ed. J. Mannarathara (Viva Books, New Delhi: 2015), 5–30, at 23.

This was the inauguration of the cultural and social renaissance that St Chavara inaugurated among the Catholics of Kerala, and evidently in this and in the imparting of moral and ethical formation, he was inspired by the protestant missionaries. It is a paradox that only lately and reluctantly, Chavara's role in the Kerala Renaissance is acknowledged by the secular public.

When *Chavarul* was written, the Kerala society had seen a decline in family relationships. Customs like *sambandham* (brahmin's marriage with Nair woman without any obligations; she has no rights whatsoever) and polyandry were common.³⁷ In *Chavarul*, wife and mother are given equal status as husband and father (n. 9). This was a time when women's role was never seen as equal, both in family and society. Chavara taught that women should be honoured in the family and society for a sound family life. He pioneered women's emancipation, "declaring their right to a life of spirituality, abstinence and service to society."³⁸ Opening the Sanskrit school is seen as a first step taken by Chavara in Indianizing Christian community and church. Chanting twilight prayers (*sandhya namam*), the use of prayer beads (*japamala*), yearly retreats, etc. which he promoted indeed have some parallels in Hindu practice also. M.G.S. Narayanan says that Chavara laid the groundwork for social reform of noted Hindu leader Sri Narayana Guru.³⁹

Social leaders saw that the caste discrimination was a hindrance to society's progress. Decades later, in a speech in 1910, Sir Chettur Sankaran Nair, the President of the Indian National Congress (the only Keralite to hold the post) stated:

There is no reason to think that truth, politeness, sincerity, courage, etc. depended on racial superiority. Cleanliness and action depend on with whom one dwells and the circumstances. When you see that the missionaries appoint people of lower caste in important places, after giving them education, one cannot even say that the higher castes have better aptitude than lower castes in education.⁴⁰

³⁷H. Mohammed, "Directives for Families: A Sociological Approach," in *Light on the Burnt Horizon, Chavara the Reformer Saint*, ed. J. Mannarathara (New Delhi: Viva Books, 2017), 290.

³⁸M. Raghaviah, "A Saint's Vision of a Model Family," in *Light on the Burnt Horizon, Chavara the Reformer Saint*, ed. J. Mannarathara, 301–302.

³⁹M.G.S. Narayanan, "Precursor of Reformist Movements," in *The Life and Legacy of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, ed. J. Mannarathara, 37–41.

⁴⁰Bhaskaranunni, *Patthompatham Noottantile Keralam*, 1088.

Nair added that what counts in the admission of a student to school is one's cleanliness and character and not his caste; one even does not ask the caste of pulaya when he is converted into Christianity or Islam.

Pastoral Persuasion and *Chavarul*

19th century catholic family life involved pastoral and parental persuasion in the affairs of their children, especially in the choosing of vocation.⁴¹ In France, with the help of several edicts and decisions from the Kings and parliaments, "parents could determine children's future, not only through informal pressures and social expectations but also through legal procedures."⁴² On the other hand, the catholic doctrine, especially in the Council of Trent in 1563, opposed the parental intervention in the choosing of one's state of life—whether religious or married. In this complex situation, the pastors and devotional writers of this time sought a balance between the liberty of young men and women to choose a state and the familial authority. St Francis de Sales (1567-1622), following the *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius of Loyola, would develop "prayer, deliberation and consultations, followed by a prompt and confident choice" in this decision process.⁴³ Subsequently, a series of vocation discernment advice literature appeared in western spirituality, which was prevalent till 19th century.⁴⁴ Parents were asked not to intervene in the vocation decision of their children if such intervention was caused by avarice, ambition or their personal attachment to children. For the spiritual good of the children, "true parental and filial love demanded putting divine love first."⁴⁵ At the same time, all decisions, especially regarding vocations, were taken with the help of parental counsel and with filial respect.

The Catholic reform ideals also called for children's freedom to choose a state of life. Reform efforts must include all members of the church and this would be possible only if laity, clergy and religious would embrace alike the states to which God called them.⁴⁶ And yet, the reform also allowed that parents were brought to a process of discernment on the

⁴¹C.J. Lane, "Vocational Freedom, Parental Authority and Pastoral Persuasion in Seventeenth Century France," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 69, 4 (2018): 768–784.

⁴²Lane, *Vocational Freedom*, 769.

⁴³Lane, *Vocational Freedom*, 771–772.

⁴⁴Lane, *Vocational Freedom*, 774.

⁴⁵Lane, *Vocational Freedom*, 778.

⁴⁶Lane, *Vocational Freedom*, 782–783.

vocation of their children; “parents would be a help, rather than a hindrance if they cooperated in following right principles.”⁴⁷

Chavara uses the method of pastoral persuasion amidst different claims and challenges so that discernment is made by the parents and elders, leading to a good stable Christian family. Although in some places *Chavarul* tends to be authoritarian and paternalistic, giving much less room for the concerns of children, Chavara seems to follow middle path in the art of pastoral persuasion. He advocates a clear role for the parents.

Children are sacred treasures entrusted to you by God Almighty. You should also remember that these are the souls that Jesus Christ has entrusted in your hands to sanctify them... and to offer them back to Him on the Day of Judgement. If any of the children were to be lost in hell due to the fault of their parents, what a serious hindrance will it be for their salvation (II part, n. 1).

At the same time, Chavara calls for a balanced approach in bringing up the children. “Both extreme strictness and too much leniency towards children are evil. While too much affection will make them proud, excessive anger and punishment will lead to lack of trust, shamelessness and intellectual incompetence in them” (n. 9). Chavara endorses a ‘democratic style of parenting.’⁴⁸ Regarding the vocational choice of the children, Chavara has followed the ideals of the traditional doctrine and Catholic reform: the ultimate choice would be by the children themselves. “When they come of age, children should be given full freedom to choose their state of life. For, it is God who resolves on their state of life and it is the responsibility of the children to make the right choice; it is not the prerogative of the parents” (n. 14). Chavara insists that children’s consent must be sought before marriages are arranged; the decision about the state of life should not be delayed for boys when they are at sixteen (latest eighteen) and for girls at fourteen (latest sixteen).

Conclusion

Chavarul, an important contribution in the moral teaching of the 19th century Kerala, must be seen as an integral part of the Kerala Renaissance. Being open to the insights in moral theology, sociology and church history, Chavara reflected on the chief values that build up

⁴⁷Lane, *Vocational Freedom*, 783.

⁴⁸A.C. Rajaratnam, *Invaluable Insight*, in *Light on the Burnt Horizon*, ed. J. Mannarathara, 295-299.

the family: unity in family, humility, industriousness, sense of justice, role of conscience, responsible upbringing of children, etc. Sacraments, devotions, especially those to Eucharist and Mary, family prayer, etc. remained the basis of a good family for him.

Later, possibly inspired by *Chavarul*, St Euphrasia (1877-1952)—belonging to the Congregation of Mother of Carmel, founded by St Chavara—wrote a letter to her niece Kochumary in 1945 on family values. In the letter, dated 6.11.1945, Euphrasia exhorts her to grow in “humility, patience, obedience, justice, truth, honesty, love, carefulness in the living of the commandments, growth in the (devotion) to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Holy Mother.”⁴⁹ She advises Kochumary how to be a good wife, how to win over the difficulties and to get reconciled with husband. Again, Chavara’s final testament to the family would have inspired St Mariam Thressia (1876-1926) who dedicated her life for the uplift of the families in the beginning of 20th century Kerala and many others who worked for the renewal of family in the past century.

Chavarul is the result of what St Chavara learned from his surroundings, theological tradition, personal intuitions and intense prayer life.⁵⁰ Chavara worked hard for the church, the congregation and the public society. He recommends the same level of industriousness in family life.⁵¹ *Chavarul* is a fine example where Chavara wanted to strengthen the family life of Catholics, both elders and children. It was a first initiative in family counselling and parenting. He wanted them to learn not only from the Catholic moral tradition and practice, but also from the surrounding missionary models of Christian education. Using the art of pastoral persuasion, he exhorted parents and children to be faithful to Church and to fulfil their moral obligations to society through a stable family life. His enlightening words on family values are still valid after 150 years, and *Chavarul* can still be one of the sure foundations of contemporary family.

⁴⁹Sr Cleopatra, ed., *Mother Euphrasia Letters* (Trivandrum: Carmel Pub. House, 2013), 353–354.

⁵⁰On Chavara’s ideals of prayer, cfr P. Pulikkan, “The Path of Pilgrim and the Carmelite Spirituality,” in *Herald of the East* 1, 2 (2006): 35–40; Cfr J. Pathrapankal, An Iconoclast in his Own Right, in J. Mannarathara, *The Life and Legacy of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 234–241, 239.

⁵¹Jancy James, “A Precious Source of Reference and Assurance,” in *The Life and Legacy of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, ed. J. Mannarathara, 134–140, 137.

ST KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA'S VISION OF THE FAMILY IN *CHAVARUL*

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He loved his own people while on earth. When it was time to leave his own, he gave them some insightful and practical teachings addressed to and centred on family. In his own words, "I am leaving this document for you in my own handwriting. This script will live even after I am dead."¹ Years rolled by and time changed, but family still remains the major concern. "Don't you realize that the family throughout the world is in crisis? The family is the basis of society! Don't you realize that the youth don't want to marry? Don't you realize that the fall of the birth rate in Europe is to cry about?"² These words of Pope Francis on 26 April 2016 should not surprise us as we see that some of these concerns were addressed, and as preventive measures a few guidelines were given by St Chavara 150 years back. The letter,

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¹Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Chavarul: Testament of a Loving Father* (1868), trans. Saju Chackalackal (Kochi: Chavara Central Secretariat, 2018), 7. Hereafter, *Chavarul*.

²Pope Francis' in-flight interview from Lesbos to Rome, available at <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/full-text-of-pope-francis-in-flight-interview-from-lesbos-to-rome-97242>

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widely known as *Chavarul*, were written to the faithful of his native parish and through them to the entire humanity. "This insightful and down-to-earth document, surprisingly, the first of its kind in the known history of the Church, offers practical direction to families in leading a God-fearing as well as socially commendable life."³ Much more than taking his practical guidelines as solutions, we should look into the vision of the family he had in mind.

Among number of official Church documents related to Family in modern times, starting with Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae: On Christian Family* and culminating in *Amoris Laetitia* of Pope Francis, which speaks about the vision of family in the changing scenario and time, the words of Chavara seem to resemble many of the ideas found in them. The significance and authenticity of *Chavarul* comes from the fact that it is a contextual, comprehensive, prospective and Catholic vision of the family that Chavara would want to see as a prophet in every time, more importantly in our time. Today when we read *Chavarul* we understand better the problems of our time, and when we analyse the symptoms of the present crises in our families in India, we truly understand the vision of family in the *Chavarul*. Further, the renewal of the Church and society, in the vision of Chavara, depends on the revitalization of the families which was a major concern for him.

Chavara: Champion of Families—In the True Sense!

We have many saints in the list of declared patron saints for the family.⁴ Some of them are patrons either because of their struggles for the good of the family while others are because of their past, treacherous lives in the family context. If St Chavara could be a patron of family, that is highly fitting, yet, it is not because of any of these reasons, but solely for his vision of the family that we find in the *Chavarul*. He was a man who had great devotion and filial attachment to

³<http://lightoftruth.in/column/saint-chavara-champion-families/>, accessed on 2/10/2018.

⁴St Joseph, the foster father of Jesus, St Francis of Assisi, St Maximilian Kolbe are conventionally considered patrons of families. We have St Eugene de Mazenod as the patron saint of dysfunctional families, and St Leonidas of Alexandria, St Nicholas of Flüe, St Vladimir of Kiev, St Margaret of Scotland, St Dagobert II, Blessed Dorothy of Montau, Blessed Ivetta of Huy, St Adelaide of Burgundy and St Clotilde as patrons of large families.

the Holy family and the name he took at the time of his first profession in the congregation as Kuriakose Elias Chavara of Holy Family attests to it. Even on his death bed, while giving advice to the members of the congregation, showing the picture of the Holy Family he said,

My parents taught me to keep the Holy Family always in my mind and to honour them throughout my life. As I had always the protection of the Holy Family I can tell you with confidence that I have never lost the baptismal grace. I dedicate our little Congregation and each of you to the Holy Family. Always rely on Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Let the Holy Family reign in your hearts.⁵

Further, the only desire he expressed to his dear ones of his native parish was to not just remember him or what he was, but to read and practice the guidelines, namely *Chavarul*, given to them.

This is my last testament given to you, my siblings and family members, and children both in the order of spirit and flesh. Let this be a mark of the fact that you are my successors. The countless favors God has bestowed upon you are not entirely due to your meritorious lives but earned also by the true love and trust of your forefathers. Hence, you must ensure that you do not lose it! Do remember that I came into this world and that I left it by copying this testament by, as many as possible, to preserve and perpetuate it in your homes. Keep the original locked in a box in the chapel. On the first Saturday of every month, all of you shall come together and read it; this shall be a commemoration (*Chavarul*, 7–8).

To express such a desire is in no way selfish as there is nothing in it to show his contribution or greatness; I would deem it as prompting of the Spirit as the power his script enables every reader or family to stand firm amidst all adversities of life. Subash Chandran, one of the most read contemporary writers of Malayalam literature with unique accreditation writes:

I am not sure whether there was the *Chavarul* among the list of miracles that were sent to Rome for the process of his canonization. We may tend to think that it may be a little miracle like the healing of the diseased. But

⁵Valerian C.D., in his biography of St Chavara in Malayalam, *Malankara Sabhamathavinte Oru Veera Santhanam, Athava Divyasree Kuriakose Eeliasachan* (Mannanam, 2012 [2nd ed.]), 315; Leonard Moolayil in *Positio*, 548 cited in Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2008), 208, 390–91.

I do firmly believe what makes St Chavara different from other saints are his wondrous deeds like the *Chavarul*.⁶

The reason behind Chavara's wish that the parishioners read and practice *Chavarul*, presumably was because he knew the conditions of families in general and of his native parish, in particular. He deemed it unfortunate to have no peace and unity in the families which would eventually lead to quarrels, destruction and death which, in turn affects the Church too. He equally considered it blissful to have a family where peace and love blossoms.⁷ It is with this intention that he, in a spirit of prayer and discernment and yearning for 'God's light and peace,' invited family members to cultivate love, order, and peace, even if that would call for sacrificing personal convenience and comfort.⁸ He firmly believed that under heaven, there is only one place like heaven where one can experience the joy of love: "The only sweet consolation for a person experiencing trials and difficulties in this valley of tears is the membership and life in a family where love, order and peace reign" (*Chavarul*, 9). Being a member of a family and living as one, is a bliss.

Chavara's Vision of a Christian Family Life

Chavara, being an unmarried man, giving guidelines for the renewal of families and for the faith formation of children may be frowned upon by some of us today. However, in spite of his indubitable contribution in the field of education and social reform, he would be remembered more for his vision of Christian family in the context, found articulated in the small book *Chavarul*. He wrote these guidelines in the light of Christian faith, in the light of Gospel values and his own experiences as a pastor with certain issues and challenges of families that is undoubtedly and irrefutably practical wisdom for the smooth functioning of families, even in our time. It is this practical wisdom that makes Chavara more relevant in the context of the renewal of families in our context. He firmly believed that consolidation of family is important

⁶Subash Chandran, "This Page shall Not Perish," in *Light on the Burned Horizon: Chavara, the Reformer Saint*, ed. J. Mannarathara (New Delhi, Viva Books, 2017), 307.

⁷For this reason, Chavara codified *The Testament of Loving Father* as a practical guideline in forty paragraphs: part one having twenty-four paragraphs or guidelines and part two with sixteen.

⁸Saju Chakkalackal, *St Chavara, Champion of Families*, <http://lightoftruth.in/column/saint-chavara-champion-families/>, accessed on 1/10/2018.

for a good parish and for a good society for which he thought some rules and norms are inevitable. This rule of conduct or guidelines were not of legalistic nature, but more like the guidance of a compassionate priest, who seemed to be an embodiment of a loving father, caring mother and good shepherd. Families are not made on conditions and mutual legal agreement, but are embodiments of certain values that are always in a dynamic process, therefore, never outdated. This dimension was equally emphasized and acknowledged as something unique to Indian family structure and organization by Pope John Paul II, so that certain values become the sustaining force for families. He stated,

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.⁹

Chavara realized that family is not anything readymade nor dropped from heaven as ideal, but has to be formed in a process of loving. He played the role on behalf of the Church to help the families to grow and mature in the ability to love and celebrate themselves. This role that he played has become a pastoral paradigm that resonates in the words of Pope Francis, “People grow in holiness, and the Church must be there to give them a helping hand rather than turn them away because they have not attained some degree of perfection” (*Amoris Laetitia*, 325). In this regard, Chavara, as a loving and caring pastor, was already a practitioner of what Pope Francis called for, namely, making compassion, love, mercy and solidarity as a true way of life and making it a rule of conduct in our relationships with one another.¹⁰

A good or ideal family is not a closed family, but is an open and close-knit one. Though the love between the couple is exclusive, the family remains a Christian family only to the extent it is inclusive that it

⁹John Paul II, *The Pope Speaks to India* (Bombay: St. Paul’s Publications, 1986), 117–118.

¹⁰Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the celebration of the 49th World Day of Peace, 1 January 2016, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20151208_messaggio-xlix-giornata-mondiale-pace-2016.html, accessed on 31/09/2018.

ever grows both numerically and in its nature. For Chavara, it is the place where “members live together by the bond of blood and affection, duly respecting and obeying the parents, walking peacefully before God and people, seeking eternal salvation according to each one’s proper state of life” (*Chavarul*, 9). We do not see such a rich and comprehensive definition of family in the Church documents until the 20th century. Moreover, the emphasis is not on the structuring of the family, but on love/affection, the uniting factor and the basis of life together in the family that leads to communion. As the family grew larger, involving grandparents, relatives, friends, neighbours, the local community and so on, he presumed, there could be shattering factors that affect the unity and peace of the family. Therefore, he prescribed antidotes in the form of 24 directions and 16 precepts in the *Chavarul* like, ‘don’t go to court before trying other amicable and Christian means’ (2); forgiving the shortcomings of others (1); ‘not engaging in gossiping (3); not going around the houses of others and monger news about them (9); ‘not letting all sorts of people freely move about in houses and not making house a place for indecent talk’ (7, 10); unchristian behaviours and unchristian criticism of others’ (10).

The vision of *Chavarul* encompasses four perspectives of Catholic families that would be inevitable, if they are to be called catholic in the proper sense.

Family as a Basic Factor

Truly, *Chavarul* is all about family. It is addressed to, centred on and aimed at family. It is possible to divide the guidelines into two groups/sections: the former deals with the characteristics and mode of conduct of a good family and the latter exclusively deals with a spiritually balanced and morally healthy upbringing of children. Invariably, all of them pertain to various aspects of catholic family that evinces that family is a basic factor. “St Chavara considered family as the basic factor of the Church and society.”¹¹ His experience of love in his own family, the ever cherished atmosphere he enjoyed at family helped him to form a right concept of family which is gradually developed into wider horizons like the first school he attended, the parish Church he went to, the seminary for his formation, and the places

¹¹A.M. Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2008), 490.

of his ministry after the ordination.¹² What he envisaged of and worked for was not a one-sided view of family in terms of salvation of souls alone, but he had an integral vision of a Christian family that pays adequate attention to its social, spiritual and interpersonal dimensions. Today when we are taught to see family as “the Church in miniature” and to call the Church itself the “family of God,”¹³ we cannot, but acknowledge the great role Chavara ascribed to family in the Church. For him, renewal of the Church begins with the renewal of families.

The Place of a Family in the Redemptive Plan of God

Family is founded on the created order—that is what the very first chapters of the book of Genesis show forth (Gen 1:26–28, 2:18, 21–24). The vocation to family is written in the very nature of man and woman—to be part of it, to enhance and to enliven it. The faith that every family is a created reality on the created order gets full meaning only when Jesus Christ becomes to its members the saviour, who in turn, would make use of them as an instrument of his own saving, redeeming work on behalf of humanity.

Catholic families are Christ-oriented. According to Chavara, the essential worth of a family consists in holiness and fear of God (*Chavarul*, 25). Such families will manifest due consideration for dignity and reverential treatment of members, though they play different roles or belong to societies labelled today as patriarchal or matriarchal. In line with what we read in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, *Chavarul* talks of responsibilities, rights and duties in a very concrete and contextual way. “For the common good of its members and of society, the family necessarily has manifold responsibilities, rights, and duties” (CCC 2203). What Chavara mentions of as very practical even in our changed milieu, could be categorized as responsibilities and duties towards God, towards parents, children, neighbour and above all, the duty of setting good examples as catholic families. However, we do not see any mention of conjugal responsibilities and rights.

¹²Thomas Mampra, “Chavarul of Chavara: A Precious Gift to Families,” *Vinayasadana: Dharmaram Journal of Psycho-Spiritual Formation* 9, 2 (July 2018): 8.

¹³William J. Levada, *The Family in the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20060707_levada-valencia_en.html, accessed on 14/10/2018.

Taking into consideration the concerns or movements of our time, at least from certain corners of the globe, to abandon or overturn the idea of family based on the created order, ratified by the explicit revelation of God, Chavara does not seem to accept anything like that. All his guidelines envisage a lifestyle that is in tune with the teachings of the Church and keeping fear of God as the most important quality which would eventually result in the right formation of conscience and character.

The Role of Family in the Mission of the Church

While elucidating the role of family in the mission of the Church, *Familiaris Consortio* calls upon families to become what they are; namely, to become authentic persons fitting to their role and status in the family (FC 17). Further, it underlines that "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" (FC 17). The task and challenge of the family is to have love as the point of departure and reference point for everything it does. In tune with it, we see that the primary task among the fourfold tasks of the family is forming a community of persons. That is possible when love becomes the principle for everything one does as husband and wife, as parents and children, as relatives and neighbours (FC 17, 18).

When Chavara gives mandate for the families and the domestic Church, love gets primacy, and forgiveness, generosity, and bearing the shortcomings of others as cognate values become inseparable from love. The very first mandate of *Chavarul* highlights the need for practicing charity, generosity, and forgiveness in mutual dealings. Chavara reminds that everyone has his/her limitations, and no one is perfect. One's love should make one generous and patient enough and not to bicker about others. In bickering about others, one neither grows nor helps others to grow. When one accepts the limitations of others, he not only grows, but also helps others flourish. These ideas resonate with what we find in *Amoris Laetitia*, that love goes beyond the limitation (AL 118); love asks each one of us to accept the other person as part of this world (AL 92). This is an invitation to be loving and caring rather than be judgmental and negative. Such an attitude promises growth of communities with a communion that "will give you peace on earth and eternal joy in heaven" (*Chavarul*, 11).

The Mission of Family in Social Networking

Chavarul can be instrumental in the spiritual reformation and the renewal of the families today.

The term 'social networking' could be confusing when I give it a derivative meaning in the sense of connecting the different communities, cultures, ideals, and integrating values by way of witnessing and by setting paradigms in a changing world. This is an integral part of the new evangelization that is possible more easily in our globalized world because we find new avenues open for building relationship, reaching out to people and fast movements. Consequently, the Church, from its institutional and exclusive outlooks gets a relational and catholic dimension. Every Christian family living exemplarily among others really transmits the gospel values and radiates the love and presence of Christ. Therefore, we may conclude, "*Chavarul* can be instrumental in the spiritual reformation and renewal of the families today."¹⁴ Family, being the domestic Church, if lives the various aspects of the entire Church, keeps a vibrant relationship with her, it becomes a place where the Gospel is transmitted and from which the Gospel radiates (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 71). With added clarity *Amoris Laetitia* affirms, "family is good news indeed" (AL 1). The emphasis of *Chavarul* over good internal discipline, cultivating fear of God, moral and character formation of children, hard work and social relationships, attention to the needy, humility and justice in dealing with others and showing forgiveness at the hurts in relationships (*Chavarul*, 13, 15, 17–18, 21, 23) would facilitate every family to be a place of joy and peace, so to say, they become 'the way of the Church and become a 'human space' for encountering Christ,' (FC 49; AL 317) not only for its members, but to everyone it comes in contact with. Surely, the way *Chavarul* envisages family, where love is celebrated as communion and service as reciprocal gift, would be an effective and enriching means for social networking. Such a Christian vision of family would surely withstand the symptoms of the "culture of the ephemeral" (AL 39) and enhance the beauty of growing together and looking after one another. The precepts on daily routine and obligation over prayer life found in the *Chavarul* (29–30), are

¹⁴Benny Nalkara, "The Guidelines for the Formation of the Youth as Reflected in the *Chavarul* (*Testament of a Loving Father*) by St Kuriakose Elias Chavara," *Vinayasadhana* 9, 2 (2018): 40.

nothing other than the basics of the family spirituality advocated in Amoris Laetitia in our time (AL 223).

Parenting, Trusting and Forming in the Family

The increasing number of problems, often voiced by the parents and their inability to cope up with the situation not only shows that parenting is a herculean task but also that families are a seat where values and customs, and conventions are at stake. Unfolding of theories and studies in this domain is on the increase. Compared to earlier times, affluence is more, and better time-management is possible; but in spite of all these, something is inadequate in parenting so to say that the outcome in many cases is not satisfactory—to be specific, in forming children of good character and appreciable maturity. Chavara, may be out of his far-sightedness or intuitiveness, had a much thought after strategy in the *Chavarul* to counteract the viral affliction on the family and Christian values which could be found in the following lines. It would entail different roles to be played in the context of family both by parents and children from the very early childhood (1). Children as gift of God (*Chavarul*, 33): God has trusted the parents that a being unknown, but part of them, is given to them that they may consider him/her as their own, but nurture him/her in tune with the plan of God. Therefore, what is important is to trust them as if it is God's gift and control them less as they are part of the parents themselves—their own flesh and blood. What is implied here is that they become role models that there is less space for forceful control in terms of do's and don'ts. It would also mean that the best gift parents can give children is becoming imitable persons.

(2) Parenting is primarily not a task, but a privilege. Though it is a responsibility, it does not fall upon anyone as a burden, rather it is a privilege emerging out of one's response to the vocation one has received. The vocation parents receive is to love the other without condition that in no case respect is lost, and to anyone that love is not extinguished (*Chavarul*, 37). Even in conflicting situations, love should be the rule of law in the family that even while committing mistakes, the concern should be how love is affected (disoriented) and failed to understand (inadequacy of love) that even corporal punishment does not affect one's development but becomes corrective. Chavara advises that "before inflicting corporal punishment, prudently make the

children understand why they are being punished” (*Chavarul*, 37). Further, Chavara seems insistent on respect for God or authority as a first step for respecting others (*Chavarul*, 34) and respecting as a give and take process. Chavara was truly insightful in believing that nowhere can one learn the virtue of respect except in the family. The mutual respect of parents and their respect for children (*Chavarul*, 37) is a beginning of an art of respecting persons and things. Modern studies too attest to this fact that “the child’s respect for the authority is the single most important moral legacy that comes out of the child’s relationship with the parent.”¹⁵ Becoming only positive towards what children do, without being realistic does not seem to have any place in Chavara’s understanding of parenting. For him, true parenting is always to do with formation of right ethical conduct that life could be celebrated everywhere (*Chavarul*, 37, 38), instead of the current culture of celebrations limiting to parties, events and organized entertainments.

Chavarul Reinterpreted in our Times

The holistic and practical guidelines of *Chavarul* in the changed and changing situations could be re-read and reinterpreted to make them weightier and more effectual. For that purpose, Chavara’s contextual perspective could be seen along with our contextual concerns. Focusing on the present-day social context of India, we can postulate the following and find the relevance of *Chavarul* in our life.

1. Catholic family is not a palace, but a place where one can feel the warmth of love and care, security, and where needs are realized. Like a palace it is not a place of orders, commands, threat and fear; not a place where demands are made and getting them granted. It is a place where joys and sorrows are shared; life is taken responsibly and with faith in the divine providence; a place where its members share what one cannot bear, and bear what one cannot share.

2. In a world where money and management has become the watchword of our time, *Chavarul* evokes to develop a new lifestyle and virtue of simplicity as the hallmark of Christians. Family should help the members to learn the lessons of life management and to handle money, time and facilities prudently, that nothing is of merit, but a gratuitous gift at the service of humanity.

¹⁵William Damon, *The Moral Child: Nurturing Children’s Natural Moral Growth* (New York: Free Press, 1988), 52.

3. In a world where time matters most, and speed and promptness are considered mantra of success, family should not be seen as a time-bound enterprise, but as a process where communication, discussion, discernment and communion take priority over fast and single-head decisions.

4. On the one hand, consumeristic trends sway over us, its dynamism dazzles us, to its psychology we become a subject, and on the other hand, we, at least, come to know the dire needs of a section of people, *Chavarul* challenges everyone to practice the principle of frugality.

5. The new generation is not a problem, but our hope; they are not question marks before us, but answers to the concerns we have today. *Chavarul* demands from both the Church and families to take appropriate steps to facilitate a proactive–formative process for the new generation with an integral vision of humanity where plurality, diversity, ecology get serious attention.

6. 'Reading makes a full man.' It was our experience though it was said by the English philosopher, Francis Bacon. Chavara's advice, 'reading good books makes a good man,' should be taken to heart. As we pass through time, reading itself is on the decrease and visual interests kill time and spoils character.

7. In the light of the growing concern of the Church for the youth, parents and elders have a bigger responsibility to be more understanding, to walk with them and inculcate in them the fundamental values of family life. The process of accompaniment may make them listen more, more witnessing, to the family values and be more open.

8. Along with families, the educational institutions—the second home, and teachers, the secondary formators too have a big role to play. The future of the institutions is more important than the formation of students, it may seem at least in some cases. *Chavarul* invokes to make educational institutions centres of formation, character building and a means to build a right value system.

9. *Chavarul* may highlight a bigger role for families in the human, social and spiritual formation of the young generation. The good examples of parents, relatives and elders, their care and concern for them, prudence in controlling them, accompanying them in their struggles, supporting their initiatives, correcting them with affection and at the right time and place, would promise a generation who will have love for the family life and family values.

Conclusion

Chavarul, written in a particular context and time is valid for our time for two reasons: it is in its nature an all-inclusive set of guidelines for all, and for Chavara's far-sightedness. It is relevant for us even today in the formation and renewal of families as the concerns in the mind of Chavara, behind giving the guidelines, appear in our time, perhaps, in an aggravated form. The way it is accepted in the family circles in recent decades proves that it is a treasure and still works. Some of the values it upholds are foundational for catholic families especially in India. The admonitions of *Chavarul* would not only contribute towards a catholic family vision but also enhance stability, security, fraternity and beauty to the family life. It could also be called as the catechism of the family in short. Chavara's vision of family makes him not less a patron saint of the family. We cannot but appreciate his refined and comprehensive vision of family. While the blessings and conveniences of our time, spurred on by technology and development of skills, at times, looms like a threat to certain values and cultures of 'right living,' in view of human flourishing of all, especially causing disintegration of family, *Chavarul* gives us not only directions for families, but also provides a pastoral vision as well as a social vision that families can and should act as the sprouting grounds of gentle and genuine human persons needed for our time. For Chavara, the catholic family is a place where God reigns, not money, power, or gadgets. Family cannot be true until there is happiness in it, and it is concerned about salvation. The Christian foundations and values he projects in his vision of family will contribute to leading genuine family life and understanding its dynamics.

CHAVARUL FROM A VIRTUE PERSPECTIVE

Vimala Chenginimattam, CMC♦

Today we live in a world that seems to be indifferent to family virtues and threaten those principles that hold the family together. But being Christian we cannot negate our ultimate call to be courageous and true witnesses of virtues of the Gospels. Kuriakose Elias Chavara (1805-1871), a native of Kerala, India, was a champion of the family. He is the first canonised Catholic male saint of Indian origin and belongs to Syro-Malabar Catholic Church, an Eastern Catholic Church based in Kerala. He was born and brought up in a virtuous family; grew up as a virtuous person with a dream for Christian families as the garden of virtues. Fr Chavara's *Testament of a Loving Father—Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul—*, addressed to families of his own parish, Kainakary, delineates a set of virtues to be cultivated in a Christian family.

In this article first we will make an analytical study of the life of Kuriakose who was moulded into virtues in a God-fearing family. Secondly, we will deal with the virtue perspective in *Chavarul—The Testament of a Loving Father*.

Kuriakose Elias Chavara: A Man of Virtues

It is family formation that lays the foundation of an individual's personality. When we analyse the biography of Kuriakose Elias Chavara, we can easily understand that he was brought up by two families: Chavara family and the Holy Family, simultaneously. A God-fearing and loving family designed him with virtues and wisdom.

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Upbringing in Chavara Family

Fr Kuriakose Elias Chavara was born in a noble family, from exemplary parents, from whom he inherited and nurtured many natural virtues. According to Mundadan, “Kuriakose was particularly fortunate to have a very pious and devout Catholic family, a father well-grounded and firm in faith and devotion, and the mother exceptionally pious.”¹ He himself speaks highly of the exemplary upbringing he received mainly from his mother during his infancy and childhood. 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.² His mother exemplifies that a mother is the finest builder of God in a child. He sings in *Compunction of the Soul* that while he was still a little child, his mother fed him with the divine grace, and kept him at the feet of Blessed Virgin Mary offering him to her, and pleading her to accept him in her maternal love as her humble slave.³ The dedication to Blessed Virgin Mary is an example of how Kuriakose’s mother initiated him to grow in faith and basic Christian values. The seeds of virtues were sown in Kuriakose from infancy itself.

He wrote in *Compunction of the Soul*: The “very look of my mother was sufficient for me to distinguish between the right and the wrong.”⁴ According to him, the formation and disciplining of the child was not by scolding or punishments but by pouring into its heart all the love. So, his first knowledge of parents is as those who forms a child by infilling the spirit of goodness through love. Chavara has written: “A mother should show and teach how to respect and obey his father. Likewise, a father should teach how to love and respect the mother” (*Chavarul*, Part 2, no. 9). It can be assumed that these words were formed from his experience of his parents.⁵

¹Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2008), 45.

²Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Compunction of the Soul*, in *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara*, Vol. II: trans., Mary Leo (Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Bl. Chavara, 1989), 53-56

³*Compunction of the Soul*, 55-56.

⁴*Compunction of the Soul*, 83- 84.

⁵Navya Maria, *Empowered Womanhood: Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara’s Socio-Pastoral Vision for Women and the Legacy of the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2014), 13.

The future of the child is mainly determined by the way the child is loved and trained by his parents. Therefore, Parents are those who, according to Chavara, create a domestic church at home and form the child attuned to the divine will. He also learned from his family that love is the medicine to cure the wounds caused by hatred, quarrel, disobedience, etc. Thus we learn that his own family played a significant role in his formation.

Holy Family Becomes His Family

After joining the seminary, the young boy Kuriakose never met his parents and elder brother. He lost his loving parents and the only brother in an epidemic spread in that village. His relatives compelled him to discontinue the seminary studies to take care of Chavara family. Kuriakose did not accept this proposal by the relatives, but with a divine assistance, after settling all the properties and the family bonds, he returned to seminary. At that time of painful loss, he recalled what his mother taught about the Holy Family which was ever his protection and he was confident of it.⁶ This was a turning point in the life of Kuriakose; since then the Holy Family became an emotional and deeply personal experience for him. According to Chavara Christians are called to live in the Holy Family, consisting of Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

In his room he kept an image of the Holy Family till the end of his life and he had in his heart a special veneration for the Holy Family. This must have prompted him to form his famous definition of a Christian family: "A good Christian family is the image of heaven." His devotion to the Holy Family is clear in adding a phrase "of the Holy Family" along with his name on the day of his religious profession—Fr Kuriakose Elias Chavara of Holy Family.

As we have seen above, these two families together formed this man of God, Fr Kuriakose Elias Chavara. Let us have a close look at his virtuous life, which in turn made him fully human.

Kuriakose Elias Chavara—A Virtuous Person

Virtue ethics theories affirm that a virtuous person is someone who has ideal character traits. By taking inspiration from the father of virtue ethics Aristotle, they declare that these traits derive from natural

⁶Valerian Plathottam, *The First Indian Saint* (Mannanam: Sanjos Book Stall, 1950), 60.

internal tendencies. Yet it needs to be nurtured until it becomes established as character. As we learn from the biography of Kuriakose Elias Chavara that he had been nurtured to be a virtuous person by his parents and this 'being good' becomes intrinsic to him.

In order to understand Chavara well, I would like to read him with James F. Keenan's unique view of being virtuous. Keenan writes "being virtuous is more than having a particular habit of acting..., it means having a fundamental set of related virtues that enable a person to live and act morally well."⁷ Kuriakose Elias Chavara is a garden of virtues which capacitated him to live and act morally good. Archbishop Francis Xavier, in the context of issuing an order to appoint Kuriakose Elias Chavara as Malpan said, "I am encouraged by your virtues and efficiency, to appoint you as the examiner for all priests of the Syrian Rite under my jurisdiction and as the Malpan of all theological studies."⁸ Virtuosity of Kuriakose buds from the moral greatness of his personality. His understating of theological and cardinal virtues provides guidelines to lead a morally excellent life.

Theological Virtues in Chavara

Faith, hope, and charity are the theological virtues because they are the most important characteristics in a Christian's life, as Paul explains in Romans 5:1-5 and 1 Corinthians 13:13. They pertain to one's relationship with God. The virtue of faith enables the person to call heavenly Father as one's own father. Throughout his writings Kuriakose called God the Father and Jesus as *ente nalla appan* (my good father). His God experience led him to a constant awareness of his filial relationship with God. Chavara growing in this virtue could enter into a sacred dialogue with God.⁹ Chavara had a firm foundation in Christian faith, so that he articulated his perspectives and decisions primarily based on his personal encounter with Jesus in prayer.

Without the virtue of charity, faith and hope are imperfect virtues. The father-son relationship with God instilled in him a deep love for his fellow beings too. Hallmark of Chavara's mission on this earth is founded on the dictum "Be charitable to each other." When one finds complete trust in God, s/he will become the source of hope for those

⁷James F. Keenan, "Proposing Cardinal Virtues," *Theological studies* 66 (1995): 711.

⁸Valerian Plathottam, *The First Indian Saint*, 21.

⁹*Complete Works of Blessed Chavara*, Vol. III, *The Letters*, 40.

who are in hopeless life situations. This spirit of Chavara encouraged him to found schools (where pupils could study without any discrimination of caste and creed), charitable home for destitutes and to establish a 'confraternity for Happy Death.'

Hope is the firm expectation of a good that is possible to attain. Theology of the virtue of hope is based on three truths: God is almighty, God loves each person immensely and God is faithful to his promises. One can learn from the very life of Kuriakose that he received momentum to do his entire mission from firm hope in the Almighty. Being a young seminarian himself he chose "My Lord is my portion and cup" (Ps 16: verse?) as the motto of his life. This trust was clearly seen in the event of the foundation of the first convent: with a meagre sum of eighteen rupees he founded at Koonammavu a convent for the first religious congregation for women in Kerala.

There are many more examples in Chavara's life and mission to illustrate the beautiful blending of these theological virtues.

Cardinal Virtues in Chavara

Cardinal virtues are the habits of mind and will, that support moral behaviour, control passions and avoid sin. Cardinal virtues are prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude. They assist us to live within the moral parameters set forth by the gospel. Kuriakose Elias Chavara has given a special affirmation for moral virtues in his life and teachings. He not only worked for his personal moral uprightness but also worked as an agent for the moral development of families and society at large.

Kuriakose Elias Chavara was a prudent person in making decisions and actualising his responsibilities. For example, Fr Leopold, OCD commented like this: "As Frs Palackal and Porukara died, the young Fr Kuriakose Chavara who was among the pioneers in founding the CMI congregation—was left alone. Fr Kuriakose, however, made up for his lack of age with prudence and exemplary conduct."¹⁰ When he had to correct others, he was careful not to offend them. He professed a fourth vow—vow of humility—and was humble in all his words and deeds.

We can find in Chavara, fairness as an outstanding virtue which made his leadership more effective. He is even called the prophet of

¹⁰Cansius CMI, *Bl. Kuriakose Elias Chavara, Kerala Sabha Samudharakan*, Vol III (Kochi: The CMI General Department, 1990), 67.

justice due to his just dealing with others, especially the poor. He insisted that justice has to be followed strictly in a Christian family. He enforced regular and just wage to the workers. The prevailing practice was to make the Dalit to work for pittance of wage or a little of rice or any other food item. He tried to stop this exploitation, in such a manner as to say that postponement of payments was to be condemned as a sin (*Chavarul*, Part 1, no. 18). He maintained that God would seek revenge against persons who caused the poor to shed their tears.

St Chavara was a man of great moral strength and courage. His fervour in fighting the schism led by Mar Thomas Rocos was one of the manifestations of his heroic virtue of fortitude, to safeguard the integrity of the Catholic Church.¹¹ Fr Leopold Beccaro, OCD exclaimed: "What else could explain the courage and daring that animated Fr Chavara in his insistent fight against the schism!"¹² Fortitude strengthened Kuriakose to pursue the good of the faithful without being discouraged by fear of difficulties or dangers, even that of death.

Temperance is the virtue that perfects human's ability to act well from within oneself. Fr Kuriakose had a firm tranquillity in all adversities he faced in fulfilling various responsibilities entrusted to him. He listened to adverse criticisms gracefully. Some priests esteemed Chavara saying, "The Prior General appears as an angel." His angelic goodness inspired him to be keen on observing the spirit of obedience, love of God and devotion to his religious vows. This man of virtues, revealed at his death bed, that "By the grace of God I dare to say that... I never had an occasion to be deprived of the grace received in baptism."¹³

Kuriakose Elias Chavara was well aware of the fact that he attained personal growth and Christian commitment primarily because of the disposition that was facilitated in his family. 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.¹⁴ We shall explore *Chavarul*, which contains virtues to shape the personality of every individual in the family.

¹¹*Complete Works of Bl. Chavara*, Vol. I, Translated by P.J. Thomas (Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Bl. Chavara, 1990), 92.

¹²Valerian Plathottam, *The First Indian Saint*, 53.

¹³*The Servent of God—Fr. Kurikose Elias Chavara* (Ernakulam, 1970), 32.

¹⁴Ann Elizabeth, "Kuriakose Elias Chavara: Visionary and Karmayogi of Families," *Herald of the East* 10, 1 (2014): 120.

Virtue Perspective in *Nalla Appante Chavarul*

Today families are heading towards a major crisis: bonded by blood but mostly lack bonds of love; living together, but they lack togetherness and mutual respect; internal breakdowns, divorces, court cases and related quarrels for wealth and due to infidelity. *Chavarul* is an insightful and down to earth document, surprisingly the first of its kind in the known history of the Church. It offers practical direction to families to lead a God-fearing as well as socially commendable life. These codes for families are applicable for all ages.

Chavara, more than a century and half back, defined a good Christian family as the image of Heaven on earth, where members live together by the bond of blood and affection, duly respecting and obeying parents, living peacefully before God and people, seeking eternal salvation according to each one's proper state of life (*Chavarul* part 1) Chavara's fundamental vision of the family was to make every family an earthly replica of the heavenly kingdom. The *Testament of a Loving Father* is a collection of 24 sayings or advices of Saint Chavara for families, especially for the parents and for the children to lead a pleasant and virtuous family life. It is a practical guideline addressing three vital perspectives to be maintained in every Christian 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.

Virtues in Loving Relationships

Chavara considers that the supreme rule of a Christian family is mutual love among family members, especially between spouses, which is an imperative that determines the strength of the family. He had a deep conviction that in this world of tears, torn by pain and suffering, the greatest consolation is the "membership and life in a family where love, order and peace reign." In a family the virtue of love nurtures order and order in the family matures into the reign of peace. Kuriakose was convinced that the lack of order resulted in the destruction of many rich, famous, and respected families.

For Kuriakose, to be bound mutually in a relationship of selfless love is an inevitable basic factor for successful family life.¹⁵ If there is the

¹⁵Hafiz Mohammed, "Directives for Families: A Sociological Approach," in *The Light on the Burnt Horizon: Chavara, The Reformer Saint*, John Mannarathara (New Delhi: Viva Books, 2017), 291.

virtue of love, that family will have the grace of God. Love for another will enable the spouses to forgive the mistakes and shortcomings of each other. Those who do so will experience peace on earth and eternal reward in heaven. Kuriakose asked, if we love only those who do not harm us, what difference would be there between us and people of other faith. If parents are not loving and respecting each other, the children will do the same to the parents.

Friendships: Like a psychologist, Chavara suggested, “you don’t require many friends; but choose one carefully from among a thousand. Those who do not love God will not truly love you either” (*Chavarul*, Part 1, no. 16). According to him we have to limit the number of friends by choosing good friends so that one must be able to live in friendship with Jesus. Real friends must help us attain our fundamental option. In the second part of *Chavarul*, that is, the directives for upbringing children, Chavara instructs that parents should know about the friends of their children, because these associations can influence the formation of children’s character (*Chavarul*, Part 2, no. 6)

Social Virtues: Social virtues are those virtues to be practised by families in the society for the smooth running and moral wellness of the society. He exhorts the families to avoid litigations as nobody would be happier or better by going for court cases. Instead, according to Chavara, many families were ruined after such cases. (*Chavarul*, Part 1, no. 2). People should not get involved in the affairs of other families unnecessarily. “For, if you were to discharge your own duties well, you would not have time to peep unnecessarily into the affairs of others” (*Chavarul*, Part 1, no. 7) They are to receive to their house only those people who are well-mannered and God-fearing; as the old saying goes, “show me your friends and I will tell you who you are” (*Chavarul*, Part 1, no. 9).

Truthfulness in Economic Affairs: “Do not borrow money except in absolute necessity. If you have borrowed pay it back at the earliest” (*Chavarul*, Part I no. 4). Chavara, a man of justice, reminded businessmen that “business is risky for your soul.” It does not mean that they should not pursue business, instead, it should be carried out with due care, honesty, and justice. He warned them that “the riches accumulated by fraud and deceit will melt away like snow” (*Chavarul*, Part 1, no. 13). Chavara cautioned families that “extravagance and miserliness are both sinful” (*Chavarul*, Part 1, 15). A family’s most

important wealth is devotion to God and God-fearing children (Phil 4: 19).

Humility should be the hall mark of a Christian family. He asks people not to show off their wealth out of pride. According to Chavara, one who makes false pretensions of wealth will, sooner or later, become a beggar (*Chavarul*, Part 1, no. 5).

Virtues in the Formation and Upbringing of Children

Kuriakose was anxious not to let the joys of the family life be lost through the negligence of moral values by irresponsible parenting. He writes, "Parents, remember that it is your primary duty and responsibility to bring up your children." Children are precious gift from God and nurturing them properly is the greatest challenge to a family. Here comes the relevance of Chavara's teaching on the upbringing of children. Chavara says parents are obliged to handle their children with utmost care, dedication and commitment. Blemishing the beauty of the gift is equal to dishonouring the giver of the gift—God. Every child is like a piece of clay given by God to the parents; it is the duty of parents to form this clay into beautiful images.

It is unquestionable that children ought to be brought up as God's progeny, pious and God-fearing. Therefore, the first responsibility of the parent is to induce the virtue of faith in their children. Chavara says, "Teach them to call Jesus, Mary and Joseph, as soon as they are grown up enough to understand ..." (*Chavarul*, part 2, no. 2).

Virtue of Fortitude: Present generation is lacking the moral strength. People find very difficult to face personal or social problem. To grow in moral strength, and to face adversities with faith, children need to be trained in moral values. Chavara asked to teach children to hold truth and justice in high esteem.

Modesty: Chavara underscored the importance to be exceedingly careful to be chaste and modest in postures, whether sitting or walking, lying or playing. "Immodesty is reprehensible both before God and the world" (*Chavarul* part 1, 19). He also instructed parents to clothe children modestly and to set physical boundaries to help them develop a healthy perspective about their own bodies and about physical relationships (*Chavarul*, part 2, nos. 3, 5). This may be particularly relevant today, in preventing grave crimes like child abuse which are often unreported because often children lack the knowledge and awareness of the right kind of touch.

Fr Chavara realised that if a girl was educated, the whole family would be educated. So, he had a special care for the upbringing of the girl child in the family and insisted particularly on the modesty that girls should keep in their dealings and clothing. Girls and their body should not be considered as objects of sexual pleasure. Chavara instructed in *Chavarul* to avoid dressing up girls to attract praise and applause (*Chavarul*, part 2, no. 11). Instead, he proposed some virtues to be treasured by a Christian girl: “The most desirable ornaments for a girl are her modesty, devotion, silence and the control of her eyes” (*Chavarul*, part 2, no. 12). He says that immodesty is reprehensible both before God and the world. We need not take such strict instructions regarding girls as discrimination against them; we can understand them in the particular socio-cultural context.

Conclusion

St Kuriakose Elias Chavara can be called the patron of families in the Catholic Church. I would like to emphasise that Christian family is an abode of virtues which is called to mould virtuous persons. *Chavarul* is a loving father’s dream of an orderly family, which calls forth a harmonic domestic life. Certainly, these advices are on a par with any modern psychological and spiritual approach for a better life. Chavara was able to synergize all his temporal activities with spiritual energy that his memories continue to inspire later generations. What St Kuriakose says is quite true, because it is in the family that every virtue is planted and nurtured.

MORAL FORMATION OF CHILDREN IN *CHAVARUL*

Shiji Varghese♦

Morality means learning the difference between right and wrong or good and bad behaviour towards others. It is associated with concepts such as values, conscience and law. Parents and family are typically essential in its development because they are the primary social contacts during a person's childhood and adolescence. The wellbeing of any society is largely dependent on the moral health of its individual members. Moral decline is said to be one of the biggest problems the society faces today. The formation received from families has been a principal generator of moral strength or moral decline. This is because children learn moral values mainly within their families and mainly by relying on their parents as role models. Twenty-five years of experience as a parent and twenty-five years of my professional experience as a teacher give me the enthusiasm and confidence to discuss the relevance of *Chavarul* in family life especially in the upbringing of children.

Role of Parents and Family in the Moral Formation

Marriages and family are key structures in most societies. There is an inextricable link between the institution of marriage and that of the family because historically marriages are what create families and families are the basic building blocks of society. The family plays an important role in the moral and faith formation of children. Grandparents and other adult members of the family can influence the values and religious practices of the youngsters. The first school a child attends is his/her own home and parents are the first teachers. However,

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Varghese, Shiji. "Moral Formation of Children in *Chavarul*." In *Vocation and Mission of the Family: Reflections on Chavarul and Amoris Laetitia*, edited by Shaji George Kochuthara, 105–116. Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2020.

many of our parents are unaware of their duties as teachers and role models within their home. With the help of their conduct and behaviour they can induce strong influence on their children. Values are essential for a sound character and strong personality. At times due to their sheer negligence, a child lacks morally and ethically accepted values. The notion of what is fair is one of the central moral lessons that children learn in the family context. Certainly, no more important work is to be done in this world than preparing our children to be God-fearing, happy, honourable, productive and strong. It is the glory of parenthood. Parents can help their children to internalize a set of values that will contribute to a healthy society. So, the role of family and especially parents, in providing religious and moral values to their children is very prominent. When families are unstable, when parents are absent, emotionally distant, pre-occupied or when parents themselves are immoral, the learning of moral values by children is greatly obstructed. Parents who take seriously their commitment to raise the children according to the will of God, simultaneously serve as a sign of God's hope and Grace to other family members and their community. Families set boundaries on the distribution of resources such as food and living spaces and allow members different privileges based on age, gender and employment.

Moral Formation of Children in *Chavarul*

To strengthen the society and civilization what is needed is the strengthening of the family. St Kuriakose Elias Chavara who lived in the 19th century was always aware of this truth. For Chavara, renewal of the Church begins with the renewal of the families. What he envisages is not a view of family in terms of salvation of souls alone but an integral perspective of a Christian family that pays adequate attention to its social, spiritual and interpersonal dimensions. Today we are taught to see family as the Church in miniature and we have to acknowledge the great role St Chavara ascribed to family in our Church. Pope Francis in his ground-breaking Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* says, "The family is an absolutely essential part of the church, because after all the church is a family of families."¹ Chavara gave top priority in his ministry to the renewal and strengthening of families in the context of Christian faith. The *Testament of a Loving Father*, which he wrote was

¹Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 80.

meant to accomplish this lofty goal. This brief exhortation to the families, especially the 16 instructions in the second part contain a great deal of psychological, moral, sociological and spiritual insights of formation of children. The love and concern of a caring father is revealed in these guidelines. It defines a good Christian family as the image of 'Heaven on Earth,' where members live together by the bond of blood and affection, duly respecting and obeying parents, living peacefully before God and people seeking external salvation according to each one's proper state of life. This definition comprises all aspects of Christian family.² He believed that family is the sanctum sanctorum of a society. This bed rock of society is the abode of self-emptying and other empowering love. Since family is the basic unit of a society St Chavara was convinced that the constitution of a good family leads to the development of a healthier society and value-based nation.³ Pope John Paul II had the vision of a real mission for the family. "The family has the mission to guard, reveal and communicate love. Family communion can only be preserved and perfected through a great spirit of sacrifice." Pope Francis his successor extols "family as the foundation of co-existence and a remedy against social fragmentation."⁴

His own family played a significant formative role in the making of St Chavara. He was convinced that the experiences in one's family would decide the quality of one's life on the personal as well as the social levels—a lesson learned from his own life in the Chavara family. When we closely read the biography of St Chavara, we can easily understand that he is brought up by two families—Chavara family and the Holy family simultaneously. Pope Francis echoes this precious lesson that families should learn: "Every Family should look to the icon of the Holy Family of Nazareth" (AL 30).

Chavara considers that the intimacy and love among family members is an imperative that determines the potency of a family.⁵ 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

²Ann Elisabeth, CMC, "Kuriakose Elias Chavara, Visionary and Karmayogi of Families," *Herald of the East* 10, 1 (2014): 121.

³John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 21.

⁴Pope Francis, "Address to the Community of Varginha (Manguinhos)," 25th July 2013.

⁵Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Letters. Complete works of Blessed Chavara*, Vol. 4, 9/6, (Mannanam: KEC Publication, 1990), 103.

love, peace, charity and order.”⁶ It was the family of his loving and God-fearing parents and relatives that moulded his character and prepared him to do the noble things he acquired in his life. The seed of a virtuous life was sown in Kuriakose from infancy itself. When St Chavara defines Christian family as the image of Heaven, the significance of this idea is that at that time nowhere else we see such a comprehensive definition for family. Heaven is where God reigns—not money, power or gadgets reign. Chavara was anxious not to let the joys of family life be lost through the negligence of moral values by irresponsible parenting. He writes, “Parents, remember that it is your primary duty and responsibility to bring up your children.”⁷ Chavara repeatedly introduces children as the sacred treasure of God, entrusted to the parents.

The first responsibility of the parent is to induce virtue of faith in their children (no. 2). When God has entrusted my children in my care, I have the responsibility to give them back just like the Talents entrusted to the slaves (Mt 25:14–30). The very word parent is existing just because of our children. If we have no children, we don’t enjoy the status of parents. For a parent having children is not enough; bringing them morally strong is their primary duty.

Chavara asks parents to submit their children to the intercession of the Holy family and pray for them often (no. 1). Then he continues: “teach them to call Jesus, Mary, Joseph as soon as they are grown up enough to understand” (no. 1). In a way we should teach our children not to go away from their original father or heavenly family (no. 2). According to Chavara, from early childhood, the children should be taught step by step, their daily prayers (no. 2). But today, often we see that the parents are more concerned about providing nutritious food for the brain and body of their children than nurturing their heart and soul. Even in the dress code of children at home Chavara is very particular. He instructs that young children should not be allowed to walk around naked even inside their home (no. 3). This is necessary because children should understand from young age itself the dignity of their body and the necessity of covering it. Also, the idea that naked body may create evil thoughts in the minds of on lookers. According to the reports on crime against children in our country, 106958 cases were recorded in

⁶*Letters*, IX/6, 103.

⁷*Letters*, IX/6, 112.

2016 alone, of these 36022 cases were recorded under POCSO Act (Protection of children from sexual Offences).⁸ There are four child victims every hour, or a child is sexually abused every 15 minutes, according to the latest government figures. In the light of the several reported cases of sexual abuses of children, *Chavarul* is a clear guideline to clothe children and to set physical boundaries to help them develop a healthy perspective about their own bodies and about physical relationships.

Chavara strictly warns the parents not to engage in unbecoming conversations and gossiping in the presence of their children: “Don’t even wrongly assume that they don’t follow what you say” (no. 3) Parents are the ultimate role models for their children. Every word, movement, and action has an effect on them. No other person or an outside force has a greater influence on a child than parents. Then Chavara instructs not to let the children to sleep in their parents’ room (no. 4). It may not be only about the possibility of watching any intimate acts. Parents’ room is the workshop where the full blueprint or design about the functioning of the family is being discussed. It is a kind of rejuvenation centre. Emotional outbursts may take place there. Then Chavara adds “not to let boys and girls to sleep in the same room” (no. 4) and he himself tells us the reason that “the devil will teach them what they don’t know by nature.” In other words, parents, girls and boys should have separate rooms to sleep.

According to him we should always keep an eye on little children and do not let them remain with servants and their companions. This instruction is all the more relevant in today’s scenario as several parents leave children unsupervised often in the care of maids, in day care centres, in tuition classes or in front of gadgets like television, computer or smart phones reducing their responsibility to protect and to spend quality time with children. Regarding this, Pope Francis says, “Parents need to consider what they want their children to be exposed to, and this necessarily means being concerned about who is providing their entertainment, who is entering their rooms through television and electronic devices and with whom they are spending their free time” (AL 260). As we know, child abuse is very common now. So, it is very important to understand and reduce the risks of child abuse.

⁸The National Crime Records Bureau Reports, 2016, Published by Indian Home Ministry, ncrb.gov.in.

Approximately 3 million cases of child abuses are reported every year. In most cases of child abuses the abusers are people known to children than complete strangers. We should remember in every moment of our parenting that we are only caretakers and we have the responsibility to take care of them responsibly.

“As soon as the children reach the age of reason they must be sent to school” (no. 6). Chavara realized 150 years back the power and necessity of education and instructs to send children to school at the right age and regularly enquire about their studies and conduct. As a teacher and mother for the last 25 years, I can say with conviction that regular enquiries about children, their activities and friends will benefit them a lot. Certainly, it will help them not to deviate from their studies.

Next two instructions are also very significant. Chavara advises that children should not be encouraged to stay at relatives’ homes. He also emphasises the importance of preparing them for confession and communion at the proper age (no. 7 & 8). St Chavara was very particular in facilitating the confession at the age of seven (no. 8). Presently children of seven years old are familiar with the sins which would have been known only by children of 15 years old at the time of Chavara. There is great change in the attitudes and actions of our youngsters, mainly because of the influence of the media. The sacrament of confession is also misinterpreted now-a-days. The absence of the sense of sin is a serious threat affecting our children. They should be trained in confessing their sins to God and acknowledging their faults to elders from their young age itself. Certainly, this will help them a lot to get a perfect personality—a personality that begs sorry or forgiveness when there is a need. Also, the initiation in this sacrament will create a conviction in them that our God is the one who is ready to forgive us and waiting patiently for the return of sinners. Presently our children do not have the habit of saying rosary daily as we had it in our childhood. They must be aware of the fact that the proper channel to love the Son is through His Holy Mother, and also there is great power in the intercession of Virgin Mary.

In the very next instruction of St Chavara, we can see the golden rule of proper discipline of the children, which is the need of the hour. In his opinion, the parents should neither be too stern nor too lenient with children (no. 9). Too much of indulgence will make them proud and too much severity and punishment will make them desperate, shameless and weak of intellect. This advice tells us that effective discipline helps

our children learn to control their behaviour, so that they act according to their ideas of what is right and wrong and not because they fear punishment. For example, they act honestly because they think it is wrong to be dishonest and not because they are afraid of getting caught. According to Chavara, the formation and discipline of the children should not be done by scolding or punishment but by pouring into their hearts all the love and care. Whatever is the child's age it is important to be consistent when it comes to discipline. If the parents don't stick to the rules and consequences of breaking them, children are not likely to do that either. Parents need to enhance a child's self-esteem so high that the rest of the world cannot poke enough holes to drain it dry.

With regard to the mutual love and respect of parents, Chavara says that if the parents do not love and respect each other, their children will not respect them. The best security blanket a child can have is parents who respect each other. If we allow a child to be disrespectful to either of his parents, he/she will not have respect for anyone else. In Chavara's view mothers can play a great role in the overall character formation of children, especially in grooming respectful children. Chavara says, the mother must set an example to the children in loving and respecting the father and the father should teach them to love and respect their mother. If parents do not love and respect each other, the children cannot be expected to love and respect them. His mother exemplifies that a mother is the finest builder of God in a child. He wrote: "The very look of my mother was sufficient for me to distinguish between the right and the wrong."⁹ According to him the formation and disciplining of the child was not by scolding or punishment but pouring into their heart all the love. So, his first knowledge of parents is as one who forms a child by imparting the spirit of goodness through unconditional love (no. 9).

Chavara solemnly points out that prayer is the soul of the family and repeats that each member of the family has to be at home in the evening for the family prayer. "At dusk when the bell for angelus is rung, make it a rule that the children should be at home. After night prayers teach them to say "Praise be to Jesus!" to their parents and kiss their hands (no. 11). Here Chavara highlights the need of the family prayer in strengthening the unity. Pope John Paul II says: "family prayers are the moments for sharing joys and sorrows, hopes and disappointments,

⁹Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Compunctions of the Soul (Dirge); Anasthasia's Martyrdom*, in *Complete works of Blessed Chavara*, Vol. 2, Translated by Mary Leo (Mannanam: KEC Publication, 1989), 53-56.

births and birthday celebrations.”¹⁰ The importance of family prayer is repeated by Pope Francis: “It is essential that children actually see that, for their parents prayer is something truly important. Hence moments of family prayer and acts of devotion can be more powerful for evangelization than any catechism class or sermon” (AL 288). Today technology has enhanced the quality of our business and allowed families to stay electronically accessible. However, it has also curtailed close personal communication. With greater regularity parents and children today, distance themselves from one another emotionally and spiritually. Ultimately, in this era of cutting edge communication, the family mis-communicates with God by omitting family prayers. The number of families avoiding family prayers or rarely participating in activities together, but directing their attention to the smart phone are increasing. In forfeiting dialogue and prayer with family members, parents and children lack unity from God through prayer. St Chavara instructed to have family prayer because praying as a family help us to develop a sense of unity. When family members pray together regularly, they start to think more about each other. Besides, prayer can demonstrate character, integrity and personal faith and it also reflects family values.

Chavara continues: “teenagers should be prevented from exposing themselves from possible scandals and temptations from the world around.” In his view, girls should be taught that their real ornaments are modesty, piety, patience and control of the senses. Parents should help their daughters to see the benefit of wearing outfits that reflect who they are and what they want to do (no. 12). In other words, a sense of proper dressing was to be cultivated in the children. Chavara realized that if a girl is educated, the whole family would be educated. He had a special care for the upbringing of the girl children in the family. In order to understand the instructions for girls in *Chavarul* we need to understand the society of those days. At that time women’s role was solely to serve men and raise children. They were deprived of the basic rights of education, property inheritance and even proper clothing. Women specially from the lower castes had suffered abuses and violence at the hand of mighty men. In response to these cultural standards Chavara gives directions for the girl’s formation. Girls and their bodies should not be considered as objects for sexual pleasure. So he instructs in *Chavarul* to avoid dressing up daughters to attract praise

¹⁰John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 59.

and applause. Instead, he proposes some virtues to be treasured by a Christian girl.

As a parent I think, the dressing of my children (both boys and girls) should not be to expose but to express—to express their personality. At the same time, I think parents can do more to educate their boys to stop objectifying the female body. Let us not think that it is solely the responsibility of girls to prevent others from looking at them like lunch meat. We should teach our boys in their young age itself that girls or women deserve dignity and respect. Expose them to situations to imbibe such values, and home is the best place to provide such values to our children. Chavara continues to say, “Let there not be quarrel among children, and fight between children should not lead to quarrel among elders” (no. 13). I think we must not insist our children not to quarrel. And if they quarrel, the elders must not interfere with their silly prejudices. Let them settle their disputes and petty fights in their own characteristic way. Let them be capable of solving problems and issues themselves. Today’s children are very much in need of that quality.

Finally, Chavara urges parents to give children freedom to make choices with regard to their career or vocation (no. 14). This is extremely significant in the light of current trends where pressure is put on children to follow the careers or courses projected by media and society, even if they have no interest, motivation or aptitude for it. In our society majority of young minds are confused while choosing streams and careers. From the instruction of St Chavara, we learn that it is a must that right from the childhood, interest and talents of a child should be given high importance and it must be kept in mind that every child is different. Sometimes parents who failed to fulfil their dreams try to get them fulfilled through their children. At present there is a trend of following others, including successful neighbours and relatives, in selecting a career or a vocation. Though St Chavara foresaw this disturbing trend years before, it seems that very few parents and educational institutions have taken inspiration from him. In selecting marriage partners, Chavara says that more importance should be given to good character and conduct than wealth and prestige. When we search present matrimony advertisements, we often come across phrases like ‘financially sound,’ ‘highly qualified,’ ‘aristocratic,’ ‘very fair,’ etc. than God fearing, loving, caring, etc. According to St Chavara, children as they grow up should develop a deeper sense of humility and awareness about themselves.

He says prophetically that partition of family property should be timely and married children should be encouraged to move to their own homes at the earliest (no. 16). We could avoid several of our family fights if we follow the valuable advice of St Chavara. There are many examples of families which are completely ruined just because of fights between siblings over family properties. Chavara instructs against showing undue regard for children even after they are matured (no. 15).

The unlimited control by the parents is not expected once the children become competent or erudite professionals. Children may feel at certain periods of their growth that their parents did not come up to their expectations. Parents on the other hand may always like to consider their children as infants who are in need of their constant care. We, as parents are expected to provide proper and perfect ambience for their healthy growth and we should let them grow on their own. In this regard I would like to mention the opinion of Dr D. Babu Paul IAS, which is strongly supporting the golden rule of St Chavara. About parental relation to grown up children, Babu Paul says,

Parents and children cannot live together always as in olden days. I say to my son, don't try to come and live with me. You live your life with your family. Spend your weekends and evenings with them. Life should go forward like a moving vehicle. You should drive your vehicle forward, look in the rear-view mirror occasionally to check whether my vehicle is coming behind you. If I have any needs, I will surely sound the horn. We the two parties—parents and children—should be able to respect and protect our mutual relation and that is the important part.¹¹

St Chavara also emphasizes that, we should follow the golden rule of mutual respect—parents respecting children, children respecting parents and parents respecting each other. In fact, *Chavarul* ends with a simple reminder of the 4th commandment—the responsibility of children to honour their parents.

Conclusion

The *Testament of a Loving Father, Chavarul*, which was written 150 years back, is still valid for our times because of two reasons. It is in its nature an all-inclusive set of guidelines for all. These instructions show the

¹¹Speeches of Dr D. Babu Paul IAS, On Family Relation, as cited by Nelson MCBS, <http://nelsonmcb.com>.

farsightedness of St Chavara. The way it is accepted in the family circles in recent decades prove that it is a treasure and still a timely work. *Chavarul* can be said to be the gist of the catechism for the family. We cannot but appreciate his refined and comprehensive vision of family though some of the particular guidelines may appear not very feasible. If *Chavarul* would have been taken as a '*Jnana-upadesam*' (wise advices) to every household, today's crime rates might have been reduced a lot.

Parenting is the biggest responsibility one can take up. The future of our children is in our hands and that is a big job indeed. The journey is tough but rewarding as well. As we see our children grow adorable, caring, sensible, responsible and God-fearing we feel satisfied about a job well done. The interesting thing about parenting is that there are not any hard and fast rules for it. That is what make this seemingly easy process very difficult in reality. And certainly here is the significance of *Chavarul*.

The erosion and disappearance of model parenting have caused human consciousness to grow cold and have led to the tragic degradation of society... The children develop a sort of mercenary attitude towards parents and use them merely as a means to get their things done... The erosion of values in the family leads to its sad demise and in turn leads to anarchy and callousness.¹²

We should always remember that it is easier to build morally strong children than to repair morally broken people and this is the relevance of *Chavarul* today. It is an insightful and down to earth document, the first of its kind in the history of the Indian Church (and perhaps of the universal Church), offering practical directions to families in leading a God fearing as well as socially commendable life. As the Catholic church makes earnest efforts to accompany her faithful who discern and adopt their vocation of responsible parenthood for which Pope Francis invites all pastors to go an extra mile to support families, the practical insights of St Chavara come handy, provided we are ready to translate them into contemporary idioms and make them respond to the challenges faced by modern day families. His insightful practical directives indicate how thoroughly he understood the dynamics of a family, especially in grooming children and nurturing discipline within the family. It was for the renewal of the family and the moral formation of children, St Chavara gave the greatest emphasis. The concerns he had

¹²Elisabeth, "Kuriakose Elias Chavara, Visionary and Karmayogi of Families," 131.

in mind 150 years back are what recently have been said by Pope Francis. It was all about the crisis of family. The Pope says, “The life of every family is marked by all kinds of crises, yet these are also part of its dramatic beauty. Couples should be helped to realise that surmounting a crisis need not weaken their relationship, instead it can improve, settle and mature the wine of their union” (AL 232).

Chavarul was written directly addressing the faithful of his native parish, through them to the entire humanity. These guidelines speak about his vision of family. The significance and authenticity of *Chavarul* lies in the fact that it is a comprehensive and Catholic vision of the family. *Chavarul* is a guiding light for families even today. Parenting styles have a big impact on how children develop into adults and have important implications for their future success. Chavara advocates that prayer and religious activities should be backed up by proper discipline and guidance to make a child to become a responsible adult in the future. He aims to tell us that a parent who shouts, fights, drinks and curses should not expect his/her child to act like a saint, because our actions speak louder than words. In AL Pope Francis says, “The Lord’s presence dwells in real and, concrete families with all their daily troubles and struggles and joys and hopes” (AL 315).

It is amazing that what St Chavara wrote about family life during the 19th century are still relevant in the 21st century. In fact, they are more relevant now than ever before. So, his teachings need to be propagated at a wider level.¹³ 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. Such morally sound families turn out to be the enlightening force in the society. He strongly believed that family was the most effective means for humanizing society. Vatican II calls family the principal school of social virtues, which is necessary to every society.¹⁴ 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 aim of St Chavara.

¹³Letters, IX/6, 114.

¹⁴Vatican II, *Gravivissimum Educationis*, 3.

GOD'S OWN FAMILY IN GOD'S OWN COUNTRY

A Brief Exposition of the *Testament of a Loving Father*

Thomas Panthaplackal, CMI♦

Here I am presenting a few facts and figures about *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul*, that is, the *Testament of a Loving Father*.

"God's Own Country" is actually a caption used for Kerala in tourism advertisements. This is an expression echoing the 150 years old expression of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara in the *Chavarul*, namely, 'family on earth is the image of heaven.' Hence corresponding to this is the title of this paper – "God's Own Family in God's Own Country."

The commanding moral force behind this text, all through the years, prove that it was coming from a progenitor and a spiritual head who wrote it with the Divine assistance as he had mentioned in the introduction. There he says,

I am leaving this document for you, in my own hand-writing. This script will live even after I am dead... Let this be a sign that this is my testament to you my brethren and children in the double order (of spirit and flesh)... copy out of this document by all who can do it so and preserve it in your homes. Keep the original locked in a box in the chapel. On the first Saturday of every month, all of you come together and read it through.¹

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¹St Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Testament of a Loving Father*, ed, Thomas Panthaplackal CMI (Kochi: Chavara Central Secretariat, 2014), 9. N.B.: All numbers given in brackets referring to the *Testament* are from this edition.

Panthaplackal, Thomas. "God's Own Family in God's Own Country: A Brief Exposition of the *Testament of a Loving Father*." In *Vocation and Mission of the Family: Reflections on Chavarul and Amoris Laetitia*, edited by Shaji George Kochuthara, 117–123. Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2020.

More than 35 editions of this small booklet in 100 years with hundreds of thousands of copies also speaks to us about the influence of its message in the society.

As St Chavara foresaw the calamities going to happen in families due to the absence of love, peace, order, fraternal charity, fear of God and justice, he gives practical instructions as to how a Christian family can become an image of heaven. Even though the original text in the manuscript form has only 24 small pages, each line in this document brings out some practical suggestions for a better family. St Chavara's *Chavarul* is a 40-point *Magna Carta* of family life.

In 2014, in the year of the canonization of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara, George Cardinal Alencherry, Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church recommended to all the dioceses, priests, religious and faithful to undertake serious studies on the *Testament of a Loving Father* of St Chavara. This letter of introduction itself proves the worth of this directives to the families, even to the present day families. I quote here the main part of the letter of introduction of the Major Archbishop, published in the new translation of the *Testament of a Loving Father* in 2014.

Pope Francis has announced a Synod of Bishops, to take place in two sessions this year and the next to study the issues and challenges related to families. In this context it is most appropriate to make a serious study about the perspectives of St Chavara on families. The *Testament of a Loving Father (Nalla Appante Chavarul)* written by St Kuriakose Elias Chavara is a road map given by him for families. It deals with how families were renewed through sacramental life, how fraternity and charity should be nurtured in families, what is the spirit with which we could grow in holiness, and the duties and responsibilities of parents and children to live in a society. When I realize that they were written a century and a half ago, I am amazed at how relevant his writings are for this day and age. And the saint himself mentioned that he wrote this testament to the families while at prayer seeking the light of inspiration in a special way. This book which is very handy throws light on how a family should lead a life according to the Divine Providence leading a fruitful life in the church and in the society. Through many scriptural passages, anecdotes, stories, examples and other figures of speech, he unfolds a forty point action plan detailing the duties and responsibilities of the parents and children. It is quite gratifying to know that this testament is being used widely in many dioceses for family renewal. Quite a few of the official

teachings about the families found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the Documents of Vatican Council II are reverberating in this book of St Chavara, is a matter of pride for the Syro-Malabar *sui iuris* church. It is a testimony of the importance of the subject covered in this book that thousands of copies of this book have been published in umpteen editions over the years and they reached so many families.

During this time and age in which we live, when families, the fundamental unit of human society, are undergoing tremendous crises and challenges, let us turn to St Chavara, who is a special patron for various needs of families in the divine presence, and earnestly study his directives for making our families ideal. It will be a unique contribution for family renewal from the patrimony of Syro-Malabar Church to the universal church to have it published in more languages as it is translated into English and Italian. I sincerely wish that this very year when St Kuriakose Elias Chavara is canonized, our dioceses, Priests, religious and faithful take keen interest and undertake serious studies on this book, *Nalla Appante Chavarul*.²

It is also good to note a quote from the covering letter of Mar George Cardinal Alencherry, given to the members of Extra Ordinary Synod on family of 2014 in Rome as a guideline for discussion.

It is my joyful privilege and fortune to introduce Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara who would be declared a saint by Holy Father Pope Francis on November 23, 2014... We are participating in a synod under the leadership of the Holy Father to discuss the challenges and crisis among the families in the modern world and to propose ways and means to counter the threats of disintegration within the families. I firmly believe that this book, which has been used in our individual church for family renewal for more than a century, would be an inspiration and guideline for the discussion of the synod on families and family renewal. I hope and wish that the Holy Father in due course of time would be able to declare Blessed Kuriakose Elias as a patron for Christian families in the universal church. I Submit this book for the earnest study, reflection and discussion of the honorable fathers of the synod.³

²George Cardinal Alencherry, Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church, "Message: A Chavara Legacy to Christian Families," (Prot No. 1483/2014), in St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Testament of a Loving Father*, (Kochi, 2014).

³George Cardinal Alencherry, Prot No. 1686/2014. Covering letter given to Pope Francis together with the book, *Testament of a Loving Father*, for its circulation among the Extra- Ordinary Synod of Fathers at Vatican, 2014.

Historical Perspective of the Text

St Chavara's text on Family (13 February 1868) was the first comprehensive instruction manual on family in the catholic church, even though not given in the form of a decree for the whole Church. Though it was given to his parishioners, it appeared universal in character as it was received by families irrespective of religious differences. Prior to this document, it seems that there was only one magisterial teaching on marriage promulgated by the Council of Trent (1545-1563). It was in answer only to the Protestant Reformers on the issue of marriage, but not as an instruction manual for families.

The Text Resembles or Reflects Four Biblical Texts

- I. The Last Blessings of Jacob to his sons. Here Jacob speaks about the future of his children and then what is right and what is wrong in them (Gen 49:1-27).
- II. The Last Testament of Moses to the people of Israel. Here Moses blesses them giving instructions according to the standards they kept in life (Deut 33:1-29).
- III. Farewell Discourse of Jesus to His disciples in which Jesus promises them the gift of love and life and what is expected of them (Jn 13:31-16:33).
- IV. The last Exhortation of St Paul to the Elders of the Church at Ephesus. There he says that he was not lazy in giving them directives needed for their life (Acts 20:18-25).

The Main Topics of Discussion in the *Testament*

I may mention the Main topics given in the *Testament*: They are self-explanatory and most practical. Those topics cover the fundamental Christian values on family.

- Prayer and sacramental life in the family (*Testament*, 16, 17, 19, 20)
- Charitable life in the family (*Testament*, 13, 14, 17)
- Healthy relationship in the family (*Testament*, 10, 11, 13, 19)
- How to handle wealth and money transactions in the family (*Testament*, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15)
- Education of the children in the family (*Testament*, 17, 19)
- Choosing marriage partners and friends in the family (*Testament*, 12, 13, 21)
- Industriousness in the family (*Testament*, 13, 14)

- Dealing with the poor people (*Testament*, 15, 16)
- Servants in the family and their spiritual care (*Testament*, 15, 16, 17)
- The communication in the family (*Testament*, 13, 20, 21)
- The timetable and the use of time in the family (*Testament*, 24)
- Modesty and holiness of children in the family (*Testament*, 16, 19, 20)
- Upbringing of children in the family (*Testament*, 18-22)
- The discipline in the family (*Testament*, 18, 20, 21)
- Festivals and celebrations in the family (*Testament*, 20)
- The fear of God in the family (*Testament*, 12, 13, 14)
- Justice and peace in the family (*Testament*, 14, 15, 16, 17, 20)
- Responsibility of the parents in forming children in Christian values (*Testament*, 1-16)
- Responsibility of children towards parents, and society (*Testament*, 16)

Approach to Various Topics in the Text

St Chavara applies Scripture, Moral Theology, Philosophy, Psychology, and Spirituality in dealing with various subjects. He uses similes, maxims, philosophical thoughts, stories, parables, life events, etc., in expounding his teachings on family, creating practical and in-depth convictions in the readers.

It is a wonder how a man who had no educational qualification other than the primary education in *Kalari* (basic study centre in languages and Mathematics) and training in the parochial seminary, could present a study covering the above mentioned aspects, especially, from the background of 19th century Kerala.

St Chavara's Definition of Family and of Children

St Chavara's definition of family and of children alone will suffice to identify the value and worth of the document. The text runs like this:

A good Christian family is the image of heaven, when members live in unity by the bond of blood and affection, duly respecting and obeying the parents, walking peacefully before God and people, seeking eternal salvation according to each one's proper state of life (*Testament*, 10).

Five Foundational Elements in the Definition

1. Anthropological foundation in family relationship
- God created humankind in His image (Gen 1:27)

- I will make him a helper as partner (Gen 1:27; 2:18-24)
Saint Chavara: with the bond of blood and affection (*Testament*, 10)
- 2. Communitarian Foundation as a social being
 - God created them male and female, and not to live alone but as partners (Gen 1:27; 2:18-24)
Saint Chavara: Members living together in unity (*Testament*, 10)
- 3. Foundation of God's creative authority through parents recognized
 - Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it (Gen 1:28)
Saint Chavara: Respect and obedience to parents (*Testament*, 10)
- 4. Foundation of God's Commandment of Love
 - Love God and Love your neighbour (Mt 22:36-40; Jn 13:34, 35)
Saint Chavara: walk peacefully before God and fellow beings (*Testament*, 10)
- 5. Foundation of Divine Call
 - Every state of life among the family members on earth is a special call from God aiming for eternity with God (Mk 3:30; Lk 18:18-22; Jn 14:1-6)
Saint Chavara: Seek eternal salvation according to each one's proper state of life (*Testament*, 10, 21[14])
St Chavara defines who the children are and the duties of the parents towards them:

Children are sacred treasures entrusted to the parents by God. Know you that these children have been entrusted to your hands, to be purified with the most precious blood of the Lord, to be trained up in His service and to be returned to Him on the judgment day (*Testament*, 18).

Fourfold Duties of the Parents according to the Definition

1. Children are gifts from God entrusted to take care of them (*Testament*, 18)
2. Help them to be purified with the most Precious Blood of Christ by a sacramental life (*Testament*, 18)
3. They are to be trained up in God's service (*Testament*, 18)
4. They are to be returned to God on the judgment day as holy souls (*Testament*, 18)

St Chavara Looks at Family from Three Angles

1. Family in the plan of God: Family is the image of heaven on earth (*Testament*, 10)

- Holy Trinity, the best heavenly model of unity and totality.
- Heaven is a place of love
- Holy Family the best earthly model of sharing and caring
- Family is the little heaven on earth (*Testament*, 10, 11)

2. Family in the plan of the Church—the domestic Church (Vatican II): Family is the basic sacramental community in the church.

- In the definition of family, St Chavara bases the family in relation to eternal salvation (*Testament*, 10)
- In the definition of the children, he explains children as gifts from God, to be purified in the church through the sacramental life (*Testament*, 11, 14, 16, 17, 18, etc.)
- Family is committed to the Church by living in it and by serving the people of God. Do good to all (*Testament*, 14)

3. Family in the plan of the society: Family exists in relation to individual's religion, culture, tradition and society.

- Family is a call to live together as husband and wife, parents, children and brothers and sisters with a social bond (*Testament*, 10)
- Bond of blood and love in the family as unifying elements and inseparable social bond in the church, giving self-identity (*Testament*, 10)
- The blessings and honour in a family consist in the peaceful co-existence (*Testament*, 10, 11)
- Prayer in the family is a spiritual and social bond which makes the members a tolerant and forgiving community (*Testament*, 18, 24)

St Chavara gave his testament for the generations to come. That is why he mentioned that even after his death his words may live forever. Let us hear the words of St Chavara: "Hence I am leaving this document for you, in my own handwriting. This script will live even after I am dead. So, I entrust this to my children to be preserved as a treasure."

FAMILY PRAYER AND THE LORD'S DAY IN THE MAKING OF THE DOMESTIC CHURCH

Reading *Chavarul* in the Light of Papal Teachings

Sophy Rose, CMC♦

“The interpretation of the Sacred Scripture would remain incomplete were it not to include listening to those who have truly lived the Word of God, namely, the saints,” says *Verbum Domini*.¹ The lives of the saints are real commentaries of the Gospels; saints are scriptures interpreted. The most profound interpretations of the Scripture come precisely from those who let themselves be shaped by the Word of God through listening, reading and assiduous meditation.² Pope Benedict XVI says: “The saint is the person who is so fascinated by the beauty of God and by his perfect truth as to be progressively transformed.”³ Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara was such a man who was transformed by the Word of God and had interpreted the Gospel through his life and transformed the society in which he lived with his firm conviction on the Gospel values.

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¹Pope Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2010), 48.

²Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, 48.

³Pope Benedict XVI, *Heart of the Christian Life, Thoughts on the Holy Mass* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010), 36.

Sophy Rose. “Family Prayer and the Lord’s Day in the Making of the Domestic Church: Reading *Chavarul* in the Light of Papal Teachings.” In *Vocation and Mission of the Family: Reflections on Chavarul and Amoris Laetitia*, edited by Shaji George Kochuthara, 124–138. Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2020.

Saint Chavara, an Epoch Maker

Saint Kuriakose Chavara was a man of God who revealed the wisdom of God which is relevant to all the generations. He was born in 1805 at Kainakary, Kerala, India and was ordained in the year 1829 and was instrumental in founding the first two indigenous religious Congregations,⁴ one for men and the other for women. Saint Kuriakose was a versatile genius and a saintly person who gave remarkable leadership in the fields of religious, social and cultural life of the natives through his multifaceted activities. He served the Church in various capacities like the life-long Prior of the monasteries, *Malpan* of the Seminaries and the Vicar General of the Syro-Malabar Christians. As a pioneer in many realms, he initiated and contributed much for the revitalization and integral development of the people through spiritual and secular education, print media, women empowerment, charitable activities and family renewal. Among them, his contribution to the renewal of families is the point of our consideration here.

An Overview of the *Chavarul*

Saint Chavara was a man of vision. He understood the importance of family for the well-being of the Church and society. So, forming families according to the divine plan was his primary concern. In view of that, in 1868 he wrote a Letter to his parishioners, *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul (Testament of a Loving Father)*, which contains his spiritual and moral exhortations to Christian families. He visualized family as an *icon* of heaven. He defined Christian family as

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 practice obedience to parents and walk in peace before the

⁴The Congregation for men, namely, Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI) was founded in 1831 along with Fr Thomas Palackal and Fr Thomas Porukara and the Congregation for women, namely, TOCD was founded in 1866 with the help of Fr Leopold Beccaro, OCD. In 1890, based on the Rite, the TOCD Women Congregation was divided into two: the Syro-Malabar wing is known as Congregation of the Mother of Carmel (CMC) and the Latin Rite wing is known as the Congregation of Teresian Carmelites (CTC).

Lord and the people and each one according to his proper state of life seeks to attain eternal salvation and lives peacefully.⁵

Most of his utterances in the *Chavarul* are prophetic and have prognostic nuances. As he mentioned in the prelude to the *Chavarul* “after getting the Divine Light from above,” he started to write this *Testament*. Indeed, a saintly man with the divine assistance wrote this Letter for the benefit of the families. The purpose of the *Chavarul*, as he himself testified, is “to help you to have an orderly family” since, “the greatest sorrow for a man would be to live in a family where there is no peace, no order and where the members live independent of each other without caring eternal salvation.”⁶

The uniqueness of this *Testament* is that it is the first one of this kind issued by an ecclesiastical leader directly addressing the families for the building up of God-fearing families and the upbringing of God-fearing children. It can be seen as a family catechesis, a practical interpretation of the Ten Commandments. His exhortations are filled with wisdom and are based on the Scripture. The *Chavarul* contains 40 paragraphs: 24 of them offer “Rules for a family” and 16 are the guidelines for “the upbringing of children.” These statements offer guiding principles for different categories of people—parents and children, young and old, ignorant and learned, men and women, stewards and servants, families and societies, etc. It contains spiritual instructions, theological visions, moral principles, psychological insights, social norms, corrective measures and practical suggestions. Those who take these sayings seriously as their guide will never stumble and hurtle in their lives. It shows the prophetic and perennial character of his teachings. The core of all his sayings is this: “love one another and forgive mutually, you will enjoy peace in this world and eternal happiness in the other world.”⁷ “The highest wealth of a family is piety and fear of God. A family of God-fearing people enjoys God’s blessings in this life and in the next.”⁸ Although the life in the family unfolds on this earth, family

⁵Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Chavarul, Testament of a Loving Father*, in *Complete Works of Bl.Chavara*, (Hereafter CWC), Vol. IV, *Letters*, X/6 (Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Blessed Chavara, 1990), 102.

⁶Chavara, *Chavarul*, CWC Vol.IV, *Letters*, X/6, 103.

⁷Chavara, *Chavarul*, “Rules for a Family,” 1.

⁸Chavara, *Chavarul*, “Rules for a Family,” 18.

members are invited to fix their eyes in eternity: that is the uniqueness of his noble vision for families.

As mentioned above, in the prelude to the *Chavarul*, he wrote: "after getting the Divine Light from above," he began writing the *Testament of a Loving Father*. That is why his directives are ever new and relevant even today. When we go through the writings of the contemporary Popes and other Church documents, especially the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, we come across many ideas that have much resemblance with the exhortations in the *Chavarul*. Although all the exhortations in the *Chavarul* are very important and relevant, the instructions regarding the family prayer and observance of Sunday are very significant in the present scenario for the making of the Church in general and the family—the domestic Church—in particular to be in communion with God and with the brethren. Both these aspects indicate the summary of the Ten Commandments: to love God and to love the neighbour. Hence, in the following pages we present mainly the teachings of Saint Chavara regarding the observance of the Day of the Lord and the family prayer. We elicit also the uniqueness of his teaching by drawing similar insights from the teaching of Saint Pope John Paul II, in his Apostolic Exhortation on the *Day of the Lord, Dies Domini*,⁹ issued in 1998, that is, 130 years after the publication of the *Chavarul*. Moreover, we complement this with the teachings of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church, Familiaris Consortio*¹⁰ of Pope John Paul II and *Amoris Laetitia*¹¹ of Pope Francis in order to elucidate its farsightedness and relevance even to this day. Before that let us have a brief understanding of the observance of the Lord's Day from a biblical perspective based on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

Day of the Lord: A Biblical Understanding

The observance of the Day of the Lord is a command of the Lord. It has its background in the Scripture. The third commandment of the

⁹Pope John Paul II, *Dies Domini* published on 31st May 1998 (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1998).

¹⁰Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* published on 22 November 1981 (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1981).

¹¹Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* published on 19 March 2016 (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2016).

Decalogue recalls the holiness of the Sabbath: “The seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the Lord” (Ex 31:15).¹² While speaking of the Sabbath the Scripture recalls two events: creation (Ex 20:11) and redemption, that is, Israel’s liberation from the slavery of Egypt (Dt 5:15). So, God entrusted the Sabbath to Israel in order to keep it as a sign of the irrevocable covenant (cfr Ex 31:16), a holy day set apart for the praise of the Lord for his marvellous deeds of creation and liberation.

If God rested and was refreshed on the seventh day, humans too ought to rest and should let others, especially, the poor be refreshed (Ex 31:17). Thus, God’s action and command has become a model for human beings forever. It is a day of rest and of liberation. But, in the Scripture we come across many incidents when Jesus was accused of violating the Sabbath law. However, He gave an interpretation to the Sabbath law as follows: “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mk 2:2). With conviction and compassion, Christ declared, the Sabbath is for doing good rather than to harm, for saving life rather than killing (cfr Mk 3:4); and it is the ‘Day of the Lord’ of the Lord of mercies and a day to honour God (cfr Mt 12:5, Jn 7:23).¹³

After the resurrection of Jesus, the day of the Lord has got a new meaning. Jesus rose from the dead on the day following the Sabbath. According to the Jewish understanding, it is the eighth day. But for the Christians, it has become the first day of the week (Lk 24:1), that is, the Sunday. In the Christian tradition, the Sunday is the Lord’s Day. Hence, the precept of the Church specifies the law of the Lord more precisely: “on the Sundays and other holy days of obligation the faithful are bound to participate in the Holy Mass.”¹⁴

Lord’s Day in the Tradition of the Church

The Lord’s Day—as Sunday was called from apostolic times—has always been accorded special attention in the history of the Church because of its close connection with the very core of the Christian mystery. Due to its divine origin and the divine command, the people of God gave prime importance to the observance of this ‘holy day’ all throughout the ages: as the day of Sabbath until the time of Jesus’ resurrection and as the weekly Easter from the time of the apostles. For

¹²*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2168.

¹³*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2173.

¹⁴*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2180.

two thousand years, Christian time has been measured by the memory of that "first day of the week" (Mk 16:2, 9; Lk 24:1; Jn 20:1) when the Risen Christ gave the apostles the gift of peace and of the Spirit (Jn 20; 19–23). Hence, a worth and meaningful celebration of the Lord's Day is something that is inherent in the blood of every Christian. Taking into account the tradition and interpretation given by Jesus, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that "On Sundays and other holy days of obligation, the faithful are to refrain from engaging in work of activities that hinder the worship owed to God, the joy proper to the Lord's Day, the performance of the works of mercy, and the appropriate relaxation of mind and body."¹⁵ Moreover, "Christians will also sanctify Sunday by devoting time and care to their families and relatives, often difficult to do on other days of the week."¹⁶

Lord's Day in the Present-day Scenario

Today, the socio-economic-political and cultural situations are rapidly changing; the consciousness of the new generation regarding the religious matters is influenced by the social medias and various secular trends and ideologies. Consequently, instead of a *holy day* celebration, Sunday has become a *holiday* for enjoyment or a weekend for rest. Being aware of the present scenario, Pope Francis, while teaching about the meaning of the third commandment, the *day of rest* as in Exodus and the *commemoration of the end of slavery* as in Deuteronomy, has said:¹⁷ "Today's society is thirsty for amusement and vacations ... Man has never rested as much as today, yet man has never experienced so much emptiness as today!"¹⁸

There is a slavery that binds more than a prison, more than a panic attack, more than an imposition of any kind: the slavery to one's own "ego"... The ego can become a tyrant who tortures man wherever he is and procures for him the most profound oppression, which is "sin". ...

¹⁵*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2185.

¹⁶*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2186.

¹⁷At the General Audience on 12 September 2018, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2018/documents/papa-francesco_20180912_udienza-generale.

¹⁸"Pope Francis on the Third Commandment," <http://www.strosenj.com/pope-francis-on-the-third-commandment> (accessed 16–09–2018).

Sin is, in the end, the speech and action of the ego. I want to do this and I don't care if there is a limit, if there is a commandment, I don't even care whether there is love. ... Egocentrism digs a deep hole between oneself and others.¹⁹

It is in this context we see the uniqueness, authenticity and farsightedness of the exhortations uttered 150 years ago by Saint Chavara in the *Chavarul* as if he has foreseen the changing circumstances of our times due to the various trends of secularization and hedonistic tendencies.

Teaching of *Chavarul*

Sundays are our Lord's days. It is least befitting to hold secular celebrations on such days. It may cause many evils amounting even to the perdition of the souls. Through these Satan will be using his vile methods to convert the Lord's Day to his own day. When anyone dies in a family, the nearest relatives may be exempted, it is not proper for others to give up their spiritual obligations and stay at the home of the dead. Such evil practice is condemned both by God and the Church.²⁰

"Besides keeping Sundays holy by participating in the holy Mass, spend a larger portion of the day listening to sermons, reading good books and in similar other occupations, visiting the sick, especially the poor and serving them."²¹

When we analyse these exhortations in the light of *Dies Domini* we can bring out the universal relevance of St Chavara's teaching. The important insights he puts forward are:

- Sunday is the Lord's Day. So, it is to be observed holy and unflinching.

- The participation in the Holy Eucharist is not for the sake of fulfilling the obligation only. But the gathering together of the believers around the Eucharistic Table constitutes the living experience of the Church. Thus, the Eucharistic celebration realizes the Church. Hence the day of the Lord is also the day of the Church.

¹⁹"Catechism of the Holy Father," at the General Audience, on 12.09.2018, <http://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2018/09/12/180912b.html>.

²⁰Chavara, *Chavarul*, 3.

²¹Chavara, *Chavarul*, 22.

- Sunday should be a day of listening and reading the Word of God and other good books that impart spiritual enlightenment. The Word of God gives ample nourishment for spiritual life. It is, therefore, a day of Contemplation.

- Sunday should be a day of Mission by doing charity and love, by visiting the sick and the needy and by serving the poor and the destitute. It shows the altruistic vision of Saint Chavara and the horizontal dimension of the Lord's Day. The Lord's Day celebration is God-oriented and also human-oriented. There is a move from Holy Mass to Holy Mission. That means, the Day of the Lord is also the Day of the Church and the Day of human beings.

In *Dies Domini*, we can see very clearly the development of the aforementioned themes of St Chavara's visions regarding the Lord's Day. In that Pope John Paul II presents the Sunday celebration of the Lord's Day and His Eucharist at the heart of the Church's life²² and the multidimensional role of the Day of the Lord in the formation, nature, growth and the mission of the Church throughout the centuries. According to the Holy Father, Sunday is the Day of the Risen Lord and of the Day of the Gift of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, every Sunday is the weekly Easter. St Augustine calls Sunday "a sacrament of Easter."²³ The intimate bond between Sunday and the Resurrection of the Lord is very strongly emphasized by all the Churches of East and West and that is why it stands at the heart of all worship.²⁴ For more than a century before, St Chavara was very much conscious about this reality. His articulation on the Day of the Lord in simple and practical terms is ahead of all the papal teachings and the magisterial documents. That is the uniqueness and historical importance of *Chavarul*.

Role of the Day of the Lord in the Making of the Family

Holy Eucharist: The Central Act of the Day of the Lord

To Saint Chavara, the centre of the Lord's Day is the Eucharist, which means "thanksgiving." For us Christians, it is the day to say to God: "thank you, Lord, for life, for your mercy, for all your gifts. That is why

²²John Paul II, *Dies Domini*, 32 & *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2177.

²³John Paul II, *Dies Domini*, 19.

²⁴John Paul II, *Dies Domini*, 19.

he insists very strongly that even in the context of “the death of a family member, except the very necessary helpers, all must go and attend the Holy Mass.”²⁵ Moreover he says: “try to participate in Mass daily. If it is not possible, do so at least on Mondays for the sake of the souls in purgatory, on Fridays in memory of the passion of the Lord and on Saturdays commemorating the Dolours of our Lady. If all cannot attend daily Mass, let members take turns, so that one or two of them at least can hear Mass every day.”²⁶ It indicates his awareness of the centrality of the Holy Eucharist in the spiritual and communal growth of a family. Moreover, it shows his belief in the redemptive power of the Eucharist, since the Holy Eucharist is for the “remission of debts, forgiveness of sins, hope for resurrection and new life in the kingdom of heaven.”²⁷ Thus, the Eucharistic celebration has the central place in the life of a family.

Centrality of Eucharist in the Making of the Domestic Church

In *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis speaks about the centrality of the Eucharist in the making of the family as a domestic Church. He says:

The family’s communal journey of prayer culminates by sharing together in the Eucharist, especially in the context of the Sunday rest. Jesus knocks on the door of families, to share with them the Eucharistic supper (Rev 3:20). There, spouses can always seal anew the paschal covenant which united them and which ought to reflect the covenant which God sealed with mankind in the cross. The Eucharist is the sacrament of the new covenant, where Christ’s redemptive work is carried out (cfr Lk 22:20). The close bond between married life and the Eucharist thus becomes all the more clear. For the food of the Eucharist offers the spouses the strength and incentive needed to live the marriage covenant each day as a “domestic church.”²⁸

Pope John Paul II had already developed this theme in the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*. In it the Pope says:

The Christian family’s sanctifying role is grounded in Baptism and has its highest expression in the Eucharist, to which Christian marriage is

²⁵Chavara, *Chavarul*, 3.

²⁶Chavara, *Chavarul*, 18.

²⁷This is the portion of the prayer said by the priest holding both pieces of the divided Host together over the chalice. Cfr *The Order of the Syro-Malabar Qurbana* (Kakkanad: Mount St Thomas, 2005 [Reprint]), 63.

²⁸Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 318.

intimately connected...The Eucharist is the very source of Christian marriage. The Eucharistic Sacrifice, in fact, represents Christ's covenant of love with the Church, sealed with His blood on the cross. In this sacrifice of the New and Eternal Covenant, Christian spouses encounter the source from which their own marriage covenant flows, is interiorly structured and continuously renewed.²⁹

Day of Solidarity with the Poor

Ever since apostolic times the Sunday gathering has in fact been for Christians a moment of fraternal sharing with the poor. This is very evident in the writings of St Paul and St James. The insight and farsightedness of St Chavara is also very profound in his exhortation to make the Day of the Lord as a day of solidarity with the poor and needy. He says: "Besides keeping Sundays holy by participating in the Holy Mass, spend a larger portion of the day in visiting the sick, especially the poor and serving them."³⁰ It is a very challenging exhortation. It is an antidote to the "haughty egocentrism"³¹ as Pope Francis said, of the generation that tries to enjoy their 'rest' without the *Other* and *others*. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches:

Those Christians who have leisure should be mindful of their brethren who have the same needs and the same rights, yet cannot rest from work because of poverty and misery. Sunday is traditionally consecrated by Christian piety to good works and humble service of the sick, the infirm and the elderly.³²

The content of what St Chavara said in nutshell is elaborately found in *Dies Domini*. Pope states: "Sunday should also give the faithful an opportunity to devote themselves to works of mercy, charity and apostolate. To experience the joy of the Risen Lord deep within is to share fully the love which pulses in his heart: there is no joy without love."³³ The Pope draws a beautiful picture of the true brotherhood that flows from the Sunday Eucharist. He articulates:

²⁹John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 57.

³⁰Chavara, *Chavarul*, 22.

³¹General Audience, 12.09.2018, <http://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2018/09/12/180912b.html>.

³²*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2186.

³³John Paul II, *Dies Domini*, 69.

The Eucharist is an event and programme of true brotherhood. From the Sunday Mass there flows a tide of charity destined to spread into the whole life of the faithful, beginning by inspiring the very way in which they live the rest of Sunday. If Sunday is a day of joy, Christians should declare by their actual behaviour that we cannot be happy “on our own.” They look around to find out people who may need their help. It may be that in their neighbourhood or among those they know there are sick people, elderly people, children or immigrants who precisely on Sundays feel more keenly their isolation, needs and suffering. It is true that commitment to these people cannot be restricted to occasional Sunday gestures... Inviting to a meal people who are alone, visiting the sick providing food for needy families spending a few hours in voluntary work and acts of solidarity; these would certainly be ways of bringing into people’s lives the love of Christ received at the Eucharistic table.³⁴

Pope John Paul II presents it in such a way that,

as a representation of Christ’s sacrifice of love for the Church, the Eucharist is a fountain of charity. In the Eucharistic gift of charity the Christian family finds the foundation and soul of its “communion” and its “mission”; by partaking in the Eucharistic bread, the different members of the Christian family become one body, which reveals and shares in the wider unity of the Church. Their sharing in the Body of Christ that is “given up” and in His Blood that is “shed” becomes a never-ending source of missionary and apostolic dynamism for the Christian family.³⁵

So, it is in the Eucharist and from the Eucharist the members of the family get the inspiration and strength to do charity. Charity that didn’t come out of divine and self-sacrificing love will not be pure Christian charity but mere social service. The love of God should compel us to do charity.

Lord’s Day is a Day of Contemplation

St Chavara exhorts: “Besides keeping Sundays holy by participating in the Holy Mass, spend a larger portion of the day listening to sermons, reading good books and in similar other occupations.”³⁶ It indicates the

³⁴John Paul II, *Dies Domini*, 72.

³⁵John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 57.

³⁶Chavara, *Chavarul*, 22.

reading, listening and pondering over of the Word of God as Mother Mary did. In the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* we read: "Sunday is a time for reflection, silence, cultivation of the mind and meditation which furthers the growth of the Christian interior life."³⁷ The reflections of Pope Francis on the third commandment will complement the aforementioned words of St Chavara. Pope says: "...the day of rest is the day of contemplation and of blessing... it is the moment of contemplation, it is the moment of praise, not of evasion. It's the time to look at reality and say: how beautiful life is!"³⁸

In short, we can say, Sunday is the soul of other days. With Pope John Paul II, we can acknowledge that "Sunday is a true school, an enduring programme of Church pedagogy—an irreplaceable pedagogy, especially with social conditions now marked more and more by a fragmentation and cultural pluralism which constantly test the faithfulness of individual Christians to the practical demands of their faith."³⁹ So to rediscover the importance of Sunday and to observe it faithfully as St Chavara exhorts is an absolute necessity for the establishment of communion and holiness in the family as well as in the Church as a whole.

Transmission of Faith through Family Prayers

When St Chavara begins to speak about the "Upbringing of the Children" in the *Chavarul*, he admonishes the parents as follows: "Parents, understand that your most important duty and responsibility is to bring up your children well."⁴⁰ In the following sentences he highlights the reason behind his saying:

They (the children) are the treasures entrusted to you by God. He saved their souls with His precious blood in order that they may serve Him in this world and be returned to Him on the final Day of Judgment. If one of them were to suffer perdition because of your fault, it would create a serious impediment to your own salvation.⁴¹

³⁷*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2186.

³⁸"Pope Francis on the Third Commandment," <http://www.strosenj.com/pope-francis-on-the-third-commandment>.

³⁹John Paul II, *Dies Domini*, 83.

⁴⁰Chavara, *Chavarul*, "Upbringing of Children," 1.

⁴¹Chavara, *Chavarul*, "Upbringing of Children," 1.

Quoting the great scholar Origen, he adds:

If they (children) go to hell because of the negligence of the parents, the parents will be responsible for every sin committed by their children... if they don't respect and fear God when they are young, they will not later love or respect their parents. Parents should often offer children up to God and entrust them to the intercession of Jesus, Mary and Joseph and often pray for them.⁴²

The aforementioned words of St Chavara lead us to a Scripture passage where we read: "Fear of the Lord surpasses everything" (Sir 25:11). St Chavara was very much conscious about this. He says, "the essential worth of a family consists in its holiness and fear of God."⁴³ He had experienced this from the life of his parents who considered the fear of the Lord as the wealth of their family. As an expression of this, the family members prayed together before the Lord. Out of his experience and the example that he had from his family, he taught also the same through the *Chavarul*. He asked the parents to pray with their children and teach them how to pray. He writes:

As soon as they are old enough to understand things, teach them to repeat with devotion the name of Jesus, Mary, Joseph. Show them their pictures or statues and make them kiss them and respect and love those three. When they begin to speak, teach them to recite the prayers, Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory be., the Angelus and other prayers. How profitable it would be if they are given their spiritual food along with the material food.⁴⁴

St Chavara again urges the parents, "At dusk, when the bell for the Angelus is rung make it a rule that the children should be at home. After night prayers teach them to say 'praise be to Jesus' to the parents and to kiss their hands."⁴⁵ Again, he instructs: "They should be taught especially to be devoted to our Mother."⁴⁶

After 148 years, almost in the same line of thought Pope Francis speaks in *Amoris Laetitia* as follows:

⁴²Chavara, *Chavarul*, "Upbringing of Children," 1.

⁴³Chavara, *Chavarul*, "Rules for a Family," 18.

⁴⁴Chavara, *Chavarul*, "Upbringing of Children," 2.

⁴⁵Chavara, *Chavarul*, "Upbringing of Children," 11.

⁴⁶Chavara, *Chavarul*, "Upbringing of Children," 8.

Faith is God's gift, received in baptism, and not our own work, yet parents are the means that God uses for it to grow and develop. Hence it is beautiful when mothers teach their little children to blow a kiss to Jesus or to our lady. How much love there is in that! At that moment the child's heart becomes a place of prayer.⁴⁷

In *Familiaris Consortio* Pope John Paul II also exhorts the same to the parents in a vivid manner. He states:

By reason of their dignity and mission, Christian parents have the specific responsibility of educating their children in prayer, introducing them to gradual discovery of the mystery of God and to personal dialogue with Him... The concrete example and living witness of parents is fundamental and irreplaceable in educating their children to pray. Only by praying together with their children can a father and mother penetrate the innermost depths of their children's hearts and leave an impression that the future events in their lives will not be able to efface.⁴⁸

Quoting the appeal made by Pope Paul VI to the parents, his holiness Pope John Paul II continues:

Mothers, do you teach your children the Christian prayers? Do you prepare them, in conjunction with the priests, for the sacraments that they are young: confession, communion and confirmation? Do you encourage them when they are sick to think of Christ's 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.⁴⁹

Along with the aforementioned words of the saintly Pope Paul VI it is appropriate to remember the following words of St Chavara regarding the reception of the sacrament of reconciliation also. He says: "When they are of eight years of age, they are also to be taught all about confession and should be made to make their confession."⁵⁰

⁴⁷Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 287.

⁴⁸John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 60.

⁴⁹John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 60.

⁵⁰Chavara, *Chavarul*, "Upbringing of Children," 8.

Conclusion

In our present situation to re-discover and to re-establish the importance and purpose of Sunday and to implement it faithfully is a powerful means to promote the family life intact and the Christian life meaningful. To live in the aforementioned way, not only the Sunday Eucharist but the whole of Sunday will become a great school of charity, justice and peace.⁵¹ These vertical as well as the horizontal dimensions of the Lord's Day fulfil the whole commandments of our Lord: to love God and to love your neighbour. This is all the more true with regard to the family prayer. A family that prays together stays and lives together. The coming together for the daily family prayer is an incentive and preparation to celebrate the Sunday joyfully and meaningfully. Both complement and enrich each other. That will make the family an abode of God and an image or the icon of heaven. Hence, to re-discover and to re-establish this two-dimensional celebration of Sunday and family prayer are imperative in the changing and challenging world of division and adversity. In that respect the observance of the Lord's Day is the heart of Christian life and the exhortations of St Chavara regarding Sunday as well as the family prayer are ever relevant and prophetic.

⁵¹John Paul II, *Dies Domini*, 73.

CONCEPT OF THE DOMESTIC CHURCH IN THE CHAVARUL OF ST KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA

Ann Mary Madavanakkad, CMC♦

We can reasonably doubt whether family is given due respect by the society today. The Church, however, holds family in high regards, as it is acknowledged in the magisterial teachings that family is “first and vital cell of society.”¹ For a Catholic theology of the family the metaphor of “domestic Church” stands as one of the sources of renewal. The key argument of this paper is that family is the ‘domestic church,’ and it unfolds in two major parts. After briefly discussing the implications of the domestic church in the light of the Bible, Church Fathers, magisterial teachings and contemporary theological deliberations we proceed to examine the vision of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara in *Chavarul* concerning the domestic church so as to deduce the essence of its vision and mission.

Theological Foundations of ‘Domestic Church’

The Church is called to build up the kingdom of God in history by participating in the life and mission of Christ from its grassroot level, namely, family which is a living image and historical representation of the mystery of the Church. The Church symbolizes a mother who gives birth, educates and builds up the Christian family by putting into effect

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¹Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum, Encyclical on Capital and Labour*, 12 (Citta’ del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1891); Pius XI, *Casti Connubii, Encyclical Letter on Christian Marriage*, 8: AAS 22 (1930): 539-592; Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae, Encyclical Letter on the Regulation of Birth*, 23: AAS 60 (1968): 481-503; John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio, Apostolic Exhortation on the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World*, 42: AAS 74 (1982): 81-191.

Madavanakkad, Ann Mary. “Concept of the Domestic Church in the *Chavarul* of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara.” In *Vocation and Mission of the Family: Reflections on Chavarul and Amoris Laetitia*, edited by Shaji George Kochuthara, 139–154. Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2020.

the salvific mission she has received from the Lord which are mainly done through the proclamation of the Word and by the celebration of the Sacraments. Through these pathways she repeatedly insists the new commandment of love to follow the example of Jesus Christ, the Apostles and Saints, the Church. In this section I enquire how the Bible, Church Fathers, the Teaching authority of the Church, and contemporary theologians have conceived and developed the notion of the domestic church.

Biblical Understanding of the Domestic Church

The Biblical vision of family is unveiled through God's plan in the creation of Adam and Eve, the first human beings on earth to form a family. Therefore, God gave them the authority to procreate when he commanded them to "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (Gen 1:28).² Thus, in God's plan, the family is to be "the primary place of 'humanization' for the person and society." Family is also called as the "cradle of life and love." It is here the children learn the love and faithfulness of the Lord, and the need to respond to God's faithfulness and love.³ It is in the family that children learn first the most important lessons of practical wisdom that are inter-connected with Christian virtues. God's high regard for the family is clear from the fact that Jesus was born in a family and lived in a family. God conferred to the institution of marriage the dignity of a sacrament of the new covenant. The family, therefore, can be defined as a divinely instituted organization born of the intimate communion of life and love founded on the marriage between one man and one woman. Being a divine and human institution, the family has its own specific and original social dimension of interpersonal relationships that is the primary and vital cell of society.⁴ The family is a divine institution that stands at the foundation of life of the human beings as the prototype of every social order.⁵

²Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Citta' del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004), 209.

³John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation*, 40: AAS 81 (1989): 469.

⁴Second Vatican Council, *Decree on Apostolicam Actuositatem* 11: AAS 58 (1966): 848.

⁵Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 211.

The Christian family constitutes “a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, and for this reason it can and should be called a domestic church.”⁶ “It is a community of faith, hope, and charity; it assumes importance in the Church, as is evident in the New Testament (Eph 5:21–6:4; Col 3:18–21; 1 Pet 3:1–7).”⁷ In his letters sent to various Christian communities, St Paul employs the notion of the “Church” in relation to familial environment. In the letter to the Romans, where he sends greetings to Prisca and Aquila, he adds the following words: “Greet also the church in their house” (Rom 16:5). The word “Church,” according to the ecclesiological terminology of that time, stood for the community of the baptised who gathered for liturgical meetings. These Eucharistic gatherings took place at private homesteads as the ecclesial community met at a house of one of its members. Paul’s greetings inform that Prisca and Aquila had a house where the Roman community gathered together for prayers.⁸ A similar content is contained also in the greetings at the closing of the letter to the Colossians: “Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters in Lā’o’di’cē’a, and to Nym’pha and the Church in her house” (Col 4:15).

St Paul’s vision of family virtues highlighted in 1 Cor 7, Col 3:18–4:16, and Eph 5:21–6:9 serves as a magna carta for a domestic Church. He compares the great mystery of marriage with that of the love of Jesus for the Church. In Ephesians 5:21–33, we find the ultimate model of what the domestic Church should be. The relationship between the couples is compared to the relationship that Christ has with the Church and its prototype is seen in the OT—just as Israel as the bride of the Lord (Hos 2:14–20), so too is the Church—born from the side of Christ—His very own bride. Grace is poured out upon the couples to live this mystery of love in the sacrament of Holy Matrimony. As Christ “gave himself up for her” [his Church] (Eph 5:25), the husband gives himself for his wife and vice versa. Furthermore, all the efforts of the domestic church to live a life of love make them a mirror of Christ’s love expressed through his life, passion, death and resurrection for the

⁶John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 21.

⁷*Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Citta’ del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994), 2204.

⁸Nobert Widok, “Christian Family as Domestic Church in the Writings of St. John Chrysostom,” *Studia Ceranea* 3 (2013): 167–175, at 167.

Church.⁹ Conjugal charity, which flows from the charity of Christ, offered through the sacrament, makes Christian spouses witnesses to a new social consciousness inspired by the Gospel and the Paschal Mystery. The natural dimension of their love is constantly purified, strengthened, and elevated by sacramental grace. In this manner, besides offering each other mutual help on the path to holiness, Christian spouses become a sign and an instrument of Christ's love in the world.¹⁰ Intimately united to the Church by virtue of the sacrament that makes it a "domestic Church" or a "little Church," the Christian family is called "to be a sign of unity for the world and in this way to exercise its prophetic role by bearing witness to the kingdom and peace of Christ, towards which the whole world is journeying."¹¹ In this world which is often alien and even hostile to faith, believing families are of primary importance as centres of living, radiant faith. For this reason, Second Vatican Council calls the family the *Ecclesia domestica*.¹²

The Concept of Domestic Church in Church Fathers

The family as the "Domestic Church" is an ancient patristic concept of the baptized family. The phrase "the Domestic Church," goes back to Irenaeus, a leading Christian theologian of the 2nd century, and St John Chrysostom (349–407). St Augustine of Hippo (354–430) and other patristic writers also referred to religious devotion in the home.¹³ In the light of Eph 5:21–33 the Church Fathers explain some profound bonds between ecclesial and conjugal communities and they even use the phrase "Domestic Church."¹⁴ St John Chrysostom exhorted the faithful

⁹Veronica Arntz, "Biblical Roots of the Domestic Church: New Testament" <http://truthandcharityforum.org/biblical-roots-of-the-domestic-church-old-testament/> [Accessed on 01.11.2018].

¹⁰Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 220.

¹¹John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 48: *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1656–1657, 2204.

¹²Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, 11, AAS 57 (1965): 7–75; John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 21.

¹³Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Sex, Gender & Christian Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 207.

¹⁴Nobert Mette, "The Family in the Official Teaching of the Church," in *The Family*, ed., Lisa Sowle Cahill and Dietmar Mieth (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995) Quoted in L. S. Cahill, *Sex, Gender & Christian Ethics*, 207.

in one of his sermons: “make your home a church.”¹⁵ According to St Augustine, parents employ a role of *mūnus episcopale* (episcopal responsibility) within the family. In a homily he says,

To every man, if he is the head of his own house, ought the office of the Episcopate to belong, to take care how his household believe, that none of them fall into heresy... because he has been bought at so great a price. Do not neglect them the least of those belonging to you, look after the salvation of all your household with all vigilance. This if you do, you put out to use; you will not be slothful servants, you will not have to fear so horrible a condemnation.¹⁶

Here one finds a prolonged understanding of the unique role of the father as head of the family, who is responsible for its religious education, and who is called to become a Christlike servant to his family, and thereby serve Christ.¹⁷ St Alphonsus Liguori (1696–1787), specified the ways and means to attain salvation through family life.¹⁸

Family as Domestic Church according to Magisterial Teachings

With the promulgation of *Lumen Gentium* (1964), the concept of domestic church was reinserted into modern theological parlance. In a similar vein that of the Church fathers, the magisterial teachings explain how the life of the family can be made a holy activity in union with the life and mission of Christ. For instance, *Lumen Gentium* explains that all the moments in the lives of the couples are to be lived according to the guidance of Spirit, that is, their life in the family which includes daily occupations, physical and mental relaxation, apostolic endeavours and bearing patiently the hardships their whole lives too be acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. This would convert everything into holy activity that they consecrate the world itself to God and through this

¹⁵John Chrysostom, *Homilies*, Edited by Philip Schaff (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers Inc., 1994), 148.

¹⁶Augustine, *Sermon on the Mount, Harmony of the Gospels, Homilies on the Gospels. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 6, Edited by Philip Schaff (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1994), 406.

¹⁷Joseph C. Atkinson, “Family as Domestic Church: Developmental Trajectory, Legitimacy, and Problems of Appropriation,” *Theological Studies* 66 (2005): 592–604, at 597.

¹⁸Alphonsus Liguori, *The Complete Works of Saint Alphonsus De Liguori. The Ascetical Works*, Vol. III, *The Great Means of Salvation and of Perfection*. Edited by Eugene Grimm (Brooklyn: Redemptorist Fathers, 1927), 355–356.

process family is “regarded as the domestic church,” which would function as domestic church.¹⁹ This idea is restated in the decree on the laity, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, that family receives a mission from God, and it is called to fulfil this mission by mutual loyalty of its members and in shared prayers offered to God.²⁰

Pope Paul VI states, “Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize...”²¹ This is true of the domestic church, which must be ready through witness and explicit proclamation to alert the world to the gospel of Jesus Christ. While Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul I briefly mentioned the term domestic church, it is only with Pope John Paul II that a systematic analysis of a theology of domestic church is attempted. *Familiaris Consortio* clearly enumerates the role of the family in making the Church the Mystical body of Christ.²² Pope John Paul II says, “The little domestic church, like the greater Church, needs to be constantly and intensely evangelized: hence its duty regarding permanent education in the faith.”²³ “The Christian family constitutes specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, and for this reason it can and should be called a domestic church.”²⁴ The purpose of this domestic church is not to enclose its members or Christian values for safety in a hostile world. Instead, the family should serve, in the words of *Gaudium et Spes*,²⁵ as “a school of deeper humanity.”²⁶ “This

¹⁹Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, 34.

²⁰Second Vatican Council, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, November 18, 1965, 11. http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651118_apostolicam-actuositatem_en.html. [Accessed on 06.11.2018]

²¹Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 14.

²²John Paul II, *Letter to the Families* (1994), 19. https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1994/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_02021994_families.html. [Accessed on 06.11.2018]. David M. Thomas, “Home Fires: Theological Reflections on the Christian Family,” in *The Changing Family: Views from Theology and the Social Studies in the Light of the Apostolic Exhortation Familiaris Consortio*, ed. Stanley L. Saxton & Patricia Voydanoff (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1984), 15-22, at 17.

²³John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 50. http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio.html. [Accessed on 20.09.2017]

²⁴*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2204.

²⁵Cahill, *Sex, Gender, and Christian Ethics*, 208.

²⁶Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, 52.

happens where there is care and love for the little ones, the sick, the aged; where there is mutual service every day; when there is a sharing of goods, of joys, and of sorrows."²⁷

In John Paul II's *Letter to the Families*, the family is defined as a community with a social vocation. The letter repeatedly uses the phrase "domestic church"²⁸ and defines the family as "a firmly grounded social reality," and "an institution fundamental to the life of every society."²⁹ The interior solidarity of the family flows outward in a "civilization of love" for humanity and the common good, in country, state, and world. *Amoris Laetitia* too highlights this idea and adds that one learns endurance and the joy of work, fraternal love, generosity, forgiveness, etc. in the family.³⁰ Among the magisterial teachings on the family it is the most demanding and supportive acknowledgement that the Christian family itself is a central embodiment of the Church. For, family serves the same purpose as the rest of the Church, since it is the church in a familial way. The familial church "stands under the power and the judgement of grace and, for many, the more significant events of their religious life occur within the family."³¹

Contemporary Theologians on the Domestic Church

Contemporary theologians further elaborate the idea of the domestic Church. Walter Kasper opines that the aspects which prompt us to call family a domestic church are resulting from the nature of the sacramental marriage and its characteristics, such as call, gift, and the form of service within the Church which demands the acceptance and upbringing of the children, and thus developing living cells in the Church by the model of their life.³² Lisa Cahill explains that the domestic church is linked to the reciprocal roles of men and women in the family, to the indissolubility and sacramentality of marriage, as well as to the nurture and education of children, and the contributions of families to church and society.³³

²⁷John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 21.

²⁸John Paul II, *Letter to the Families*, 3, 15, 16, 19.

²⁹John Paul II, *Letter to the Families*, 17.

³⁰Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 86. Also in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1657.

³¹Donald A. Miller, *Concepts of Family Life in Modern Catholic Theology: From Vatican II through 'Christifideles Laici'* (San Francisco: Catholic Scholar Press, 1996), 166.

³²Walter Kasper, *Theology of Christian Marriage* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1980), 38.

³³Cahill, *Sex, Gender, and Christian Ethics*, 208.

Domestic Church in the Chavarul

Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul (Testament of a Loving Father) is in the form of a letter by Chavara which in nutshell presents the precepts to be followed by a Christian family. Precisely, it expresses the love, care and struggles of a loving father who wants to ensure the good future of his children in this world and the life after. The term domestic church as such is not used in the *Chavarul*, but his teachings highlight almost every aspect of a domestic church.

St Chavara's Theological Vision of Family as the Domestic Church

Chavara looked upon the family as the most powerful system to shape individuals, and to keep them united since he has deep awareness that any damage to this system will not only destroy its members but also undermine the foundation of the Church and of the society. Chavara did undergo the birth pain like St Paul in Gal 4:19—“My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you!”—until Christ is formed in every member of a family. According to Chavara “A good Christian family is the image of heaven,”³⁴ that is, in a good family, husband and wife live and love each other in a similar intimacy, as Christ loves the Church. Their mutual love becomes fruitful when they have children, the embodiment of their love, and bring them up in love. When parents and children open themselves to others—treasures their parents and grandparents, reaches out to the relatives, their friends and neighbours—they form a wider community by radiating its goodness all around. This is almost heaven on earth and becomes a domestic church.³⁵ But this glowing picture does not often correspond to the real families. Well aware of this limitation, *Chavarul* offers practical direction to the family, the domestic church.

Chavara's vision is that family should be centred on God because fear of God is the basis of Christian family, love of God is the wealth, and devotion to God is the strength of the family and thus he highlights love as the mandate for family ethics. “Love one another” (Jn 13:34) is the first rule for every family and he admonishes persons to keep away from all sorts of strife and the tendency to take revenge. The blessing and honour of a family consists in its peaceful existence with other

³⁴Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Chavarul (Testament of a Loving Father)*, ed. Saju Chackalackal (Kochi: Chavara Central Secretariat, 2018), 9.

³⁵Michael Amaladoss, “The Ideal Family,” *The New Leader* 127, 21 (2014): 9.

families without conflicts. Even animals can retaliate. However, forgiveness is possible only for a prudent, strong, and dignified human person. Chavara cites the example of the Emperor Constantine who was walking along a road when a man from the street came up and slapped him. When the officers sought his permission to deal with the offender, the Emperor reminded them of the need of forgiveness saying that retaliation was not the sign of strength, but that forgiveness was the sign of his strength.³⁶

Chavara insists that a family in which the fear of the Lord pervades will enjoy the fruit of divine blessings in this world as well as in eternity. Blasphemous language and vulgar conversations will blur the brightness of a good family like dark clouds.³⁷ Chavara urges the families to observe Sunday integrally, not only by attending the Holy Mass which is obligatory but also spending the day in listening to sermons, in reading good books, in visiting the poor and serving the sick, and in exercising charity in general (*Chavarul*, 1:22). He advises to take turn and participate in the daily Mass, if possible, at least one or two members of the family. He asks to make confession and receive Holy Communion at least once a month. "If you cannot participate in the Novena prayers associated with major feasts and the feasts of Our Lady, and monthly devotions in honour of the Blessed Virgin and St Joseph in the church, you must recite them at home" (*Chavarul*, 1:19). The family which listens to the Word of God together, receiving Holy Communion together and praying together is an expression of a united family, united in the presence of the Lord. The Christian family is thus grafted into the mystery of the Church to such a degree as to become a sharer, in its own way, in the saving mission proper to the Church.

Chavara instructs the parents, "As the children grow up, teach them to devotedly call on the names of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. Let the children familiarise and kiss the image of the Holy Family and teach them to honour and venerate them..." (*Chavarul*, 1:2). The little children are like clay and it is the parents who shape up the lives of their children in their tender age. Whatever they are taught in this age is very important to determine their future. The children born to Christian

³⁶*Complete Works of Chavara, Vol. IV: The Letters*, ed. Lucas Vithuvattical and K.C. Chacko, trns. Mary Leo (Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Bl. Chavara, 1990), 103-104.

³⁷*Complete Works of Chavara, Vol. IV: The Letters*, 109.

parents must be brought up according to the culture and faith of true Christians. Chavara took special interest in looking into this matter and instruct the parents regarding the upbringing of the children in Christian faith.

Chavara cautions the parents to “ensure that all children are at home by the time the Angelus bell rings. Train them to greet and kiss the hands of the elders and parents as soon as the family prayers are over” (*Chavarul*, II:11). This instruction rightly gives us his keen interest in developing the spiritual ambiance in the family that promotes religiosity. From the early childhood, the children should be taught step by step their daily prayers and be made to join their parents for the family prayers in the evening. The evening family prayer where all the family members come together to pray creates in the child a sense of belonging and inculcates the habit of praying at an early stage in human development.

Virtues in Families

Chavara realized that family is the place where human life originates, and human love and human relationships are first experienced; knowledge and love of God are first learned; and values and attitudes are first found, shaped, and passed on from one generation to the next. Hence, he proposes certain virtues specifically—charity, patience, humility, and justice which are inevitable to lead a peaceful and harmonious family life.

Charity

Kuriakose Elias Chavara invites family members to cultivate love, order, and peace, even if that would call for sacrificing personal convenience and comfort. Practice of the virtue of modesty and chastity is the characteristics of a good Christian family. Chavara says, “Days on which you have not rendered any good to others will not be reckoned in the book of life. Be desirous of others’ love and respect than they becoming fearful of you. Let no beggar leave your home empty handed; likewise, don’t hesitate, as much as you can, to give alms” (*Chavarul*, 1:14). In this precept, Chavara highlights the need of charity towards our needy brethren as the primary requisite to be enrolled in the book of life. Our acts of charity make us more lovable and respectable in the sight of others. Being charitable means being generous. Whatever we have is a gift of God which is to be shared with all our brothers and

sisters. “Christians know that charity is the heartbeat of life. With Jesus they look at all human beings, but particularly to those close at hand, and say to themselves, what do they need? What can I reasonably do for them, in the Spirit of Jesus?”³⁸ The family is indispensable in forming the children in the social culture of the society. Through his precepts regarding the social concern imbued with the values of fraternity and solidarity Chavara instructs the parents to practise these values in their family and show empathy towards the poor and needy people of the society without hurting their dignity. Families, thereby, must serve society through works of charity, by way of showing hospitality to others, particularly, towards poor and marginalized and respect their dignity as children of God. It will in turn generate a social awareness in children who will function as future citizens, as prophets of love.

He further elaborates saying that engaging in loose-talk is a means of pastime for many, and many a family is turned into venues of gossip. So Chavara asks to avoid indecent talks, unchristian conversations, grumbling, and uncharitable criticism of neighbours and warns them that the punishment will befall upon those who entertain such evil deeds (*Chavarul*, 1:10). The advice is to make it clear to others that the home is not a place for indulging in conversation ill-befitting a Christian family. With a touch of exaggeration, Chavara warns people that if the evil of another person is discussed in the house, the punishment for that evil will fall on that house! Pope Francis in his apostolic exhortation, *Gaudete et Exsultate* [GE] also warns against gossiping. He says, “detraction and calumny are acts of terrorism: a bomb is thrown, it explodes, and the attacker walks away calm and contented. This is completely different from the nobility of those who speak to others face to face ... out of genuine concern for their good” (GE, footnote 73). He says that one of the traits of holiness is refraining from gossips and not to bear false witness (8th Commandment) (GE 87).

Forgiveness

Chavara, inviting attention to Jesus’ teaching, urges people to “Love one another” (Jn 13:34). He admonishes them to forgive the mistakes and shortcomings of one another to experience peace on earth and eternal reward in heaven. He expresses regret regarding homes where

³⁸Leonard Foley, *Believing in Jesus: A Popular Overview of the Catholic Faith* (Cincinnati: St Anthony Messenger Press, 2005), 194.

there is discord and hostility between brothers and sisters. He reminds them of our Lord's exhortations about unity (Cfr Mt 12:25). He says that a family which experiences discord and fight among its members will soon perish (*Chavarul*, 1:1). Chavara invites family members to lead a peaceful heavenly life by loving everyone, reconciling with God, others and oneself. He laments over the families with bitterness and conflict and exhorts them to be the initiators in forgiving the wrongdoings of the other family members. This unconditional forgiveness is the hallmark of Christians. Forgiving our wrongdoers brings us peace and makes us worthy of the eternal reward.

Trust in God's Providence

All illness and sufferings are to be accepted joyfully from the hands of God. Chavara says, "Entrust yourself to the Divine Providence when you are faced with trials and tribulations, diseases and difficulties. He is not a strong person who is patient only when he is delighted (*Chavarul*, 1:20). He gives an anecdote of a devotee who used to say: "In this world, everything happens according to my wish; for, I wish only that which is willed by God" (*Chavarul*, 1:20). "God's will always and everywhere," was the watchword of Chavara's spirituality. Seeking God's will in all things and every time would help us to stay happy and content.

Humility

To the people who show off their wealth, the exhortation that Chavara gives is almost like a maxim. He advises not to make a show of wealth. Those who display their wealth, according to him, are persons of low status. He asks people not to spend excessively on festivals and celebration. The light of mini lamp that burns longer is preferable to a torched haystack that blazes for a while and gets extinguished instantaneously (*Chavarul*, 1:6). Chavara warns against greed and asks people to improve upon what they already possess before trying to acquire more. The real wealth of the family is not the quantity of possessions but their quality. The example he gives is that of an industrious man who lived happily with his small assets (*Chavarul*, 1:11).

Justice

The *Chavarul* is known for practical ethic. For Chavara, social justice—which is central to Christian life—was one of the main

concerns. He begins with business ethics. According to him, trade involves risk of both soul and wealth. If trading is the only opening one has to make a living, there is no objection to pursuing it. However, he wants it to be done very carefully and with justice. An unjust trader never maintains a steady progress in life. Riches amassed through deceit and fraud will melt away like snow (*Chavarul*, 1:13). Chavara also advises not to steal and not to obtain stolen goods. According to him, the houses harbouring stolen goods will go up in flames. In consonant with his saying on friendship, he asks people not to mix with those who steal other people's property, for later they will not hesitate to steal even their friends' property. Moreover, one will share their guilt and sin (*Chavarul*, 23). Similarly, like the Israelite prophets he would exhort his parishioners, "Don't deny or delay just wages to labourers; for, it is a grave sin crying out before the throne of God" (*Chavarul*, 1:18). He further asks them, "Don't humiliate or trouble the poor; for, God will seek retribution from you on account of their tears" (*Chavarul*, 1:18).

We have to understand Chavara's words in the historical context of his times. During the 19th century the caste system was very much prevalent in the Kerala society. The trade and merchandise were limited to the high caste while the low castes were deprived even of the right to own the leased land for cultivation. They were hired by the rich to work in their fields and were paid very meagre wages. Thus, they had to completely depend on the landlords. On the other hand, the merchants and traders oppressed the poor by using unfair means. Thereby, the rich became richer and the poor poorer.

Chavara's innate sense of social justice is explicit through these precepts of *Chavarul*. Oppressing the poor is a grave sin which cries out before God. No one prospers in his/her life at the cost of the wealth of his/her neighbour, especially the poor. The lesson is very clear—instead of amassing wealth unjustly and losing their soul to hell, the families must be satisfied with whatever they have.

Moral Formation of Children

Christian family is described by Vatican II as the domestic Church, whereas, St Kuriakose Elias Chavara compares it to the image of heaven, the Kingdom of God. He admonishes the parents about the care they should take, in bringing up the children. He says,

Parents, you ought to know that bringing up your children is the most important thing and your primary duty in life. Children are sacred treasures entrusted to you by God Almighty. You should also remember that these are the souls that Jesus Christ has entrusted in your hands to sanctify them with His most precious blood and to make them His servants and thus, to offer them back to Him on the Day of judgment (*Chavarul*, 2:1).

To revive the Church, Chavara tried to activate its basic unit, the family. So, he asks the parents on providing them with a spiritual base as good Christians. His discourse on parenting rings with worldly wisdom, authority, theological reflections, psychological insight, philosophical vision, and deep and intense spiritual conviction. Chavara exhorts the parents to teach the children to fear and love God, that in turn they will respect and love their parents (*Chavarul*, 2:1). Quoting Origen, Chavara says,

If the parents have been condemned to hell on the judgment day due to the evil acts of their children, it is because God holds them responsible for the acts of their children. If you desire your children to be with you and be helpful to you in your old age, ensure that they are trained to be good Christians in their tender age (*Chavarul*, 2:13).

Moderation is a virtue, and this virtue must be practiced in the case of bringing up children. Parenting is about maintaining the right balance between gentleness and strictness. Chavara exhorts parents not to be too strict, nor lenient towards children (*Chavarul*, 2:9). A Christian should be brought up in the gospel values, although the ways of the world point to other directions in order to achieve easy success. Chavara tells the parents to form a right conscience in the children: "Don't train children in lying or cheating, or other shadowy tricks, saying that it is normal and that they need to be cunning to survive in the world. When you come across their mistakes, rebuke and correct them. Teach them to hold truth and justice in high esteem" (*Chavarul*, 2:10).

Vocation, according to Chavara, is a matter of personal choice. The parents might guide them, help them discern and place before them all kinds of possible vocations a Christian youth can respond to. However, "When they come of age, children should be given full freedom to choose their state of life" (*Chavarul*, 2:14). A Christian family has to be serious about their sacramental life. Each sacrament must be received at

a specific time. So Chavara instructs the parents, “when children are seven years old, facilitate them for confession after instructing them what they should know about it. Instruct them especially to be devoted to the Blessed Mother” (*Chavarul*, 2:8). Similarly, he also considered the developmental stage of children of twelve years and above as a crucial period. He insists to keep the children of twelve years and above, fully engaged in some activity, befitting their age, while at home. They should not be allowed to run about naked even inside the house (*Chavarul*, 2:3). Out of respect for the elders, don’t let children sleep in their parents’ bedroom. Moreover, boys and girls should not be allowed to sleep in the same room; for, the devil will teach them what they don’t know by nature (*Chavarul*, 2:4). Although impractical in the case of poor families who live in single-room house, the children need to be brought up respecting the privacy of others in the house.

Children’s progress in school must be monitored by parents (*Chavarul*, 2:6). Parents shall not hand over their right of decision making and authority over the family to their children (*Chavarul*, 2:15). Parents have to instruct the children especially to be devoted to the Blessed Mother (*Chavarul*, 2:8). To the children he says that there should not be an occasion when they cause anguish to their parents. For, it is the violation of fourth commandment of God which would bring God’s curse (*Chavarul*, 2:16). Parents play a pivotal role in deciding the future of their children. The children are the future of a family, the domestic church. Therefore, it is the duty of the parents to watch over the children’s growth and ensure their holistic development by showing keen interest in their spiritual, intellectual, social, and moral formation.

Mission of the Parents as Role Models and Witnesses

Chavara admonishes the parents to be strict in keeping regularity in daily activities at home, otherwise, comfort and self-interest may influence the activities at home. For, disciplined life in the family brings health of mind and body. Chavara asks people to go to sleep in time and rise up punctually; they have to pray the morning prayers and if possible attend the mass; in the evening, they should pray the family prayers in common, meditate for half an hour upon a theme based on what is read from good books; after supper, they are urged to make an examination of conscience, and to pray before retiring to bed, and to proceed to sleep. Chavara asked the head of the family to ensure that

these precepts are followed strictly (*Chavarul*, 1:24). All of us are called to follow the Lord in the ways befitting to our vocation to life. In the family, the domestic church, the parents take up the role of the spiritual animators to train the children with regard to the matters of faith.

In a similar vein *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches,

It is here [in the domestic church] that the father of the family, the mother, children, and all members of the family exercise the priesthood of the baptized in a privileged way 'by the reception of the sacraments, prayer and thanksgiving, the witness of a holy life, and self-denial and active charity.'³⁹

Conclusion

As family being the cradle of virtues where children are trained to cultivate love and manners and build character, the vision of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara on family life visualized in *Chavarul* is a unique contribution to mould and form a virtuous family, a domestic church. In the context of the contemporary world, which is undergoing fast changes and facing various challenges, the theological and ethical vision contained in the *Chavarul* can contribute to and influence positively the family life to remain faithful in its call to be domestic church. Chavara's concern not to lose the joys of family life through negligence of moral values by the members of the family and by irresponsible parenting should be ours too. *Chavarul* is the fruit of his meditation and the lessons of his life, and its impact, relevance, and consoling warmth shine untarnished through generations with its countless love and purity of thought. *Chavarul* contains the insightful and practical teachings of St Chavara to explore solutions to address contemporary issues faced by our families for their integral wellbeing and to help them to become 'heaven on earth.'

³⁹*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1657.

**CATHOLIC THEOLOGICAL TRADITION
OF THE FAMILY
VISION OF THE FAMILY IN *AMORIS LAETITIA***

Keynote 2

DEVELOPMENT OF CATHOLIC THEOLOGY OF MARRIAGE AND FAMILY ETHICS IN THE 20TH AND 21ST CENTURY

Peter Hünermann♦

The aim of this paper is to give an overview of the profound changes in the Roman magisterium, which took place in the end of the nineteenth century up to the beginning of Vatican II in the first part and describe in the second part the time of Vatican II and the subsequent main post-conciliar documents referring to family ethics up to the threshold of *Amoris laetitia*. This account will be enriched through hints of the public social evolutions.

Catholic Marriage and Family Ethics from the 19th to the 20th Century

The Starting Point: Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae

At the end of the 19th century Leo XIII promulgated his encyclical *Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae* (1880) in response to the political and juridical evolution, which troubled the church since the end of the eighteenth century. In 1792 France introduced the obligatory civil

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Hünermann, Peter. "Development of Catholic Theology of Marriage and Family Ethics in the 20th and 21st Century." In *Vocation and Mission of the Family: Reflections on Chavarul and Amoris Laetitia*, edited by Shaji George Kochuthara, 157–171. Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2020.

matrimony. In Prussia the State took over civil control over a lot of family rights. These tendencies spread rapidly in Europe. The roman reactions of the magisterium against this historical evolution are listed in the *Syllabus of Errors* by Pius IX.¹

Sociologists, historians and philosophers call this great cultural shift “Enlightenment.” It is the rational transition from matrimony as universally accepted institution of divine right to matrimony and family as an institution of human right. In this view matrimony is a community based on a free contract. The way to live matrimony takes more and more personal or even individualistic features as mutual affection, a space of intimacy in upper bourgeois classes. Because of the importance given for society the modern state has to protect people against eventuality in matrimony and family, despotic attitudes, and save the individual right of the involved persons. One finds a good description of this situation in Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*.² Marx affirms, that the grade of women’s emancipation is the most important index of progress in every epoch.³

Leo XIII defends marriage and family as “religious institution”: Universal tradition teaches “that Christ our Lord raised marriage to the dignity of a sacrament.” “One man with one woman far more perfect through the bond of heavenly love.”⁴

He speaks of “perpetual indissolubility” and the “mutual duties of husband and wife.” “The husband is the chief of the family and the head of the wife... Since the husband represents Christ, and since the wife represents the Church, let there always be in both, in him who commands and in her who obeys, a heaven-born love guiding both in their respective duties.”⁵ This is Christian doctrine. The accent lies on the following statement:

¹DH 2965-2974: “In no way can it be asserted that Christ raised matrimony to the dignity of a sacrament. The sacrament of matrimony is nothing but an appendage to the contract and separable from it, and the sacrament itself consists merely in the nuptial blessing. By natural law the bond of matrimony is not indissoluble and in various cases divorce, properly so called, can be sanctioned by civil authority.”

²Georg W.F. Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, ed. J. Hoffmeister (4th ed.), §158-§181.

³Karl Marx, *Frühe Schriften*, ed. H.J. Lieber, P. Furth (Darmstadt, 1962), 907-909.

⁴Heinrich Denzinger, *Compendium of Creeds, Definitions and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals*, revised, enlarged, and, in collaboration with Helmut Hoping, ed. Peter Hünermann, (for the original bilingual edition and edited by Robert Fastiggi and Anne Englund Nash) for the English edition (Ignatius Press, San Francisco [43rd ed.], 2012), DH 3142.

⁵DH 3143.

Christ, ... having renewed marriage ... commended and entrusted all the discipline bearing upon these matters to his Church. The Church, always and everywhere, has so used her power with reference to the marriages of Christians, that men have seen clearly how it belongs to her as of native right; not being made hers by any human grant, but given divinely to her by the will of her Founder...⁶

For confirmation Leo refers to legislation of the Western Church: The law of marriage in the Church was “the same for all, did not distinguish “between slaves and free-born men and women,” forbade men “to inflict capital punishment” to his wife, who betrayed him. Excessive sexual or shameless desire was brand-marked. Sons and daughters were not subordinated to the heads of their family but free to marry. The result: “...no one who thinks rightfully of these matters can fail to see how, with regard to marriage, she (the Church) is the best guardian and defender of the human race.”⁷

This second statement was evidently the centre of the sharp public controversy. It was a typical European question, resulting from the public order, the strong connection between Roman Catholic Church and the Empire in the West with bishops as princes and the pope as the superior Authority over kings and even the Emperor.

The Main Steps from Pius X to Pius XII

The next step after Leo’s encyclical was the decree of the holy office *Lamentabili* (1907) of Pius X: A list of 65 sentences taken from encyclicals of the Popes. Sentence 51 reads: “It is impossible that matrimony could have become a sacrament of the New Law until later in the Church, since it was necessary that a full theological explication of the doctrine of grace and the sacraments should first take place before matrimony should be held as a sacrament.”⁸ The whole list ends with the papal sentence: “Each and every one of the above listed proposition must be held by all as condemned and proscribed.”⁹

The context is development of biblical and especially historical research in theology, initiated by Leo’s recourse to Thomas Aquinas.

⁶DH 3144.

⁷DH 3144.

⁸DH 3451.

⁹DH 3141ff.

This document is as well a consequence of Vatican I.¹⁰ The Constitution *Dei Filius* says:

The perpetual common belief of the Catholic Church has held and holds also this: there is a twofold order of knowledge, distinct not only in its principle but also in its object; in its principle, because in the one we know by natural reason, in the other by divine faith; in its object, because apart from what natural reason can attain, there are proposed to our belief mysteries that are hidden in God, that can never be known unless they are revealed by God.¹¹

Pius X considers Scripture and Church traditions as supernatural objects, which cannot be treated by reason. The Responses of the Biblical Commission on the authorship of the Pentateuch and on the Gospel of John are famous examples for that, but this opinion marks as well the concept of matrimony.

The next roman document by Pius XI: *Divini illius magistri* (1929) concerns education, especially the right and duty of education. "There are three necessary societies, family, society, church, and yet harmoniously combined by God, into which man is born: two, namely, the family and civil society, belong to the natural order; the third, the Church, to the supernatural order."¹²

In the first place comes the family, instituted and arranged by God himself. Family has priority of nature and therefore of rights with respect to civil society. But family is an imperfect society; whereas civil society is a perfect society, having in itself all the means for its appointed end, which is the temporal well-being of the community; and so, in view of the common good, society has pre-eminence over the family.

"The Church, in which man is born through baptism, a society of the supernatural order, has in itself all the means required for its own end, hence it is supreme in its own domain."¹³ But the Pope is not content with that. He declares, that the Church has the first and supreme right to educate because this right is of "supernatural order... superior, therefore, to any other title in the natural order."¹⁴ The Church has "the inalienable right as well as the indispensable duty of the Church to watch over the entire education of her children, in all institutions, public or private, not merely in regard to the religious instruction there given,

¹⁰DH 3015.

¹¹DH 3015.

¹²DH 3685.

¹³DH 3685.

¹⁴DH 3686.

but in regard to every other branch of learning and every regulation insofar as religion and morality are concerned...”¹⁵

Accordingly in the matter of education, it is the right, or, to speak more correctly, it is the duty of the State to protect in its legislation the prior rights, already described, of the family as regards the Christian education of its offspring and, consequently, also to respect the supernatural rights of the Church in the same realm of Christian education.¹⁶

These formulas made part of the concordats between the Vatican and the States of Latin America. Spain (Franco), Italy (Mussolini). In Argentine for example political decisions in education could not be voted without previous approval from the side of the Bishops. These concordats had to be revised after Vatican II.

The encyclical of Pius XI *Casti connubii*, written in 1930 by Franciscus Hürth SJ, against the declaration of the Anglican Lambeth Conference (august 1930), claims to present “Christian marriage taking into account the present-day conditions and necessities, errors and crimes.”¹⁷ The public situation: the European and the North-American discussions after the first World War: the emancipation of women, formation of women’s Associations, the right to divorce and remarriage, the limitation of the number of children, meaning and essence of marriage and family in modern society.

Casti connubii starts with a definition:

Let it be repeated as an immutable and inviolable fundamental doctrine, that matrimony was not instituted or restored by man but by God; not by men were the laws made to strengthen and confirm and elevate it, but by God the Author of nature, and by Christ the Lord, by whom nature was redeemed; and hence these laws cannot be subject to any human decrees or to any contrary pact even of the spouses themselves.¹⁸

¹⁵DH 3688.

¹⁶DH 3693.

¹⁷See Peter Hünemann, “On the Specific Theological Character of the Sacrament of Matrimony,” in Thomas Knieps-Port le Roi, Aldegonde Brenninkmeijer-Werhahn, ed. *Authentic Voices, Discerning Hearts* (Lit, 2016), 133-150.

¹⁸Please refer to DH 3700-3724—the Latin or the English text. The following text is not given in DH, and therefore, I have translated the text directly from AAS. The whole Text of *Casti connubii* can be found in AAS 22(1930): 539-592: *Casti Connubii*, #2, cfr, Gen 1:27–28; 2:22–23; Mt 19:3–9; Eph 5:23f.; Council of Trent Session VIII, http://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19301231_casti-connubii.html

Though matrimony is instituted by God, “the human will, too, enters into it... For each individual marriage ... arises only from the free consent of each of the spouses... by which each party hands over and accepts those rights proper to the state of marriage... the nature of marriage is entirely independent of the free will of men.” Marriage does not result from a nature-based cultural and historical development.

By matrimony, therefore, the souls of the contracting parties are joined and knit together more directly and intimately than are their bodies, and that not by any passing affection or affects of the soul but by a deliberate and firm act of the will; and from this the union of souls by God’s decree, a sacred and inviolable bond arises.¹⁹

From matrimony as *ius divinum* the encyclical deduces the rights of education of children, the way of intercourse, the order of love which prescribes the subjection of women and children to man as head of the family. The constitution of matrimony as sacrament is a free act of Christ, who connected this institution with divine grace, so that for Christians there is no possibility to marry without contracting in a sacramental way. The types of marriage in the Old Testament, especially polygamy represent only a divine dispensation given by God himself.

This extreme legal concept of matrimony serves in the preparation of Vatican II, because Father Hürth, SJ is entrusted with the task of writing the preparatory schema for the Council fathers.²⁰ This document is the basis on which Paul VI is urged by neo-scholastic theologians after the council to subscribe *Humanae vitae* against the vote of the commission he instituted. This fundamentalist affirmation of *ius divinum* marks as well as the CIC 1917 and the CIC 1983. This refers to the *ius divinum* as interpreted by *Casti connubii*.²¹

The Development of Catholic Marriage and Family Ethics from *Gaudium et spes* (Vatican II) to *Amoris Laetitia*

The Conciliar Teaching

In *Gaudium et spes* (Vatican II) there is an entire chapter with the title: “Fostering the Dignity of Matrimony and Family.” The other documents

¹⁹Quoted from AAS, 32 (1930): 542.

²⁰Hürth was probably as well the author of Pius XII’s allocution on 29-10-1951 to the members of L’Unione Cattolica Italiana Ostetriche.

²¹See CIC 1917 § 1110, 1118 and CIC 1983 § 1055–1057; 1134.

of marriage and family ethics are rather short and quite specific because they are integrated in different contexts.²²

To understand this chapter, one has to pay attention to the view of the global society presupposed. This vision opposed to the vision of Leo XIII to Pius XII is marked by the acknowledgement of Human Rights presented by John XXIII in *Pacem in terris* (1963). This encyclical declares human dignity as fundamental principle of human life. Human rights anchored in dignity precede any positive rights of whatever historical authority. With the acknowledgement of Human Rights, the plurality of modern society is recognised and relationships between the different instances must be determined anew: the plurality of religions, the plurality of cultures. The different concepts of matrimony and family had to be interpreted and judged in a new way. How did the Council Fathers within this new vision of world and society, within global plurality of cultures outline what matrimony and family is in Christian understanding?

GS gives no juridical, sociological, philosophical, theological definition of the “community produced by marriage and family.”²³ GS 47 starts with the given marriages and families in our time.

Hence Christians and all men, who hold this community in high esteem sincerely rejoice in the various ways by which men today find help in fostering this community of love and perfecting its life. Those who rejoice in such aids look for additional benefits from them and labour to bring them about. Yet the excellence of this institution is not everywhere reflected with equal brilliance.²⁴

The “plague of divorce, so-called free love and other disfigurements... excessive self-love, the worship of pleasure and illicit practices against human generation... disturbances... by modern economic conditions” etc. have “obscuring effects”... “Therefore by presenting certain key points of Church doctrine in a clearer light, this sacred synod wishes to offer guidance and support to those Christians and other men who are trying to preserve... the native dignity of the married state and its extraordinary value.”²⁵

²²See SC 77, 78; IM 10, 14; LG 6, 11, 29, 35; OE 18; UR 6, 23; CD 12; OT 10; DE 3, 7, 8; AA 4, 7, 11, 30; AG 15, 21, 41; PO 6, 16.

²³GS 47.

²⁴GS 47.

²⁵GS 47.

No. 48 speaks of three fundamental characteristics of matrimony and family: 1. The constitution of matrimony and family stems from “irrevocable consensus.” 2. Matrimony and family are ordained by their nature “towards procreation and education of children as the crown of their objects or aims.” 3. This fact is linked with mutual help, service and experience of the meaning and growing perfection of the oneness of the married Christian people and in the multiple benefits for parents and children.

The manner to speak of these characteristics differs strongly from *Casti connubii*, presenting these characteristics as imposed laws by God himself. GS argues according to the complex and multi-faceted nature of man with a multi-dimensional response: The conjugal covenant of irrevocable consent is “rooted” in the act “whereby spouses mutually bestow and accept each other.” So “in the eyes of society matrimony and family are lasting institutions.” It is this irrevocable consent which brings about all the richness of benefits for the spouses, children and society. That is as well God’s will, who created men and women.

The multiple dimensions and different levels of human existence represent the formal structure of a sacrament as patristic and medieval theology described it: a corporal sign but filled up with a deep human reality and divine presence and grace.

In the same way the teleology of matrimony is conceived: The “crown” of this inner order is the procreation and education of children, but by their “compact of conjugal love” man and woman “are no longer two but one flesh” and render “mutual help and service.” They “experience the meaning of their oneness and aim to it with growing perfection.” All that leads back to the irrevocability of this consent and its richness. It is an invitation to accept marriage and family in faith.

The second part of this paragraph opens the view for the way how God moves into the reality of the married Christian people and their offspring: It is the love of God in which married love is “caught” by divine love, has its profound and open room to live and to grow. Consequently, the Son of God and the Son of Man, Jesus Christ, the Word of God made flesh and his redeeming love integrates the married Christians and their matrimony into the reign of God and its commencement, the Church, strengthens the married couple and all their family. That is the sacrament by which the spouses are fortified in and with the local Church. Through this sacrament married Christians “receive a kind of consecration in the duties and dignity of their state.”

And the way married Christians and their children respond by their life to this gift and the presence of God the Father and Christ is their way to live as married people behaving and acting in the ordinary way and doing their prayer, educating their children, living in the Spirit.

GS No. 49 treats a very complex question: "The biblical word of God...urges the betrothed and the married to nourish and develop the wedlock by pure conjugal love and undivided affection...true love ... manifests itself in a variety of ways depending on the worthy customs of various peoples and times." The following explication underlines the affection of the will "from one person to the other, involving the whole person, body and mind. All the expressions of body and mind have unique dignity as signs of the "friendship, distinctive of marriage." "This love God has judged worthy of special gifts" of grace. This love "excels mere erotic inclination." But it demands "notable virtue," a cultivation of love, prayer "for steadiness," "large heartedness and a spirit of sacrifice." Christians are invited to give testimony to "faithfulness and harmony in their love," concern "for educating their children."

There is a remarkable difference between *Casti connubii* and this description. In *Casti connubii* the whole accent lies on the mind and our legal rationality. "Through matrimony the minds are linked and go together prior and closer than the bodies, not through passing senses or affection of souls, but through deliberated and firm decree of wills."²⁶

GS 50 is the first solemn magisterial document including affection of will, erotic inclination as constitutive but not only moments of living the sacrament of marriage: arguing how love transforms and ennobles these bodily expressions of love.

GS 51 raises the urgent question how couples should behave in circumstances where "at least temporarily the size of the family should not be increased." The response: It is up to the married people themselves to decide on this question, not to any other authority. The reflection must be marked by greatest care and avoid "the offer of dishonourable solutions." The Council Fathers don't give any detailed answer on the several methods of birth control. Paul VI reserved this question to avoid a discussion in the Conciliar Aula and instituted a special commission to treat these things. His answer, only published in 1968, is *Humanae vitae*.²⁷

²⁶*Casti connubii*, 7.

²⁷See DH 447–4479. See Chapter 2.

GS 51 states that “abortion and infanticide are unspeakable crimes.” This number ends with the admonition: “All should be persuaded that human life and the task of transmitting it are not realities bound up with this world alone. Once they cannot be measured or perceived only in terms of it but always have a bearing on the eternal destiny of man.”

GS 52 represents a very careful instruction of the family as a kind of school for deeper humanity. The outline of this number refers to the special obligations of the spouses. The public authority has the obligation to help through prudent legislation.

The Council Fathers speak of the larger family and the general obligation to promote “the various values of marriage and the family by...cooperation with other men of good will.”²⁸

In comparison with GS the other documents of Vatican II do not contradict the new vision, but they are less explicit and reduced in their teaching of marriage and family, partly because of the proper intention of the documents, partly because conceived prior to GS.

The Main Post-Conciliar Documents

Humanae vitae and the Recourse to the Pre-Modern Natural Law Concept

Humanae vitae is a frank and honest document. Paul VI marks the newness of the problematic: The world population grows faster than available resources, the changed position of women in society, the new appreciation of conjugal love, the stupendous progress in the domination of nature, etc. He refers to the theological discussion to review moral norms, and proposals for responsible Christian parents. The answer of the theological commission was not “considered by Us as definitive and absolutely certain, dispensing us from the duty of examining personally the serious question.” “Now that we have sifted carefully the evidence sent to us and intensively studied the whole matter as well as prayed constantly to God, we, by virtue of the mandate and trusted to us by Christ, (we) give our reply.”

Note: Professor Dr Alfons Auer, of the Catholic theological Faculty of Tübingen, member of the above mentioned commission told me in a longer conversation in the eighties, that the most striking result of the theological-philosophical research and the discussions for the members themselves was the fact that the majority of the members came to the

²⁸GS 52.

conviction, that the concept of matrimony and family in the apostolic church and the early patristic age—see Eph 5:21-32—was the philosophical concept of the stoic tradition. Against Plato, Aristotle insists that the polis consists of a plurality of communities, villages, which in turn are consisting of families. (Arist. Pol. 1252-1253; 1261-1262). Within family the man has to rule over wife and children, over his wife *politikos*, over children *basilicos* (Pol.1259). The Stoa introduces—in comparison with Aristotle—mutual love of spouses and a high estimation of shared life (Symbiosis) in matrimony. In his treaty of matrimony and family, Antipator of Tarsos (2nd century before Christ) admonishes to select a spouse not looking for wealth and beauty but someone who is able to live an authentic house-community (*teleios oikos kai bios*). “Who does not know by experience, what spouse and children are, has not experienced authentic love” (*Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, Frg. 62). They do not only share their property and the community of souls, but also *ton somaton outoi monoi koinonousin* (Frg. 63). (Tarsos was a city strongly marked by stoic teaching as well in the time when Paul lived there!). According to Musonius even women should be philosophers, daughters should be educated as sons. “Die Gemeinschaft des Lebens und der Erzeugung von Kindern ist das eigentliche Wesen der Ehe... Aber das reicht noch nicht zur wahren Ehe, weil es ja auch ohne Ehe geschehen könnte...In der Ehe muss in jeder Hinsicht eine Symbiose sein und eine Fürsorge von Mann und Frau füreinander, wenn sie gesund und wenn sie krank sind überhaupt in jeder Lebenslage ... Wo nun diese gegenseitige Fürsorge vollkommen ist, wo beide wetteifern , einander in Liebe zu überbieten, eine solche Ehe ist , wie sie sein soll und ein Vorbild für andere” (Quotation: Hans Rudolf Schweizer, “Familie und Ehe,” in HWPh, II, 898). I followed in the note this excellent article, which represents the status of research at the time of *Humanae vitae*.²⁹ (Pohlenz characterises Musonius in a special way). The conclusion of this research and discussions in the commission: The vast majority stated: The concept of matrimony and family—as manifested in Eph 5:21-26—represents a form historically elaborated by *philosophical reflection*, chosen in the spirit of the gospel among a multitude of concepts in the way of a common ecclesial discernment of the spirit. This differs completely from *Casti connubii*. There is room for innovation and correction through modern transformation of the state of women in the society and the modern situation of responsibility of couples for the procreation of children.

²⁹See also, Max Pohlenz, *Die Stoa—Geschichte einer geistigen Bewegung* (Göttingen, 1970 [4th ed.]), 300–303.

Based on the traditional doctrinal principles Paul VI comes to the conclusion: only the recourse to infertile periods can be a mean which fits into the frame of traditional principles. He admits that this moral norm, taken from tradition, possibly “can be observed only with gravest difficulty, sometimes only by heroic effort.”³⁰

“The Christian instincts of the faithful, the upright moral conscientiousness of men and the wisdom and experience of persons versed in sacred sciences will have much to contribute.” Paul VI hopes that “medical, biological, social and psychological research will help...by pooling their efforts.”

Quite a number of Bishops’ Conferences published declarations that this word of the Pope must be received with respect, but the last decision remains in the hands of couples themselves.³¹ The vast majority of matrimonies did not accept this document. Catholic medical doctors and medical faculties of catholic universities rejected it. Initially there was a certain approval in the Latin-American Church, because different governments, pushed by North-Atlantic institutes, considered administrative measures to obtain demographic decrease. In this situation *Humanae vitae* was accepted as instrument to protect freedom.

Humanae vitae influenced the following documents of the papal magisterium. The first example is *Persona humana* (1975).³² This document starts questioning the fundamental role of human dignity. GS presented personal dignity as the fundamental common basis of public and personal life, which includes the invitation to examine the credibility of religious and Christian faith. *Persona humana* teaches:

The people of our time are more and more convinced that the human persons’ dignity and vocation demand that they should discover by the light of their own intelligence the values innate in the nature, that they should ceaselessly develop these values and realize them in their life in order to achieve an ever greater development.

But: “In moral matters man cannot make valued judgements according to his personal whim...for man has in his heart a law written by God.”³³

³⁰*Humanae vitae*, 3.

³¹See “Königsteiner Erklärung” der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz vom 1968.

³²See DH 4580–4584.

³³DH 4580.

The conclusion:

Hence, those many people are in error who today assert that one can find neither in human nature nor in the revealed law any absolute and immutable norm; nature and revelation manifest the existence of immutable laws inscribed in the constitutive elements of human nature, which are revealed to be identical in all being and endowed with reason.

Paul VI's decision is based on equality of natural law and *jus divinum*, and natural law and legal law. This implies the concept of acts intrinsically malicious; it fosters the logical error not to distinguish between arguments of being and arguments of ethos. On the factual level the conclusion of Paul VI is a judgement, not supported by the specific reception of bishops, qualified theologians or medical doctors the Pope himself consulted, and rejected in the following years by the vast majority of the faithful.

The Inner Polarisation of the Papal Magisterium
from John Paul II to Benedict XVI

The main post-conciliar documents, we should consider in this context, are:

- The Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio* (1981) and the corresponding instruction of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith *Donum vitae* (1987);
- The Apostolic Letter *Mulieris dignitatem* (1988);
- The Encyclical *Veritatis splendor* (1993);
- The Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* (1995) and the corresponding considerations of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith regarding proposals to give legal recognition to the unions between homosexual persons (2003);
- The Letter of the Congregation of Faith on the collaboration of men and women in the Church and in the world (2004); all these during the pontificate of John Paul II;
- Instruction of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith *Dignitas personae* on certain bio-ethical questions (2008) during the pontificate of Benedict XVI.

We cannot discuss them in detail here. So, we try to describe the inner polarisation of these documents.

After the rigorous rejection of natural law through the leading schools of jurisprudence in the 19th century during and after World War II the need for a revised "critical natural law" appears:

Note: I speak of “critical natural law” in reference to Thomas Aquinas and Kant. “Natural law” is a landmark of Thomas’ philosophical-theological thinking to formulate the whole of Ethics. “Critique” reminds Kant’s introduction of transcendental logic to inquire the conditions of possibility to understand natural sciences and human freedom in its autonomy. To bring “natural law” and transcendental human freedom together, Friedrich Schleiermacher paved the way by his fundamental insight, that man experiences “im schlechthinigen Gefühl der Abhängigkeit,” the Self in its transcendental freedom as *created* freedom. Natural law is therefore a constitutive principle of men, not a series of different categorical laws. Simultaneously transcendental freedom of man is *created* freedom, because constituted by God’s fundamentally transcendent creative freedom. Freedom, viewed from the side of men, is *transcendental* and in this sense in no way heteronomous. On the other side, seen from God, freedom is created and thus constituted in a wholly *transcendent* way.

The Declaration of Human Rights, the constitutions of various countries supposed a “critical natural law” as grounding principle. The later following debates on fundamental issues of law policy in international climate policy, justice for coming generations, medical and bio-genetic ethics needed a common founding formal principle. The international juridical and philosophical discussion did not take place. Habermas lamented that.

The theological discussion of a new and critical concept of “Natural Law,”³⁴ was blocked as a consequence of *Humanae vitae*. That is a tragic development because in other fields the Popes have contributed outstandingly to cultivate the enormous cultural shift of global society.³⁵ They do not formally reflect a critical new “Natural-law concept,” but the way they argue implies it. The fundamental problem in these cases is always, how to orient a completely new law policy in far reaching dimensions of modern society.

Persona humana manifests the re-establishment of the pre-modern concept of natural law. The post-conciliar documents such as *Familiaris consortio* suffer from an inner polarisation from reflection of new

³⁴See Josef Fuchs, Alfons Auer, Klaus Demmer, Franz Böckle, Bruno Schüller and others in the Anglo-saxon and Spanish speaking World.

³⁵Paul VI through *Populorum progressio* and *Evangelii nuntiandi*, John Paul II through *Redemptor hominis*, *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, and *Laborem exercens*.

problems and traditional natural-Law concept. *Familiaris consortio* gives a comprehensive, balanced overview of the situation in which matrimonies and modern family have to live. A lot of points are very near to the description of *Amoris laetitia*. Outstanding is the large list of family rights. On the other hand, John Paul II strictly defends *Humanae vitae*.³⁶ The consequence appears specially when he treats “family in irregular situation.” The same consequences can be found in *Donum vitae* (1987). Against Catholic Universities and Bishop Conferences *Donum vitae* insists, that even homological fertilisation contradicts the integrity of the genital act. *Dignitas personae* (2008) during the pontificate of Benedict XVI treats modern bio-genetic problems in the continuity of *Donum vitae*. This is the situation at the threshold of *Amoris laetitia*.

A critical question at the end. The theme, given to me, is “The Development of Family Ethics and Matrimony from the 20th to the 21st Century.” Was there really a development?

On 16th of June 1880 the Sacra Poenitentiarum, under the pontificate of Leo XIII, answered the Dubium:

An licitus sit usus matrimonii illis tantum diebus, quibus difficilior est conceptio?

The answer: Coniugos praedito modo utentes inquietandos non esse, posseque confessarium sententiam de qua agitur illis conjugibus caute tamen insinuare, quos alia ratione a detestabile onanismi crimine abducere frustra tentaverint.

Development of catholic marriage and family ethics? From the part of the magisterium: No? From the part of Christian families: Yes?

³⁶See *Familiaris consortio*, 33–35.

CONTINUITY AND DISCONTINUITY IN CATHOLIC THEOLOGY OF MARRIAGE AND SEXUALITY FROM 19TH CENTURY

Vimal Tirimanna, CSsR♦

One of the main criticisms against *Amoris Laetitia* of Pope Francis is that it tends to change doctrine on the divorced and remarried Catholics. What such critics seem to conveniently forget is that Catholic moral doctrine on both marriage and sexuality has had its own share of continuities and discontinuities within the Tradition. Of course, today, it is an accepted fact that the Church's understanding of revealed divine truths does indeed go through a certain growth, with certain continuities and discontinuities, and this phenomenon within the Catholic Tradition has commonly been described since 19th century as "development" of doctrine/understanding.¹

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¹Cfr John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, Edited with a Preface and Introduction by Charles Frederick Harold (New York: Longmans, 1949); John T. Noonan, Jr., *A Church that Can and Cannot Change: The Development of Catholic Moral Teaching*, Notre Dame (Indiana): University of Notre Dame Press, 2005, 193–202. See also *Dei Verbum* (1965), # 8; Pope John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor* (1993), #4, 27, 28.

Tirimanna, Vimal. "Continuity and Discontinuity in Catholic Theology of Marriage and Sexuality from 19th Century." In *Vocation and Mission of the Family: Reflections on Chavarul and Amoris Laetitia*, edited by Shaji George Kochuthara, 172–192. Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2020.

Although marriage was perceived as a finished product once and for all in the by-gone days, today, it is seen as an ever-growing entity, thanks to the cognizance of the dynamic, historical nature of human beings who enter into marriage and of the environments surrounding them. As a result, though marriage remains the same in its essence, its understanding in the Catholic Church has developed. In other words, the way Pope Leo XIII's *Arcanum* perceived marriage (or the way St Kuriakose Chavara perceived it in his *Chavarul*) is radically different from the way *Gaudium et spes* perceived the same Catholic concept. The worldviews (*weltanschauung*) of those documents were radically different. In complete contrast to the former, the latter (GS) takes it for granted that "the human race has passed from a rather static concept of reality to a more dynamic, evolutionary one" (#3) and calls to "read the signs of the times" (#4).

The Background: The European Disputes between the Church and the State over the Control of Marriage

The political disputes between various European States and the Church that erupted in the 17th and 18th centuries over the control of marriages had an enormous influence in shaping the later Catholic understanding of marriage, especially its understanding of marriage in exclusively juridical aspects. During this particular era, the Royalists, Josephists and Febronians fought hard to get control over the secular aspects of the jurisdiction of marriage which were under the absolute control of the Church in Christian Europe since the Council of Trent. These 'Secularists' were ably supported by the spirit of the Enlightenment and its offspring the French Revolution, a few centuries earlier. Behind their claim for secular jurisdiction over marriage was the assumption that marriage is basically a natural institution, a civil contract between two persons, and as such, it ought to be ruled not by ecclesiastical but civil authority of a given society. Consequently, civil law had not only the jurisdiction over civil marriage but it could also grant divorce, independent of the ecclesiastical authorities. In order to achieve their goal, the supporters of secularization of marriage (i.e., those who fought hard to liberate marriage from the exclusive Church control) maintained that there is a clear-cut separation between marriage *the sacrament* and marriage *the contract*. Accordingly, the Church could have jurisdiction over the former while the State should

have the jurisdiction over the latter. The Popes, of this era and thereafter, opposed vehemently such a separation, so much so, in his notorious *Syllabus of Errors* of 1864, Pope Pius IX condemned such moves in explicit terms.² Thereafter, the official Church led by the Papal teachings continued to maintain that there is no such separation, but on the contrary, that there is an inseparable link between the sacrament and the contract of marriage.³ This was specifically mentioned in the 1917 Code of Canon Law, namely, that there cannot be a valid marriage between two baptized persons without it being at the same time a sacrament, a point that would be repeated *verbatim* even in the 1983 Code.⁴ Thus one needs to note how this historical residue of the Church–State disputes in Europe in the 19th century, has come to stay as an element of continuity in the Catholic theological understanding of marriage.

A necessary consequence of the above-mentioned inseparable link is that the marriage of each and every Catholic couple has to be necessarily a sacrament. One of those who laid a solid theological foundation for such an ecclesial assertion was Mathias Josef Scheeben who used the then prevalent theological concept of the Church as the mystical body of Christ to prove his stand. Accordingly, every baptized person is incorporated into the body of Christ raising the person out of a merely natural order of existence. A necessary consequence of this understanding then is that a Christian man and a woman can marry only as members of the body of Christ. As such every Christian marriage automatically is a sacrament.⁵ Later theologians would build on this foundation of Scheeben to insist that there indeed was an intrinsic link between the marital contract and the sacrament. In order to uphold this intrinsic unity between the marital contract and the sacrament (and thus, to uphold the ecclesial authority over marriage), the Church held on to two main theological assertions.

²Cfr Pope Pius IX, *Syllabus of Errors* (attached to his encyclical *Quanta Cura*), 1864, Nos. 66 and 73.

³See John O’Riordan, *Evoluzione della teologia del matrimonio*, Assisi: Cittadella Editrice, 1974, 9–39.

⁴Cfr *Code of Canon Law* (1983), No. 1055/2.

⁵See Theodore Mackin, *The Marital Sacrament*, New York: Paulist Press, 1989, 588–594.

*The Conjugal Union is the Creation of God Himself,
and not the Work of Humans*

In his encyclical *Quod Apostolici* in 1878, Pope Leo XIII reminded the faithful that marriage was instituted by God from the beginning of the Church.⁶ The following year he repeated the same teaching in no uncertain terms: “The conjugal union is not the work or invention of men; God himself, the Supreme Author of nature, from the beginning of creation, ordained such union...”⁷ In his encyclical *Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae* (1880), the Pope reaffirms this traditional belief.⁸ Of course, this is nothing but a re-affirmation of the well-known Judeo-Christian anthropological view given in the first two Chapters of the Book of Genesis. However, these repeated assertions of Leo XIII were more to do as a socio-political response to the claims of the “Naturalists” or the “Secularists” (that marriage represents a purely human institution and so, is subject to the jurisdiction of the State) than a religious wish to return to the Bible. The same theological fact that God is the Author of marriage (which the contemporary world seems often to forget or overlook conveniently) would be repeated and continued in the Tradition by the subsequent Popes,⁹ and Vatican II.¹⁰

*Christ the Lord Himself Raised the Conjugal Union
between two Christians to the Dignity of a Sacrament*

Already Pius IX categorically denied the then widespread Secularist assertion: “In no way can it be proved that Christ raised marriage to the dignity of a sacrament.” He based his argument on the unproven premise that there is an inseparable link between the marital contract and the sacrament.¹¹ Later, Leo XIII too would use this claim of his predecessor to repudiate the arguments of the Secularists who

⁶Mackin, *The Marital Sacrament*, 519.

⁷As cited in Mackin, *The Marital Sacrament*, 520.

⁸Cfr Pope Leo XIII, *Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae* (1880), *Acta Sanctae Sedis* (ASS): 12 (1879) 386–387.

⁹Pope Pius XI, *Casti Connubii* (1930), No. 5–6; Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae* (1968), No. 8; Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* (1981), No. 11; Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, Nos. 56, 72.

¹⁰See for example *Gaudium et spes* (1965), #48.

¹¹Cfr Ladislav Orsy, *Marriage in Canon Law: Texts and Comments. Reflections and Questions* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1986), 35.

continued to hold the distinction between the contract and the sacrament.¹²

Both these assertions which were invoked by the Church during the period under consideration have continued to dominate Catholic theology of marriage, even up to our present day. Having briefly discussed the socio-political and ecclesial background of this era, we now intend to study some of the characteristics with regard to marriage and human sexuality that have continued and those that have discontinued within the Catholic Tradition from the nineteenth century till today, under the following subtitles.

The Catholic Concept of Marriage: From Juridical Contract to Personal Covenant

As is well-known, in the post-Tridentine era, up until the Second Vatican Council, the main texts of moral theology in the seminaries were the Moral Manuals. According to the Henry Davis Manual which was one of the popular texts in many of the English-speaking seminaries, marriage is first of all a ‘contract’, and this contract is meant for “the exclusive and perpetual right” of the spouses to use each other’s bodies for the purpose of generating children.¹³ In fact, the generation and education of offspring were explicitly mentioned as “the primary purpose” of marriage. The secondary purpose is to help each other and to allay concupiscence.¹⁴ Interestingly, the nucleus of marriage, namely, the mutual love between husband and wife was not even mentioned though it might have been implicit. The same contract-based perception of marriage in the pre-Vatican II era is also seen in the two papal encyclicals of this period, *Arcanum* (1880) and *Casti Connubii* (1930), and in the 1917 Code of Canon Law, clearly indicating that it was indeed the official Catholic understanding of marriage.

The last line in the above-mentioned definition of Davis is also important in the sense that it assumes that when two baptized Christians enter into marriage, it is not merely any mutual contract, but

¹²Cfr *Acta Sanctae Sedis* 12 (1879): 393–394. The English translations referred to in this paper are taken from Claudia Carlen, *The Papal Encyclicals 1878-1903* (New York: 1981), 29–40.

¹³Henry Davis, *Moral and Pastoral Theology*, Vol. IV, Eighth Edition (Revised and Enlarged) (London: Sheed and Ward, 1959), 53.

¹⁴Davis, *Moral and Pastoral Theology*, 53.

a “sacramental contract.” The reason given for this is that Christ had raised such a contract “to the dignity of a sacrament,” a point that has been uncritically absorbed into Catholic theological tradition from the Secular–Church disputes of 18th century Europe, and which had been taken for granted even in Catholic jurisprudence since 1917. In other words, at which point of history or where exactly did Christ ever raise the contract to the dignity of a sacrament is not stated, but simply assumed, as did the Popes and theologians in their responses to the Secularists in the previous centuries. Even the historical fact that marriage was officially recognized as a sacrament only in the 12th century was conveniently forgotten or ignored in such assumptions.¹⁵ Merely repeating and summarizing what the Popes had been consistently teaching in the preceding two centuries in the particular European context, the 1917 Code of Canon Law would even freely go further to state that any and every marriage contract between baptized persons cannot be but a sacrament.¹⁶ Selling’s comments on the 1917 Code are relevant for our purposes here:

One hundred and thirty-two canons attempted to address every possible legislative question with respect to marriage, while no attempt was made to provide either theological or moral statements about this area of Christian life. The code did not even contain a definition of marriage, although because of the concern to insure that true consent would be given for the marriage contract, its ends, purposes and properties are stated quite explicitly.¹⁷

It was this exclusively canonical description of marriage that dominated not only the Moral Manuals during the first half of the 20th century till the Vatican II, but also the ecclesial life with regard to the theology of marriage and its pastoral aspects. Thus, one needs to notice how the history of the fierce controversies in the 18th and 19th centuries between the Catholic Church and the civil States in Europe contributed directly to such assumptions of the official Church—assumptions which had never been questioned till today in the official circles. This is one

¹⁵It is important here to highlight the historical fact that marriage was officially recognized as a sacrament only from the 12th century onwards. Even Peter Lombard did not count it as a sacrament in the true sense. Cfr *Sententiae* 4, d.2,c.1.

¹⁶Cfr Canon 1012 of the Code of Canon Law (1917).

¹⁷J.A. Selling, “Magisterial Teaching on Marriage 1880-1968: Historical Constancy or Radical Development?,” *Studia Moralia* 28 (1990): 451.

element of the theology of marriage that has continued so much so that even the 1983 Code of Canon Law has taken it as a given.

Today, scholars agree that the Biblical view of marriage is basically that of a covenant (*berinth'*).¹⁸ But unfortunately, in order to control the many prevailing clandestine marriages in Christian Europe, the Council of Trent had looked at marriage mainly as an exclusively juridical entity, as a legal contract entered into by two consenting parties. Moreover, the Council also wished to disassociate itself from the Reformers, especially from the Calvinistic stance which looked at marriage as a 'covenant.'¹⁹ As we already saw above the State–Church controversies in Europe during this era also further substantiated the Catholic understanding that marriage was indeed a legal contract. However, the understanding of marriage as a contract did go through a drastic discontinuity when the Vatican II explicitly re-embraced the original Biblical understanding of marriage, namely, that it is a covenant. In *Gaudium et spes* in which the Council Fathers gave their official teachings on marriage and sexuality, the term contract (*contractus*) is missing, and instead we read the term covenant (*foedus*) whenever marital relationship is talked about. The implications of this change are quite radical for Catholic moral theology on marriage because it implies a clear turning away from an exclusively juridical understanding of marriage and embracing a more Personalistic, Biblical understanding of it.²⁰ As Lawler correctly points out: “The use of *covenant* rather than *contract* deliberately takes marriage out of its narrow, traditional, juridical sphere and situates it in the sphere of interpersonal, religious, steadfast commitment and responsibility.”²¹ He goes on to state:

Covenant was intentionally chosen over *contract* to insinuate that the intimate partnership of life and love that is marriage is more than a legally witnessed contract regulating mutual rights over bodies for the purpose of procreation. It is an interpersonal vow witnessed by God in

¹⁸Cfr Michael G. Lawler, “Marriage as Covenant in the Catholic Tradition,” in John Witte, Jr. and Eliza Ellison ed., *Covenant Marriage in Comparative Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 70–76.

¹⁹Cfr Lawler, “Marriage as Covenant in the Catholic Tradition,” 78–81.

²⁰Cfr Richard R. Gaillardetz and Catherine E. Clifford, *Keys to the Council: Unlocking the Teaching of Vatican II* (Collegeville (Minnesota): Liturgical Press, 2012), 106–107.

²¹Lawler, “Marriage as Covenant in the Catholic Tradition,” 84.

and through which the spouses “mutually give and accept each other in order to establish marriage.” *Covenant* encompasses all that is legally and institutionally encompassed by *contract*, but it also insinuates more. It insinuates that the free, loving, mutual gifting and acceptance that creates the community of marriage is not temporary and revocable, as it could be under contract, but permanent, irrevocable, and “no longer [dependent] on human actions alone.”²²

The 1983 Code of Canon Law embraces in general the spirit of the Vatican II teachings on marriage though it is somewhat schizophrenic in its use of the conciliar term ‘covenant’ to refer to marriage. It does so only in the opening canon on marriage (No. 1055), but thereafter switches back to the pre-Vatican II juridical concept of ‘contract’ whenever it refers to the marital partnership. This, unfortunately, is a regression that affects Church life especially in the pastoral field in a drastic way, even today.

Marriage: An Exclusive Juridical Bond or A Personal Relationship of Love?

Down through the ages, basing herself on the biblical evidence, the Church has continued to consider marriage as a life-long relationship between two persons. However, since the post-Tridentine era, and particularly since the 19th century, marriage has been viewed more as a juridical bond between a man and a woman than a human relationship. The very free and common use of the term ‘bond’²³ even today whenever the theologians or the pastors speak of a Catholic marriage corroborates this point. It is extremely important to highlight here that “Jesus does not use the metaphor of a bond.”²⁴ As Byron pointed out some four decades ago:

The image of a *vinculum* is quite legitimate, but we must realize that it is only a metaphor; we must not reify it, as has been the tendency. The

²²Lawler, “Marriage as Covenant in the Catholic Tradition,” 85.

²³For a fine detailed theological history of marital ‘bond’ see Timothy J. Buckley, *What Binds Marriage? Roman Catholic Theology in Practice* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1997), 28–73.

²⁴Brian Byron, “1 Cor. 7:10-15: A Basis for Future Catholic Discipline on Marriage and Divorce,” *Theological Studies* 34 (1973): 436. See also Kenneth R. Himes and James A. Corriden, “The Indissolubility of Marriage: Reasons to Reconsider,” *Theological Studies* 65 (2004): 457–460.

bond of marriage is not an ontological but a moral one, formed by the divinely designed marital consent of human beings. But Jesus does not use this metaphor; rather, He speaks in terms of union: “What therefore God has *joined* together, let no man put asunder” (Mt 19:6).²⁵

Although the non-Biblical term “marital bond” referred to so often within the Catholic Church is certainly a reference to the lifelong relationship between a man and a woman (a personal ‘bond’), what has come to stay explicitly is the rather narrow juridical aspect of this ‘bond’ often overshadowing the personal aspects of a living and loving human relationship. As already mentioned above, in the post-Tridentine era, the Church in order to have control over the many clandestine marriages that were common, insisted on the Canonical Form of marriage and brought it within the juridical framework of the Church. Then, as we saw above, in her efforts to maintain her control over marriage (from the Secularist challenges of the 19th century in Europe), the Church got locked herself within an exclusively juridical framework of marriage, in the process, forgetting/overlooking to develop a sound anthropological base for a solid theology of marriage as a human relationship. Highlighting this point with regard to the Church’s official statements of this period, Mackin writes correctly:

The reader may have noticed, in studying official Church statements on marriage thus far, how little concern the authorities have shown to work out an anthropology of marriage. We have seen their repeated insistence, grounded in the assumption that a marriage is created by the parties’ contracted consent, that the contract is the marriage, and vice versa; that where two Christians contract marriage, this is a sacrament; that the sacrament is the contract elevated to grace-giving status.²⁶

It was this exclusively narrow legal concept of marriage, namely, marriage as a juridical bond (entered into through a legal contract by the spouses) that was said to become the sacrament. Practically the two human persons engaging in a love relationship were not mentioned at all in talking about marriage as a sacrament. Thus, what was indispensable in the pre-Vatican II era was that the marital contract was validly entered into through the marriage bond (as stipulated by Canon Law), and within such an exclusively juridical framework within which

²⁵Byron, “1 Cor. 7:10-15,” 436.

²⁶Mackin, *The Marital Sacrament*, 524.

marriage was perceived, “one could be forgiven for assuming that a man and a woman who hated one another could be married, as long as each gave to the other the right over her or his body”!²⁷

Although *Casti Connubii* of Pius XI, too, continued to define marriage mainly as a juridical bond, for the first time in the official papal teachings one also notices an effort therein to look at the human aspects of marriage, especially from an anthropological point of view. This document sees conjugal love as the primary cause and reason of marriage, speaking in a broader sense.²⁸ Retrieving “a long-ignored item from the *Catechism of the Council of Trent*” Pius XI saw marriage as a union of conjugal love and intimacy.²⁹ In this way, Pius XI “directs us to see that there is more to marriage than can be contained in the cold, legal categories of the *Code of Canon Law*.”³⁰ Some authors hold that this was a clear-cut transition in the Tradition that blossomed fully at Vatican II, in the chapter on marriage and family in *Gaudium et spes*.³¹ Of course, it was Pius XII who would eventually pave the way for the conciliar concept of marital love as predominantly a human relationship between two persons rather than an exclusively juridical bond.³²

In the decades that followed, a few European theologians were already following the contours indicated by Pius XI in their efforts to see marriage most of all as a loving, intimate human relationship. Two names that are indispensable in this regard are Dietrich von Hildebrand and Heribert Doms. Invoking Pius XI’s thought von Hildebrand “introduced a radical innovation in thinking about marriage” propounded his central thesis that marriage is for the building up of loving communion between the two spouses. He argued that in

²⁷Michael G. Lawler, *Marriage and Sacrament: A Theology of Christian Marriage* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 19.

²⁸O’Riordan, *Evoluzione della teologia del matrimonio*, 40. The author also highlights a tension in this document between institutional and personal aspects of marriage, a tension, according to him would be carried on even to the Vatican II as is evident in GS. See O’Riordan, *Evoluzione della teologia del matrimonio*, 55.

²⁹Michael G. Lawler, Todd A. Salzman and Eileen Burke-Sullivan, *The Church in the Modern World: Gaudium et Spes, Then and Now* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2014), 124.

³⁰Lawler, Salzman and Burke-Sullivan, *The Church in the Modern World: Gaudium et Spes, Then and Now*, 125.

³¹Cfr Mackin, *The Marital Sacrament*, 525–527; Lawler, Salzman and Burke-Sullivan, *The Church in the Modern World: Gaudium et Spes, Then and Now*, 124.

³²Cfr Mackin, *The Marital Sacrament*, 535–539.

marriage the spouses enter into an interpersonal relationship as an I and a Thou, and thus, “give birth to a mysterious fusion of their souls.”³³ Doms re-echoed the views of von Hildebrand and using the popular language which refers to sexual intercourse as “making love” insisted that in every act of such lovemaking the spouses actually entered into an intimate personal communion. Thus, even in a childless marriage, the marital communion reaches its “two-in-oneness.”³⁴

In the immediate pre-Vatican II era, among those prominent theologians who were attempting to base their theology of marriage on the human person/personal relationship was the Redemptorist moral theologian Bernard Häring who wrote the ground-breaking three-volume work of *Law of Christ*³⁵ which clearly marked a radical transition from an exclusively law-bound moral theology to a person-centred moral theology. Häring’s other writings as well as his own presence in the Council as a *peritus*³⁶ did surely influence the conciliar teachings on marriage, so much so that the eminent American moral theologian Charles Curran could refer to him as “the quasi-father of *Gaudium et Spes*.”³⁷

By defining marriage fundamentally as “a community of love,” an “intimate partnership of life and love” (GS 48), “an intimate union” of the spouses and of their actions (GS 48), and “a mutual gift of each other” (GS 49), Vatican II clearly re-discovered the personal defining aspects of the marital relationship as portrayed in the Biblical vision of marriage. It surely is a continuation in the Tradition in the sense it is a return to the Biblical understanding of marriage, but it also is a discontinuation in the Tradition in the sense that it is a radical change from the exclusively juridical understanding of marriage (as a juridical bond) that prevailed especially from 1917. Interestingly, GS used the then prevalent term ‘bond’ only once, and that too, to refer to marriage as a “sacred bond” (GS 48) and not as a “juridical bond.”

³³Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Marriage* (London: Longmans, 1939), v.

³⁴Cfr Heribert Doms, *The Meaning of Marriage*, transl. George Sayer (London: Sheed and Ward, 1939), 94–95.

³⁵Bernard Häring, *The Law of Christ* (New Jersey: The Newman Press, 1961).

³⁶Häring was also the Secretary of the Editorial Committee that drafted *Gaudium et spes*.

³⁷Charles E. Curran, “Bernard Häring: A Moral Theologian Whose Soul Matched His Scholarship,” *National Catholic Reporter*, 34 (17th July 1998), 11. See also James F. Keenan, “The Achievement of Moral Theology at Vatican II,” *Asian Horizons* 6, 3 (September 2012): 493–496.

Sadly, in spite of this conciliar rediscovery of the wider concept of marriage as a personal relationship (personal aspect of marriage),³⁸ it is the narrow, restrictive juridical concept of 'bond' (juridical/institutional aspect of marriage) that has come to stay as the determining factor of what a valid Catholic sacramental marriage is, even at present. The personal aspect is clearly in the official documents but what continues to hold the ground in the pastoral field is the institutional/juridical aspect of marriage. Most of the recent bitter controversies surrounding the two recent Synods of Bishops in Rome and their eventual result the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* of Pope Francis (especially the controversies in its aftermath) are to do with this over-dependence on the canonical bond of a marriage (the institutional aspect). Interestingly, however, one needs to note that AL considers marriage primarily as a union of love between the spouses when it says: "Marriage is firstly an 'intimate partnership of life and love' which is a good for the spouses themselves, while sexuality is 'ordered to the conjugal love of man and woman'" (AL 80).

Thus, at least in the official theology of marriage, the personal aspect of marriage seems to continue as wished by the Council.

The Traditional Ends of Marriage

The Book of Genesis already implies the two main purposes of marriage: the indissolubly lasting love relationship between a man and a woman that climaxes in them becoming one flesh (2:24) and procreation that results from it (1:28). Although Augustine had attributed three 'goods' to marriage (*proles, fides et sacramentum*) in his efforts to justify marriage against the Manicheists (who denied any good in marriage), it was Thomas Aquinas who established in Catholic theology the two important marital ends in the form of a hierarchy: procreation and education of children as *the primary end* and the mutual love between the spouses as *the secondary end*. When the Code of Canon Law was promulgated in 1917, it described marriage in Canon 1013/1 as: "*Matrimoni finis primariae est procreation atque educatione proles, secundarius mutuuum adiutorium et remedium concupiscentiae.*" Although the Code was

³⁸According to O'Riordan, *Gaudium et spes* made a synthesis of these two aspects—institutional and personal—but it was the latter aspect that dominated the synthesis at the Vatican II. Cfr O'Riordan, *Evoluzione della teologia del matrimonio*, 54–55.

mainly a juridical document and not theological, it nevertheless influenced the Moral Manuals since 1918 to take for granted the classical formulation of traditional ‘ends’ of marriage as described therein.³⁹ This has been the undisputed established official Catholic position until Vatican II as to why persons get married, and in fact, the ends did in a way define what marriage meant for Catholics. It was only in mid-twentieth century that a few Personalistic philosophers, such as Heribert Doms and Dietrich von Hildebrand, who questioned the validity of such a hierarchically ordered set of ends in view of what marriage is itself in reality.⁴⁰ Some of the pointed questions they raised radically overturned the hierarchically ordered ends of marriage in the Catholic understanding. Their basic questions, expressed in their separate works, can be framed as: Does marriage need any extrinsic purpose (end) to justify itself? Does not marriage itself contain its own intrinsic value? Does not the personal union of the spouses as “a two-in-oneness” is itself sufficient to justify marriage and sexual intercourse within it? For example, Doms wrote:

The constitution of marriage, the union of two persons, does not consist in their subservience to a purpose outside themselves for which they marry. It consists in the constant vital ordination of husband and wife to each other until they become one. If this is so, there can no longer be sufficient reason, from this standpoint, for speaking of procreation as the primary purpose (in the sense in which St Thomas used the phrase) and for dividing off the other purposes as secondary... perhaps it would be best if in the future we gave up using such terms as “primary” and “secondary” in speaking of the purpose of marriage.⁴¹

But in 1944, the Vatican’s Holy Office condemned “the opinion of some more recent authors, who either deny that the primary end of marriage is the generation and nurture of children, or teach that the secondary ends are not essentially subordinate to the primary end, but are equally primary and independent.”⁴² In 1951, Pope Pius XII taught that “marriage, as a natural institution in virtue of the will of the creator does not have as a primary and intimate end the personal perfection of

³⁹O’Riordan, *Evoluzione della teologia del matrimonio*, 28.

⁴⁰Cfr Doms, *The Meaning of Marriage*; von Hildebrand, *Marriage*.

⁴¹Doms, *The Meaning of Marriage*, 87–88.

⁴²Cfr *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 36 (1944): 103.

the spouses, but the procreation and nurture of new life.”⁴³ Thus, though the official Church did not favour at the time such a position that questioned the well-established classically defining characteristics of a Catholic marriage, the bishops gathered at Vatican II a decade or so later accepted the fundamental theses of Doms and von Hildebrand, and thus did disappear officially the hierarchy of the ends from the Catholic theology of marriage.⁴⁴ Thus, without using the adjectives “primary” and “secondary” *Gaudium et spes* simply says: “By their very nature, the institution of matrimony itself and conjugal love are ordained for the procreation and education of children, and find in them their ultimate crown” (GS 48). One needs to notice how deftly the Council formulates the above phrase in which none of the traditional ends of marriage is negated, but they are shown to be intrinsically linked to each other, a truth that is repeated in GS 51: “Marriage and conjugal love are by their nature ordained toward the begetting and educating of children. Children are really the supreme gift of marriage and contribute very substantially to the welfare of their parents.”⁴⁵ Last but not least, the Council explicitly stated that procreation is not the only end of marriage, leave alone being the “primary” end when it said: “Marriage to be sure is not instituted solely for procreation” (GS 50). This highlighting of the intrinsic link between love and life, between the two main ends of marriage rather than seeing them as hierarchically ordered separate realities is surely an element of discontinuation with regard to the theology of marriage, just as the refusal to consider procreation as the primary end of marriage. At the same time, they could also be seen as a continuation of the theology of marriage and sexuality in the Tradition, in the sense they are a return to the Biblical vision of marriage.⁴⁶

While this link is continued in the subsequent Catholic theology including those of Paul VI, John Paul II, Francis and in the 1983 Code of

⁴³Cfr *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 43 (1951): 848–849.

⁴⁴In fact, GS #48 says that God the author of marriage has endowed it, as it is, with various benefits and purposes.

⁴⁵Of course, this conciliar formulation owes its origin to the writings of Herbert Doms. See O’Riordan, *Evoluzione della teologia del matrimonio*, 40–41.

⁴⁶For example, these two ends of marriage are well-acknowledged in the Book of Genesis as complimentary though they are not given in a hierarchy. See Gen 1:28 and 2:24.

Canon Law, there was an effort by Paul VI to incorporate (though in a very restrictive sense) yet another insight of Doms and von Hildebrand when he used the term “significance” or “meaning” instead of “ends.” However, the later theological teachings both of the official Church and those of the theologians did not continue with this change, for whatever reason.

However, as O’Riordan points out, the tension between marriage as an institutional procreational model and marriage as an inter-personal union model⁴⁷ continues in almost all the post-Vatican II official theological statements. For example, though *Humanae Vitae* had clearly embraced the fundamental conciliar vision of marriage as a personal covenantal relationship, ironically it is the earlier juridical/institutional model of marriage that stressed procreation as the primary end which seemed to have dominated one of its most important but controversial teachings when it insisted that each and every conjugal act has to be ordered towards procreation. As Lawler et al. rightly point out, in the aftermath of Vatican II, even in an official legal document as that of the revised *Code of Canon Law* of 1983, the opening Canon on marriage is that, “it is the *matrimonial consent* and not *each and every act of intercourse* that is ordered towards procreation.”⁴⁸

The Use of Contraceptives—Natural Family Planning

In the classical Catholic vision of the hierarchy of ends, there simply could not be any room for contraceptives, artificial or natural, as they are classified today, mainly because the end of procreation was considered as primary, and so, that could not be compromised at all, artificially or naturally. Every marriage, every sexual intercourse ought to have procreation as its primary end. However, in the latter half of the 19th century, based on their experience, doctors, scientists and some married couples were hypothesizing that on certain days in each month conception by a woman could not take place.⁴⁹ When inquired about the

⁴⁷Cfr, O’Riordan, *Evoluzione della teologia del matrimonio*, 54–55.

⁴⁸Lawler et al., *The Church in the Modern World: Gaudium et Spes, Then and Now*, 131. Italics as found in the text itself.

⁴⁹Cfr John T. Noonan, Jr., *Contraception: A History of Its Treatment by the Catholic Theologians and Canonists* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986 [Enlarged Edition]), 438–443; John T. Noonan, Jr., “Permitted and Disputed Means of Controlling Conception,” in Charles E. Curran and Richard A. McCormick, ed.,

morality of using such days to deliberately avoid births by some couples, the consistent official response was based on that of the Roman Penitentiary in 1880: those who use such days are “not to be disturbed provided they do nothing by which conception is prevented.”⁵⁰ As Noonan so rightly points out, in giving this response, “evidently there was no one who recalled St Augustine’s opinion that intercourse only on sterile days was a prime way of doing something to prevent conception,”⁵¹ a view that had dominated Catholic morality for centuries. However, the definitive discovery of the fertile and infertile periods in the female reproductive system by Kyusaku Ogino in Japan in 1924 and Hermann Knaus in Austria in 1929⁵² raised further questions about the morality of the use of the infertile period to avoid conception, as it was by then gaining ground among some couples in Europe and North America. Noonan holds that it was Auguste Joseph Lecomte (1824–1881) of Louvain who was the first theologian “to take theological account of the nineteenth century discoveries of ovulation.”⁵³ Lecomte argued that married couples having “reasonable and proportionate causes” for avoiding children might morally choose to have intercourse only in this period.⁵⁴ Of course, there were moral theological voices that absolutely prohibited this practice, except in the case of obstinate Onanists. For example, a leading moral theologian of this period, Arthur Vermeersch opposed its use and several bishops of the time followed his authoritative lead, and counselled restraint in the diffusion of the rhythm method.⁵⁵ As such, when Pius XI in his *Casti Connubii* in 1930 implicitly allowed the conscious/intentional use of the non-fertile period as a valid natural way of preventing conceptions it

Readings in Moral Theology, No. 8: Dialogue About Catholic Sexual Teaching (New York: Paulist Press, 199, 98–102.

⁵⁰As cited in Noonan, “Permitted and Disputed Means of Controlling Conception,” 99.

⁵¹Cfr Noonan, “Permitted and Disputed Means of Controlling Conception,” 99.

⁵²Cfr Karl H. Peschke, *Christian Ethics: Moral Theology in the Light of Vatican II*, Vol. II (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1992 [Revised Edition]), 502; John T. Noonan, Jr., *Contraception: A History of its Treatment by the Catholic Theologians and Canonists* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986 [Enlarged Edition]), 442–443.

⁵³Noonan, *Contraception*, 439.

⁵⁴Noonan, *Contraception*, 440.

⁵⁵Noonan, “Permitted and Disputed Means of Controlling Conception,” 104.

was certainly a ‘novelty’ and a radical discontinuity in Catholic teachings:

Nor are those spouses considered as acting against nature who in the married state use their right in the proper and natural manner, even though on account of natural causes, either of time or of certain defects, new life cannot be brought forth. For in matrimony as well as in the use of the matrimonial rights there are also secondary ends, such as mutual aid, the cultivating of mutual love, and the quieting of concupiscence which husband and wife are not forbidden to consider so long as they are subordinated to the primary end and so long as the intrinsic nature of the act is preserved.⁵⁶

And when Pius XII explicitly approved it in 1950s,⁵⁷ there was surely a solid confirmation of the radical discontinuity in what the Church had been consistently and passionately teaching since the time of the Fathers, especially, since Augustine for whom every conjugal act had to have an explicit intention to procreate if such an act were to be morally justified, even within marriage.⁵⁸ In 1951, Pius XII speaking to the Association of Italian Catholic Society of Midwives, referred to the rhythm method “not as an alternative to be cautiously proffered to Onanists, but as a method open to all Christian couples.”⁵⁹ A month later, the Pope re-confirmed his teaching about using the sterile period of a woman for regularizing child births. Noonan points out that “this was the first time that a Pope had spoken with approval of the regulations of birth.”⁶⁰ Vatican II repeated the same teaching.⁶¹ Subsequent official Church documents beginning with *Humanae Vitae*⁶² in 1968 have continued to teach and even recommend methods of Natural Family Planning based on the use of infertile period for sexual intercourse as morally valid means to achieve “responsible parenthood”

⁵⁶Pope Pius XI, *Casti Connubii* (1930), as cited in Joseph A. Selling, “Magisterial Teaching on Marriage 1880–1968: Historical Constancy or Radical Change?” in Réal Tremblay and Dennis J. Billy, ed., *Historia: Memoria futuri, Mélanges Louis Vereecke* (Roma: Edizione Academiae Alphonsianae, 1991), 375.

⁵⁷Cfr Selling, “Magisterial Teaching on Marriage,” 380–386; Noonan, *Contraception*, 445–447.

⁵⁸Cfr Noonan, *Contraceptives*, 131–139.

⁵⁹Noonan, “Permitted and Disputed Means of Controlling Conception,” 105–106.

⁶⁰Noonan, “Permitted and Disputed Means of Controlling Conception,” 106.

⁶¹GS, #51, 87.

⁶²Cfr HV, #11, 16.

a concept which the Church now actively promotes.⁶³ Here we need to notice an element of radical discontinuity in the Tradition—a discontinuity that has been continued in modern official Catholic moral teachings since 1930.

Marital Sexual Love as a Reflection of Divine Love

Although the Bible as a whole perceived sexual love within marriage as something positive, from the time of the Fathers through the Middle Ages, up until the middle of the 20th century, sexual pleasure itself was suspicious in the Catholic eyes though it was never denied that God created both sexual love and the pleasure that is experienced through it. Even the sexual pleasure derived from marital love (*eros*) between a husband and a wife was perceived as something that deviates humans from God, though it was tolerated as a necessary evil.⁶⁴

However, following the positive evaluation of marital sexual love by Vatican II,⁶⁵ there appeared quite a few innovative moral theological writings which seriously questioned the then widely held pessimistic and negative traditional Catholic views on marriage and sexuality.⁶⁶ The rather positive view of human sexuality evinced in *Persona Humana* of the CDF (1975) was in fact a response to these writings and it marked the beginning of a clear discontinuity in the sense that for the first time, an official magisterial document on marriage and sexuality placed the human person at the centre of the discussion on marriage and sexuality. This radical discontinuity in the way Catholic theology viewed human sexuality in general, and conjugal love in particular, in the post-Vatican II era went through further development in Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* which boldly asserted: "True, *eros* tends to rise 'in ecstasy' towards the Divine, to lead us beyond ourselves; yet for this very reason it calls for a path of ascent, renunciation, purification and

⁶³Cfr FC, #32, 34; *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992), Nos: 2368, 2370; AL #222.

⁶⁴For a detailed study of how sexual pleasure was treated in the Catholic moral Tradition, see Shaji George Kochuthara, *The Concept of Sexual Pleasure in the Catholic Moral Tradition* (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2007).

⁶⁵Cfr GS, #48, 49.

⁶⁶For example, see André Guindon, *The Sexual Language: An Essay in Moral Theology* (Ottawa: St Paul University, 1976); Philip S. Keane, *Sexual Morality: A Catholic Perspective* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977); Anthony Kosnik et al., *Human Sexuality: New Directions in American Catholic Thought: A Study* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977).

healing.”⁶⁷ The Pope clearly negates the traditional antithesis between *agape* and *eros* that was so popular within Church circles until a few years before the Council when he insists that oblation or self-effacing love (*agape*) for one another as taught by Jesus and the love between a man and a woman (*eros*) “can never be completely separated.”⁶⁸ Rather, a love so total and pervasive as in the mutual giving of each other in the marital act transcends the horizon of human love (*eros*) and readily participates in divine love (*agape*). In his turn, Pope Francis while reaffirming the post-Vatican II official positive vision of sexual love (AL 147, 150–152) goes on to state: “In no way, then, can we consider the erotic dimension of love simply as a permissible evil or a burden to be tolerated for the good of the family. Rather, it must be seen as gift from God that enriches the relationship of the spouses” (AL 152).

Consecrated Virginitly VS Marriage

Although it may sound bizarre to contemporary ears, almost till the mid-twentieth century it was taken for granted that consecrated virginity expressed in and through religious life was objectively superior to the sacrament of marriage. Along with a number of theologians of his time, Pope Pius XII, for example, while highlighting the sanctity of a sacramental marriage,⁶⁹ also saw consecrated virginity as superior to married life:

This doctrine of the excellence of virginity and of celibacy and of their superiority over the married state was, as We have already said, revealed by our Divine Redeemer and by the Apostle of the Gentiles; so too, it was solemnly defined as a dogma of divine faith by the holy council of Trent, and explained in the same way by all the holy Fathers and Doctors of the Church. Finally, We and Our Predecessors have often expounded it and earnestly advocated it whenever occasion offered.⁷⁰

However Vatican II re-discovered the age-old Catholic doctrine that all the baptized are called to holiness and taught: “married couples and Christian parents should follow their own proper path (to holiness) by

⁶⁷Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (2005), #5.

⁶⁸Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (2005), #7.

⁶⁹Pope Pius XII, *Sacra Virginitas* (1954), #42.

⁷⁰Pope Pius XII, *Sacra Virginitas* (1954), #32.

faithful love.”⁷¹ In other words, irrespective of their proper calling, each and every follower of Christ is called to be holy whether celibate, married or single. When it comes to holiness, there is no superior or inferior state of life in the Church. Pope John Paul II had been very explicit in teaching this Catholic belief: “Christian revelation recognizes two specific ways of realizing the vocation of the human person in its entirety, to love: marriage and virginity or celibacy. Either one is, in its own proper form, an actuation of the most profound truth of man, of his being ‘created in the image of God.’”⁷²

In the same document, re-echoing St John Chrysostom, the Pope further says:

Virginity or celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom of God not only does not contradict the dignity of marriage but presupposes it and confirms it. Marriage and virginity or celibacy are two ways of expressing and living the one mystery of the covenant of God with His people. When marriage is not esteemed, neither can consecrated virginity or celibacy exist; when human sexuality is not regarded as a great value given by the Creator, the renunciation of it for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven loses its meaning.⁷³

Interestingly, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* after stating that all the baptized are “called to lead a chaste life in keeping with their particular states of life”⁷⁴ goes on to quote *verbatim* what St Ambrose of Milan taught long ago: “There are three forms of the virtue of chastity: the first is that of spouses, the second that of widows and the third that of virgins. We do not praise any one of them to the exclusion of the others...This is what makes for the richness of the discipline of the Church.”⁷⁵ Pope Francis continues the efforts of his immediate predecessors to bridge the gap that has been traditionally created between celibacy and marriage when he says:

Virginity encourages married couples to live their own conjugal love against the backdrop of Christ’s definitive love, journeying together towards the fullness of the Kingdom. For its part, conjugal love

⁷¹Cfr LG, #11.

⁷²FC, #11.

⁷³FC, #16. See also *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (2001), #31.

⁷⁴Cfr *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992), No. 2348.

⁷⁵*Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992), No. 2349.

symbolizes other values. On the one hand, it is a particular reflection of that full unity in distinction found in the Trinity.⁷⁶

In his *Gaudete et Exsultate*, having explicitly clarified that “to be holy does not require being a bishop, a priest or a religious,” Francis is very clear when he says:

We are all called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do, wherever we find ourselves. Are you called to the consecrated life? Be holy by living out your commitment with joy. Are you married? Be holy by loving and caring for your husband or wife, as Christ does for the Church.⁷⁷

Thus, we notice a clear official departure from the Council of Trent and Pius XII, and in that sense, it is a clear discontinuity with regard to Church’s attitude towards marriage in relation to virgin/celibate life.

Conclusion

Only a living organism can grow (develop), and growth always implies change with continuities and discontinuities. From a faith point of view, the Spirit of Jesus keeps on renewing the believing community especially in its gradual growth of the perception and understanding of the gospel values, in various life situations. Catholic moral teachings based on the gospel are no exception to this, as we saw above with regard to human sexuality and marriage from the 19th century onwards.⁷⁸ Such growth through continuities and discontinuities is not only a sign of the vitality of the believing community, but more so, a clear sign of the ever-renewing Spirit’s active presence in the community.

⁷⁶AL, #161. See also #158–162.

⁷⁷Pope Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate* (2018), #14.

⁷⁸Cfr John 14:25–26, 16:12–13; *Dei Verbum* (1965), #8; Pope John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor* (1993), #27–28.

AMORIS LAETITIA: THE CONTEXT AND MAIN FEATURES

G.A. Arul Raj, CSC♦

This paper focuses on the context of *Amoris Laetitia*¹ (The Joy of Love) and the distinctive features that we find in the document in relation to the Indian Church. Right at the very onset we may raise the following questions. Where is the Indian family today? What does it find itself surrounded by? How can we build better families?

In the Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*² (The Joy of the Gospel) Pope Francis writes, “The family is experiencing a profound cultural crisis, as are all communities and social bonds. In the case of the family, the weakening of these bonds is particularly serious because the family is the fundamental cell of society” (EG 66).

Moreover, today a wide gap has developed between the Church’s teaching concerning marriage and the family. The Holy Father recognized the urgent need for calling an extraordinary synod and initiated the groundwork. The groundwork was different as it sought the thinking and feeling of the whole Church so that the future synods would bring out the best to face the challenges of the family. *Amoris*

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¹Pope Francis, Post-Synodal Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, The Joy of Love Carmel (Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2016).

²Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, The Joy of the Gospel (Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2013).

Arul Raj, G.A. “*Amoris Laetitia*: The Context and Main Features.” In *Vocation and Mission of the Family: Reflections on Chavarul and Amoris Laetitia*, edited by Shaji George Kochuthara, 193–207. Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2020.

Laetitia draws upon the deliberations and reflections that happened at the Synods on the family.

The Crisis of the Family, and the Synods to Discuss the Crisis

Many families today see that they are confronted with serious difficulties. Many millions of people find themselves in situations of migration, flight, and forced displacement, or in degrading situations of misery. The contemporary world finds itself in an anthropological crisis. Individualism and consumerism challenge the traditional culture of families. Economic conditions often make cohesion and living together more difficult.³

The responses and observations from various Bishops' Conferences to the pastoral challenges in dealing with issues of families were grouped based on different dimensions and were brought to the Extraordinary Synod. Some noteworthy challenges were related to crisis of faith and family life, critical situations within the family, external pressures on the family, and special situations. It was recognized that these challenges play out in the real world amidst a variety of circumstances: difficulty in relationships and communication, the break-up and breakdown of families, violence and abuse, dependence, the media and the social network, the impact of work on the family, migration, poverty and the struggle for subsistence, consumerism and individualism, counter-witness in the Church, and disparity of cult.

The Indian delegation presented the following challenges as relevant to the families in India:

Finances are a big source of strain. It was noted that both parents have to work to meet the needs of the family. In many cases this puts a strain on the relationship between the couple and deprives children of parental attention and affection. This has grave impact on our youth today.

Internal and external migration are a reality in India. Internal migration, especially, people from different cultural backgrounds moving from rural areas to urban areas, is very common. This affects the education and emotional growth of the children and parents. The external migration affects the elderly in the family. In many cases, external (and internal) migration of one parent effectively creates single-parent families. There is also the risk of marital discord when someone

³Cardinal Walter Kasper, *The Gospel of the Family*, Translated by William Madges (NJ: Paulist Press, 2014), 2.

is separated from the spouse for a prolonged time. In some cases, both parents are abroad leaving the children to be reared by the grandparents.

The influence of the media has a debilitating effect on Christian values in the family life. The social media has a tremendous influence on our families today. This affects the value system of our families. Traditional values are replaced by the modern values/habits and lifestyles projected in the media.

Globalization has many ways of impacting the families: making the family more materialistic and secularized, inter-faith/disparity of cult marriages on the rise, domestic violence that leaves a scar on the relationship, etc. The number of marriage breakups is on the rise and it has become a recent concern.

The Controversial Issues Debated at the Synod

The following are the controversial issues that were brought to the extraordinary synod.

Divorced and Remarried Catholics

Going into the synod, reporter John L. Allen, Jr. said that the “granddaddy of all controversial issues” was the issue of whether or not Catholics who had divorced and remarried could receive Holy Communion without first receiving a declaration of nullity. The synod did not get a two-thirds consensus. It said the issue needs to be further studied thoroughly. Various Synod Fathers insisted on maintaining the present discipline, because of the constitutive relationship between participation in the Eucharist and communion with the Church as well as her teaching on the indissoluble character of marriage. Others proposed a more individualized approach, permitting access in certain situations and with certain well-defined conditions.

A special discernment is indispensable for pastorally guiding persons who are separated, divorced or abandoned. Pastoral activity needs to be geared towards reconciliation and mediation of differences, which might even take place in specialized ‘listening centres’ established in dioceses. At the same time, the Synod Fathers emphasized the necessity of addressing, in a faithful and constructive fashion, the consequences of separation or divorce on children, in every case the innocent victims of the situation. Children must not become an

“object” of contention. Instead, every suitable means ought to be sought to ensure that they can overcome the trauma of a family break-up and grow as serenely as possible. Special attention is to be given in the guidance of single-parent families, so that women who have to bear alone the responsibility of providing a home and raising their children can receive assistance.

Tribunal Process for Nullity Cases

A great number of Synod Fathers emphasized the need to make the procedure in cases of nullity more accessible and less time-consuming, and, if possible, at no expense. They proposed, among others, the dispensation of the requirement of second instance for confirming sentences; the possibility of establishing an administrative means under the jurisdiction of the diocesan bishop; and a simple process to be used in cases where nullity is clearly evident.⁴

Streamlining of the procedure of examining marriage cases, requested by many Synod Fathers, will require the preparation of a sufficient number of persons—clerics and lay people—primarily dedicated to this work and will require increased responsibility of the diocesan bishop. This work could be done through specially trained counsellors who would be able to offer free advice to the concerned parties on the validity of their marriage. This work could be done in an office or by qualified persons (cfr *Dignitas Connubii*, art. 113, 1).⁵

Pastoral Attention towards Persons with Homosexual Orientation

The interim report asked if the Church could guarantee gay Catholics “a place of fellowship in our communities” and “accepting and valuing their sexual orientation, without compromising Catholic doctrine on the family and matrimony.” The interim report also acknowledged that gay people have “gifts and qualities to offer the Christian community.”⁶

It added that the Church needs to recognize the value of same-sex relationships: “Without denying the moral problems connected to homosexual unions it has to be noted that there are cases in which

⁴Lineamenta, *The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and Contemporary World*, Synod XIV, No. 47, 2014.

⁵Lineamenta, Synod XIV, No. 48.

⁶Trudy Ring, “Vatican Document: Value Gay People’s ‘Gifts and Qualities,’” *Advocate*, 13-10-2014, <https://www.advocate.com/politics/religion/2014/10/13/vatican-document-value-gay-peoples-gifts-and-qualities>, Retrieved 10 January 2015.

mutual aid to the point of sacrifice constitutes a precious support in the life of the partners.”⁷

The Transmission of Life and the Challenges of a Declining Birth-rate

Today, the diffusion of a mentality that reduces the generation of human life to one variable of an individual’s or couple’s plans is easily observable. Sometimes, economic factors are burdensome, contributing to a sharp drop in the birth-rate that weakens the social fabric, compromises relations between generations and renders a future outlook more uncertain. Openness to life is an intrinsic requirement of married love.⁸

Pastoral work in this area needs to start with listening to people and acknowledging the beauty and truth of an unconditional openness to life, which is needed if human love is to be lived fully. The choice of adoption or foster parenting expresses a particular fruitfulness of married life, not simply in the case of sterility. Such a choice is a powerful sign of family love and an occasion to witness to one’s faith and to restore the dignity of a son or daughter to a person who has been deprived of this dignity.⁹

Families in Africa

Numerous interventions were made when reflecting on the challenges faced by families in Africa. The issues that surfaced were: polygamy, levirate marriage, sects, war, poverty, the painful crisis of migration, international pressure for birth control, and so on.¹⁰ Other issues that found a place in the Synod discussions were: poverty leading to migration, interreligious marriages, precariousness of jobs, and unemployment.

The Indian Church’s Survey¹¹

Prior to the Ordinary Synod, a survey was undertaken in 2015 by the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI) based on the topic of the synod. The Family Synod Survey was conducted across over 100

⁷Relatio-45, <https://wpde.com/news/nation-world/has-catholic-church-attitude-toward-gays-fundamentally-shifted-08-13-2015-074050513>

⁸Lineamenta, Synod XIV, No. 56.

⁹Lineamenta, Synod XIV, No. 57.

¹⁰*L’Osservatore Romano*, No. 41, October 2014, page 15.

¹¹Fr Milton Gonsalves and Fr Shiju Joseph csc, Family Synod Survey, 2015 CCBI.

dioceses in India that provided 55,567 responses to a questionnaire which had 55 questions distributed under 9 sections.

Findings from the Survey

The survey was conducted involving parishes, academic institutions, organizations, lay movements and other ecclesial associations. The survey helped us to learn about the challenges faced by families today. It offered suggestions on the role of the Church in addressing current and crucial issues that specifically affect families.

- i) A major issue was the pastoral care of those in interfaith marriages which occur with increasing frequency.
- ii) The issues included: the inadequacy of the marriage preparation courses, the process of annulments, and the patriarchal mindset in the family.

The following suggestions were received from the survey:

1. Ensuring Regular visits to families by a parish team comprising of clergy and laity: The high percentage across all groups affirming the need for parish team visiting families [95%] possibly highlights a lacuna in the Church or the positive experience of the same. Visits by a *trained* pastoral team [clergy + laity] will not only help families to feel connected to the Church community, but also help the parish to know their concerns and respond appropriately by planning pastoral programmes focused on the family [89%]. Maintaining a record of these visits will help keep a track of families, determine ways to include them in the faith life of the parish community and ensure that none are left out of the parish outreach programmes.
2. Train the Families to include Family Experiences in their prayer: To enable families to see the connect between their lives and their faith, a variety of programmes could be organized for couples/parents/youth/children. This could help them see how the two are not disassociated but how scripture and Church teachings can provide strength, support and solutions to life experiences if made a part of prayer life.
3. Plan and conduct, programs to foster family Spirituality, strengthen spousal relationships, and encourage responsible Christian parenting.
4. Plan, conduct, evaluate marriage preparation and enrichment programs to increase their effectiveness.

5. Provide support services to assist couples in the initial years of their marriage to understand each other better. Accompaniment of couples in the early years of married life will help them surmount initial problems and not seek separation or termination as a quick solution.
6. Provide couple-centred activities to foster bonding and indissolubility. This is needed in today's times as couples get caught up in the demands of everyday life and find it difficult to spend time on their own relationship.
7. Provide Training in parenting skills to couples at different stages of their family life.
8. These skills must not only be focused on parenting needs to respond to children at different ages, but on recognizing that parents are the primary educators of faith for their children, the training should also assist parents to be effective in the transmission of faith at the different stages.
9. Put mechanisms in place to ensure children attend parish/diocese faith education programs organized by the parish/diocese.
10. Parents must be helped to understand the importance of the Church's catechetical programmes in supporting them in the transmission of faith in a planned and systematic way.
11. Increase the involvement of lay people in the preparation, implementation and evaluation of marriage preparation courses. This will not only ensure a laity perspective on the course, but include trained laity in conducting the course would relieve the pressure on the clergy to focus on other pastoral activities.
12. Educate parents/couples on their roles and responsibilities in promoting a healthy relationship.
13. Offer counselling/reconciliation to those who seek divorce. Make accessible trained counselling services for those seeking divorce to facilitate reconciliation.
14. Appointing judicial vicars to assist in timely handling of the annulment process.
15. Allow those in irregular marriages to participate in active life of the parish. Reaching out to them with understanding and compassion will

draw them into parish life where people must be educated to allow them to experience a non-judgmental welcome.

16. Conduct sex education programs for youth.
17. Educate people on the right to life and the evils of abortion.
18. Educate children, youth, and adults to critically reflect on messages from the media and other sources.
19. Take a timely stand against social influences contrary to Christian values.
20. Get actively involved in local issues, e.g. alcoholism, dowry, domestic violence, etc. which harm unity/harmony in the family.
21. Ensure that priests have adequate practical skills to minister to families before they are ordained. Organize ongoing training programs for priests/sisters/brothers to understand and address changing family situations.
22. Educate everyone to treat homosexuals with respect and sensitivity.

The Main Features of *Amoris Laetitia*

Here I would like to focus on the responses that we find in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation to the concerns raised in the survey done in India by the CCBI. The experiences and challenges of families are found in chapter two (AL 31–57). The need for new pastoral methods is emphasized in the sixth chapter on some pastoral perspectives (AL 199–258). The eighth chapter on accompanying, discerning, and integrating weakness states that the Church must accompany with attention and care the weakest of her children, who show signs of a wounded and troubled love, by restoring in them hope and confidence (AL 291–312).

Citing *Familiaris Consortio*, Pope Francis states that “we do well to focus on concrete realities, since ‘the call and the demands of the Spirit resound in the events of history,’ and through these ‘the Church can also be guided to a more profound understanding of the inexhaustible mystery of marriage and the family’” (AL 31). Conversely, if we fail to listen to reality, we cannot understand the needs of the present or the movements of the Spirit. The Pope notes that rampant individualism makes it difficult today for a person to give oneself generously to another (AL 33). Here is an interesting picture of the situation: “The fear

of loneliness and the desire for stability and fidelity exist side by side with a growing fear of entrapment in a relationship that could hamper the achievement of one's personal goals" (AL 34).

It is unrealistic to think that families can sustain themselves "simply by stressing doctrinal, bioethical and moral issues, without encouraging openness to grace" (AL 37). Calling for a certain "self-criticism" of approaches that are inadequate for the experience of marriage and the family, the Pope stresses the need to make room for the formation of the conscience of the faithful: "We have been called to form consciences, not to replace them" (AL 37). Jesus proposed a demanding ideal but "never failed to show compassion and closeness to the frailty of individuals like the Samaritan woman or the woman caught in adultery" (AL 38).

Some Pastoral Perspectives (AL 199–258)

"Greater emphasis needs to be placed on the fact that children are a wonderful gift from God and a joy for parents and the Church. Through them, the Lord renews the world" (AL 222).

Pope Francis treats various pastoral perspectives that are aimed at forming solid and fruitful families according to God's plan. The Holy Father uses the *Final Reports* of the two Synods and the catechesis of Pope John Paul II and his own catechesis extensively.

Accompanying, Discerning and Integrating Weakness (AL 291–312)

The Pope uses three very important verbs: guiding, discerning and integrating, which are fundamental in addressing fragile, complex or irregular situations. Pope Francis stresses the need for gradualness in pastoral care; the importance of discernment; norms and mitigating circumstances in pastoral discernment; and finally, what the Pope calls the "logic of pastoral mercy." He invites us to remember that "the Church's task is often like that of a field hospital" (AL 291). This deals with the Church's outreach to the weak or those who have fallen.

The Holy Father grapples with the findings of the Synods on controversial issues. He reaffirms what Christian marriage is and adds that "some forms of union radically contradict this ideal, while others realize it in at least a partial and analogous way." The Church therefore "does not disregard the constructive elements in those situations which do not yet or no longer correspond to her teaching on marriage" (AL 292).

As far as discernment with regard to “irregular” situations is concerned, the Pope states: “There is a need ‘to avoid judgements which do not take into account the complexity of various situations’ and ‘to be attentive, by necessity, to how people experience distress because of their condition’” (AL 296). And he continues: “It is a matter of reaching out to everyone, of needing to help each person find his or her proper way of participating in the ecclesial community, and thus to experience being touched by an ‘unmerited, unconditional and gratuitous’ mercy” (AL 297). And further: “The divorced who have entered a new union, for example, can find themselves in a variety of situations, which should not be pigeonholed or fit into overly rigid classifications leaving no room for a suitable personal and pastoral discernment” (AL 298).

In this line, gathering the observations of many Synod Fathers, the Pope states that

the baptized who are divorced and civilly remarried need to be more fully integrated into Christian communities in the variety of ways possible, while avoiding any occasion of scandal... Their participation can be expressed in different ecclesial services... Such persons need to feel not as excommunicated members of the Church, but instead as living members, able to live and grow in the Church... This integration is also needed in the care and Christian upbringing of their children (AL 299).

In a more general vein, the Pope makes an extremely important statement for understanding the orientation and meaning of the Exhortation:

If we consider the immense variety of concrete situations, ... it is understandable that neither the Synod nor this Exhortation could be expected to provide a new set of general rules, canonical in nature and applicable to all cases. What is needed is simply a renewed encouragement to undertake a responsible personal and pastoral discernment of particular cases, one which would recognize that, since ‘the degree of responsibility is not equal in all cases,’ the consequences or effects of a rule need not necessarily always be the same (AL 300).

The Pope develops in depth the needs and characteristics of the journey of accompaniment and discernment necessary for profound dialogue between the faithful and their pastors.

For this purpose the Holy Father recalls the Church’s reflection on “mitigating factors and situations” regarding the attribution of responsibility and accountability for actions; and relying on St Thomas

Aquinas, he focuses on the relationship between rules and discernment by stating:

It is true that general rules set forth a good which can never be disregarded or neglected, but in their formulation they cannot provide absolutely for all particular situations. At the same time, it must be said that, precisely for that reason, what is part of a practical discernment in particular circumstances cannot be elevated to the level of a rule (AL 304).

The Logic of Pastoral Mercy

To avoid misunderstandings, Pope Francis strongly reiterates:

To show understanding in the face of exceptional situations never implies dimming the light of the fuller ideal, or proposing less than what Jesus offers to the human being. Today, *more important than the pastoral care of failures is the pastoral effort to strengthen marriages* and thus to prevent their breakdown (AL 307).

Pope Francis emphasizes: “At times we find it hard to make room for God’s unconditional love in our pastoral activity. We put so many conditions on mercy that we empty it of its concrete meaning and real significance. That is the worst way of watering down the Gospel” (AL 311).

***Amoris Laetitia* and Suggestions of the Survey**

In the Apostolic Exhortation we see the responses to the concerns that were raised from the survey done by the Indian Church. It is good to read the apostolic exhortation in relation to the suggestions from our consultation done in the country.

1. Ensuring Regular visits of families by a parish team comprising of clergy and laity: “The main contribution to the pastoral care of families is offered by the parish, which is the family of families, where small communities, ecclesial movements and associations live in harmony” (AL 202).

Another way of growing closer is by blessing homes ... this provides an opportunity for a pastoral conversation about the family’s situation. It could also be helpful to ask older married couples to help younger couples in the neighbourhood by visiting them and offering guidance in the early years of marriage. Nowadays pastoral care for families has to be fundamentally missionary, going out to where people are (AL 230).

2. Training the families to include Family Experiences in their prayer: Family prayer is a special way of expressing and strengthening this paschal faith" (AL 318). A few minutes can be found each day to come together before the living God, to tell him our worries, to ask for the needs of our family, to pray for someone experiencing difficulty, to ask for help in showing love, to give thanks for life and for its blessings, ... With a few simple words, this moment of prayer can do immense good for our families (AL 318).

3. Providing support services to assist couples in the initial years of their marriage: Parishes, movements, schools and other Church institutions can help in a variety of ways to support families and help them grow. These might include: meetings for couples living in the same neighbourhood, brief retreats for couples; talks by experts on concrete issues facing families, marriage counselling, home missionaries who help couples discuss their difficulties and desires, social services dealing with family problems like addiction, infidelity and domestic violence, programmes of spiritual growth, workshops for parents with troubled children and family meetings (AL 229).

"The life of every family is marked by all kinds of crisis, yet these are also part of its dramatic beauty. Couples should be helped to realize that surmounting a crisis need not weaken their relationship; instead, it can improve, settle and mature the wine of their union" (AL 232).

4. Providing Training in parenting skills to couples at different stages of their family life: The response to the consultation also insisted on the need for training lay leaders who can assist in the pastoral care of families, with the help of teachers and counsellors, family and community physicians, social workers, juvenile and family advocates, and drawing upon the contributions of psychology, sociology, marital therapy and counselling (AL 204).

5. Putting mechanisms in place to ensure children attend parish/diocese faith education programs: Raising children calls for an orderly process of handing on the faith. ...the home must continue to be the place where we learn to appreciate the meaning and beauty of the faith, to pray and to serve our neighbour (AL 287).

6. Increasing the involvement of lay people in the preparation, implementation and evaluation of marriage preparation courses: Pope

Francis encourages Christian communities to recognize the great benefit that they themselves receive from supporting engaged couples as they grow in love (AL 207). The Holy Father in line with *Familiaris Consortio*¹² (66) reminds us once again the need to offer a remote preparation by example and good advice, and to help their love to grow and mature. For every couple, marriage preparation begins at birth. What they received from their family should prepare them to know themselves and make a full and definitive commitment (AL 208). It is stressed that preparation should ensure that the couple do not view the wedding ceremony as the end of the road, but instead embark upon marriage as a lifelong calling based on a firm and realistic decision to face all trials and difficult moments together (AL 210).

7. Offering counselling/reconciliation to those who seek divorce: Mention is furthermore made of accompanying abandoned, separated or divorced persons. The Exhortation stresses the importance of the recent reform of the procedures for marriage annulment. It highlights the suffering of children in situations of conflict and concludes: "Divorce is an evil, and the increasing number of divorces is very troubling. Hence, our most important pastoral task with regard to families is to strengthen their love, helping to heal wounds and working to prevent the spread of this drama of our times" (AL 246).

8. Allowing those in irregular marriages to participate in active life of the parish: As far as discernment with regard to "irregular" situations is concerned, the Pope states: "There is a need 'to avoid judgments which do not take into account the complexity of various situations' and 'to be attentive, by necessity, to how people experience distress because of their condition'" (AL 296).

We read that Pope Francis is in agreement with the many Synod Fathers who observed that "the baptized who are divorced and civilly remarried need to be more fully integrated into Christian communities in the variety of ways possible, while avoiding any occasion of scandal" (AL 299).

9. Conducting sex education programs for youth: The Second Vatican Council spoke of the need for "a positive and prudent sex education" to

¹²Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, Apostolic Exhortation on the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World (Catholic Truth Society, Publishers to the Holy See, 1981).

be imparted to children and adolescents “as they grow older,” with “due weight being given to the advances in the psychological, pedagogical and didactic sciences” (*Gravissimum Educationis*, 1) (AL 280).

10. Getting actively involved in local issues, e.g. alcoholism, dowry, domestic violence, etc. which harm unity/harmony in the family. Good pastoral training is important “especially in light of domestic violence and sexual abuse” (AL 204).

11. Ensuring that priests have adequate practical skills to minister to families before they are ordained: The Pope regrets “that ordained ministers often lack the training needed to deal with the complex problems currently facing families” (AL 202). On the one hand, the psycho-affective formation of seminarians needs to be improved, and families need to be more involved in formation for ministry (cfr AL 203); and on the other hand, “the experience of the broad oriental tradition of a married clergy could also be drawn upon” (AL 202).

Seminarians should receive a more extensive interdisciplinary, and not merely doctrinal, formation in the areas of engagement and marriage. “The presence of lay people, families and especially the presence of women in priestly formation, promotes the appreciation of the diversity and complementarity of the different vocations in the Church” (AL 203).

12. Educate everyone to treat homosexuals with respect and sensitivity: Regarding families with members with homosexual tendencies, it reaffirms the necessity to respect them and to refrain from any unjust discrimination and every form of aggression or violence.

Conclusion: “Family, Become What You Are!”¹³

For families to become what they are called to be, Pope Francis summed up in the closing words: “I encourage the faithful who find themselves in complicated situations to speak confidently with their pastors or with other lay people whose lives are committed to the Lord. They may not always encounter in them a confirmation of their own ideas or desires, but they will surely receive some light to help them better understand their situation and discover a path to personal

¹³Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 17.

growth. I also encourage the Church's pastors to listen to them with sensitivity and serenity, with a sincere desire to understand their plight and their point of view, in order to help them live better lives and to recognize their proper place in the Church" (AL 312).

The idea of two synods on the theme of family, the level of preparations that were launched and the discussion these generated in different parts of the Church and at different levels of hierarchy are probably unprecedented. These are definitely encouraging signs for the future of the Church. Specifically in India, many lay persons were quite enthused to participate in the preparations for the synods. Seeking their opinions in matters that affect them intimately and reaching out to them about what it means to be at the receiving end of different positions of the Church gave the lay people an opportunity to voice their concerns, and to participate, albeit at a limited level, in the decision making. The spirit with which the issues were discussed at the Synods, and the language of AL are very promising for an effective ministry among the families. These recognize the pivotal role of families in society and the Church. These have also raised the expectations of the faithful. To what extent the compassion exemplified in AL will be available on the ground to the lay faithful will be closely watched by them. It is an opportune time for different Church organizations and dioceses to get their act together and concretely materialize the hopes raised through *Amoris Laetitia*.

THE GOSPEL OF JOYFUL FAMILIES

Vision and Vocation of Family in *Amoris Laetitia*

Mathew Illathuparampil♦

The post-Synodal Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (hereafter AL)¹ signed by Pope Francis is not the first church document on family. But it is unique of its kind as it was perhaps the most awaited church document; it was the fruit of two synods;² it is essentially a formational document;³ and those who had expected an epochal revolution in the norms for regulating access of the divorced and civilly remarried to Communion are left to feel disillusioned. In *Evangelii Gaudium*⁴ Pope Francis had already stated that “the family is the fundamental cell of society, where we learn to live with others despite our differences and to belong to one another; it is also the place where parents pass on the faith to their children” (no. 66). This reveals why the care of the family is a key priority for the Church and society.

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¹Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, Apostolic Exhortation on “Love in the Family” issued on 19 March 2016. [papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf) (vatican.va) accessed on 02 October 2019.

²For a history of the two synods see Edward Pentin, *The Rigging of a Vatican Synod? An Investigation into the Alleged Manipulation at the Extraordinary Synod on Family* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press 2015).

³Louis J. Cameli, *A New Vision of Family Life: A Reflection on Amoris Laetitia* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Pub., 2018), 15-16.

⁴Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Apostolic Exhortation on “the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World,” issued on 24 November 2013. Available at http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html, accessed on 10 October 2019.

Illathuparampil, Mathew. “The Gospel of Joyful Families: Vision and Vocation of Family in *Amoris Laetitia*.” In *Vocation and Mission of the Family: Reflections on Chavarul and Amoris Laetitia*, edited by Shaji George Kochuthara, 208–218. Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2020.

There were a number of contextual issues that made Pope Francis dwell on this theme at this point of time. They include the following.

- a) Philosophy of Relativism: The new philosophies that try to redefine marriage as a free union between two people who are attracted to each other, whether they are of the same sex or not. This situation threatens to cloud the true meaning of marriage. This is not quite a new phenomenon, but its acceptability is on increase.
- b) Infidelity of Couples: The development and maintenance of sexual relations with other people outside of sacramentally constituted marriages continue to challenge many marriages and families with potential break-ups and divorce. In countries where economic independence of women is high, infidelity is taken as a serious reason for divorce.
- c) Domestic Violence: Both married men and women suffer violence and abuse by their spouses. That lets couples to undergo fear, oppression, alcoholism, pseudo relationships, injuries, and even sometimes, death.
- d) Cohabitation/ Concubinage: Cohabitation for long periods of time without any concrete plans of regularizing their marriages is on increase even in developing nations.
- e) Divorced and Remarried Couples: Lawfully married couples are forced by circumstances to divorce from lawful spouses to marry civilly. It has caused pain to a lot of families, especially that of the innocent divorcees, who then had to have a civil marriage, when they are no more allowed to the Eucharist.
- f) Childlessness: the number of infertile couples do increase worldwide. That challenges marriage in various ways, especially the fate of women in many cultures. These are some of the issues that pressed the Pontiff to treat family as a serious concern in the church and the world in AL.

AL is a key addition to the Church's rich patrimony of documents on family and marriage. This paper represents an attempt to unravel the main thrust of this unusually long document in explaining the vision and vocation of family. In this short presentation, we are bound to limit ourselves to five dimensions of marriage and family explained in AL.

A Fresh Approach to Family

The vision of family forwarded in AL is determined to a great extent by the fresh approach Francis takes in this document. He does not seem to systematize it to such a degree as to make it a new methodology. There are various aspects of his new approach to family. For instance, giving an inclusive vision of family, Francis often speaks about family

or families, instead of “the family” as many of his predecessors did.⁵ He strikes a positive note when he says that the properties of Christian marriage “should not be viewed as a yoke imposed on humanity but as a ‘gift’ granted to those who are joined in marriage” (AL 62).

AL does exhibit a shift in emphasis from doctrinal and moral discourse to a pastoral approach. It does not condemn or prohibit any moral practice or pastoral actions. It tries to be as realistic as possible. It takes into account persons who are often challenged in their relationships by fragility, failures, faults and falls.⁶

Francis rejects the mentality of self-defence and lamentation. He is open to the challenges in family life. He keeps away from the notorious pessimistic tenor of some of the ecclesial texts. He even blames them for their inefficiency and their share in “contributing to today’s problematic situation” (AL 36). While acknowledging local attempts and cultural support for familial values, he admits that

we have often been on the defensive, wasting pastoral energy on denouncing a decadent world without being proactive in proposing ways of finding true happiness. Many people feel that the Church’s message on marriage and the family does not clearly reflect the preaching and attitudes of Jesus, who set forth a demanding ideal yet never failed to show compassion and closeness to the frailty of individuals like the Samaritan woman or the woman caught in adultery (AL 38).

He also condemns excessive idealization in putting forward “a far too abstract and almost artificial theological ideal of marriage, far removed from the concrete situations and practical possibilities of real families” (AL 36).

Theological Perception of Family

AL prefers to consider family basically from a theological angle. It draws marriage and family to the core of God’s inner life. For instance,

⁵There are other contexts, apart from AL, in which Francis has spoken about family. For his talks on the theme of family see, Pope Francis, *On the Family* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2015). Julie Hanlon Rubio, “Family,” in *Key Words of Pope Francis*, ed. Joshua J. McElwee and Cindy Wooden (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2018), 68–71.

⁶Arnaud Join-Lambert, “Accompanying, Discerning, and Integrating the Fragility of Couples: Pastors and Theologians at a Crossroads,” Thomas Knieps-Port le Roi, ed., *A Point of No Return? Amoris Laetitia on Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2017), 146.

AL affirms that fruitful love becomes the symbol of creator God's inner life (AL 11). AL clearly states that "the Triune God is a communion of love, and the family is its living reflection" (AL 11). John Paul II also had stated the same: God is a family, as he has within himself fatherhood, sonship and love, the essence of family.⁷ Francis says, "The family is the image of God who is a communion of persons" (AL 71). Pope holds that marriage is not just a social convention. For the church, the couples are a permanent reminder of what happened on the cross; they are for one another and their children witnesses of salvation (AL 72). Becoming one flesh, the couples embody the espousal of human nature by Jesus Christ.

Francis posits Jesus as the key to understand family life because "the mystery of the Christian family can be fully understood only in the light of the Father's infinite love revealed in Christ, who gave himself up for our sake and who continues to dwell in our midst" (AL 59). The Pope relates married life with divine mysteries. In Jesus Christ, God has entered the human reality. God took on flesh. Love became incarnate. Thus "the sacrament of marriage flows from the incarnation and the paschal mystery, whereby God showed the fullness of his love for humanity by becoming one of us" (AL 74).

Because of God's grace at work in the sacrament of marriage, the sexual union of man and woman becomes a path of sanctity for the spouses (AL 74). Sexual union lovingly experienced by the couples is a path of growth in grace. This is because through the sacrament, Christ sanctifies the loving union of woman and man. "Only in contemplating Christ does a person come to know the deepest truth about human relationships" (AL 77).

Not only that Pope Francis outlines a theological vision of family, he draws some theological assumptions about God from family. He holds that the family is the icon of God, when teaching that, "The triune God is Himself a communion of love and the family is its living reflection ... for He has within Himself fatherhood, sonship and the essence of the family, which is that love in divine family is the Holy Spirit" (AL 11).

AL reiterates the basic theological premises about marriage. For instance, it says God ordained marriage to be between man and woman. The document teaches that when God made man and woman and

⁷John Paul II, *Homily at the Eucharistic Celebration in Puebla de los Angeles* (28 January 1979), http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1979/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19790128_messico-puebla-seminario.html.

blessed them, He (God) intended marriage to be an exclusive union of man and woman (AL 9). “Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” to buttress this point (Gen 2:24). The subsequent conclusion is that God intended marriage to be open to life, when “He blessed them and said increase and multiply” (Gen 1:27–28).

The life-giving mission of couples is not reduced to being just pro-life. It implies many things. For instance, the gift of a new child promised to a father and a mother, begins with acceptance, continues with lifelong support of that life and has as its final goal the joy of eternal life. Parents are called to contemplate the ultimate fulfilment of each human person. The splendour of parenthood is that God allows parents to choose the name by which he himself will call their child for all eternity (AL 166).

AL understands marriage as a vocation to a life of holiness and service between the couples and in their family. They are called to be the witnesses of loving and life-giving God. The mystery of the Christian family can be fully understood only in the light of the Father’s infinite love revealed in Christ, who gave himself up for our sake and who continues to dwell in our midst (AL 59).

Marriage as Friendship

It was only by the Vatican II that love was well integrated into the theology of marriage. However, conjugal love has not been accepted unhesitatingly. For instance, Vatican II placed the caveat that “married love is too often profaned by excessive self-love, the worship of pleasure and illicit practices against human generation” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 47).⁸ *Familiaris Consortio* (no. 11) admitted only the kind of conjugal love which is a “total and personal giving.” The burden of this approach lies in the fact that it is tied inextricably with the procreative end and the often unattainable ideal of selfless charity.⁹ But AL has adopted a different path and holds that conjugal love is the greatest form of friendship (n. 123). The category of friendship describing marital love is

⁸For more details, Mariusz Biliniewicz, *Amoris Laetitia and the Spirit of Vatican II: The Source of Controversy* (London: Routledge, 2018).

⁹Thomas Knieps-Port Le Roi and Roger Burggraeve, “New Wine in New Wineskins: *Amoris Laetitia* and the Church’s Teaching on Marriage and Family,” *Louvain Studies* 39 (2015-16): 289.

closer to the vocabulary of the contemporary couples. However, he places it within the context of Catholic tradition by citing Thomas Aquinas who qualified conjugal love as the “greatest friendship.”¹⁰

Qualifying marriage as friendship is not without foundations. Francis states:

It is a union possessing all the traits of a good friendship: concern for the good of the other, reciprocity, intimacy, warmth, stability and the resemblance born of a shared life. Marriage joins to all this an indissoluble exclusivity expressed in the stable commitment to share and shape together the whole of life (AL 123).

The retrieval of marriage as friendship has huge implications for contemporary times. It places marital love in a continuum of relationships that are existent in society. As members of the society and families, we are open to relationships of utility, kinship, familiarity and friendship. AL reveals that marriage as a friendship differs from other relationships in gradation but not essence. Friendship ensures the freedom to love the other for his/her own sake. It is marked by virtues of respect and the fear of harming others. Similarly, marital love assumes a social scope also. It places erotic love in a beautiful terrain:

In no way, then, can we consider the erotic dimension of love simply as a permissible evil or a burden to be tolerated for the good of the family. Rather, it must be seen as gift from God that enriches the relationship of the spouses. As a passion sublimated by a love respectful of the dignity of the other, it becomes a “pure, unadulterated affirmation” revealing the marvels of which the human heart is capable (AL 152).

While describing marriage as friendship, Francis does not forgo the theological imagery of the relation between Christ and the church. Maintaining a healthy realism, he says,

there is no need to lay upon two limited persons the tremendous burden of having to reproduce perfectly the union existing between Christ and

¹⁰Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* III, 123, 6. Perhaps, if flourishing of the spouses has not been well exposed in the Thomistic theology, previous theological attempts are to be blamed for. Thomas had emphasized friendship between the spouses as the proper finality of marriage in his later works. L. Fullam, “Toward a Virtue Ethics of Marriage: Augustine and Aquinas on Friendship in Marriage,” *Theological Studies* 73 (2012): 663–692, as mentioned in Thomas Knieps-Port Le Roi and Roger Burggraeve, “New Wine in New Wineskins,” 290.

his Church, for marriage as a sign entails “a dynamic process..., one which advances gradually with the progressive integration of the gifts of God (AL 122).

Placing the logic of growth, he holds that the conjugal love is an imperfect sign of the love between Christ and the Church (AL 72). He reasonably admits that the most perfect marriage would be an imperfect sign of the unconditional love of Christ for the church. But the sacrament provides them the grace to proceed towards better Christlikeness.

While speaking about marriage as friendship, Pope Francis has not closed his eyes to the negative realities in many marriages and family. For instance, Pope Francis agrees with Paul VI’s prophecy of four dire consequences of rejecting the moral norms for birth regulation. Citing *Humanae Vitae* (no. 17), Pope Francis writes in paragraph #54:

...the shameful ill-treatment to which women are sometimes subjected, domestic violence and various forms of enslavement which, rather than a show of masculine power, are craven acts of cowardice. The verbal, physical and sexual violence that women endure in some marriages contradicts the very nature of the conjugal union. I think of the reprehensible genital mutilation of women practiced in some cultures, but also of their lack of equal access to dignified work and roles of decision-making ... and the exploitation and commercialization of the female body in the current media culture.

Couples in Irregular Situations

Instead of lifelong heterosexual marital bonds, different forms of living together were a serious concern for the synod process. This is perhaps the most anticipated theme which brought a lot of hue and cry in theological circles. In AL Francis seems to hold the idea of a growth process towards the people living in the so-called irregular situations.¹¹ He affirms that such spouses would be led eventually to the full reality of marriage and family in conformity with the Gospel (AL 294). He refers to the idea of the “law of gradualness.” Francis admits that “This is not a “gradualness of law” but rather a gradualness in the prudential

¹¹The very expression “irregular situation” may look reprehensible for some. They hold that it is condemnatory in itself, before making any moral judgment of the particular case. However, for want of a commonly accepted neutral expression, we continue to use it here.

exercise of free acts on the part of subjects who are not in a position to understand, appreciate, or fully carry out the objective demands of the law” (AL 295).

The attempt of Francis is to respect the objective moral law while shifting the focus to the individual subjects and their capacity to comply with the demands of the moral law. He concedes that there are mitigating factors that make some people at least partially incapable of living up to the ideal. That means, people living in an objectively sinful situation may not be subjectively culpable (AL 305).¹² This leaves the scope of discernment of the pastors and personal discernment in conscience. This grand task is described as the ministry of accompanying, discerning and integrating failures.¹³ In sum, we may reasonably hold that Francis has opened a way forward which must be subjected to the prudent judgment of the local pastors.

By looking at the specifics of the situation of a couple in irregular condition, by remembering “mitigating factors,” by counselling them in the “internal forum,” and by respecting that the final decision about the degree of participation in the church is left to a person’s conscience (305, 300), the Pope wants that the divorced and remarried couples should be made to feel part of the church. “They are not excommunicated and should not be treated as such, since they remain part” of the church (243). *Amoris Laetitia* tries to balance the church’s responsibilities to both teach families the church’s doctrines and also to learn from their lived experiences. However, the Church has not been successful in fulfilling this goal both in theory and practice. In no part of *Amoris Laetitia* is it explicitly said that the divorced and civilly remarried can approach the Eucharistic table without the established requirement of living together as brother and sister. *Familiaris Consortio* 84 and *Sacramentum Caritatis* 29 therefore remain the perfectly valid points of reference for pastoral discernment. However, be it noted that various bishops’ conferences have offered provisions for receiving communion without the above

¹²One may observe that, for some, the approach of Francis does not go far enough to help the couples in irregular situations, whereas, for some others, he goes too far especially in AL 305 footnote no. 351 where he conceded sacramental help to such couples among the possible helps of the church.

¹³José Granados, Stephen Kampowski, Juan José Perez-Soba, *Accompanying, Discerning, Integrating: A Handbook for the Pastoral Care of the Family according to Amoris Laetitia* (Ohio: Emmaus Road Publishing, 2017).

said condition. We do not venture into considering those provisions here, as they would exceed the thematic limits of this paper.

Educative Pastoral Care for Families

The chief problem the Pope addresses is not the one of divorce, but the problem that marriage is no longer perceived as good news (AL 34). Therefore, in AL Pope Francis did not want to focus his reflections on divorce and remarriage. Instead, at the centre, that is, in chapters four and five, we find a profound reflection on love and its fruitfulness. That becomes the foundation of proclaiming the gospel of marriage and family. Francis proposes the way of education as central for the Church. Not only that chapter seven is dedicated to the topic of education but also that theme permeates the entire text.

Francis details the pastoral approach in the following words:

It is true that there is no sense in simply decrying present-day evils, as if this could change things. Nor it is helpful to try to impose rules by sheer authority. What we need is a more responsible and generous effort to present the reasons and motivations for choosing marriage and the family, and in this way to help men and women better to respond to the grace that God offers them (AL 35).

How is it possible to educate persons to make significant lifelong choices? Here Francis lays out a fundamental principle of healthy pastoral care: “Today, more important than the pastoral care of failures is the pastoral effort to strengthen marriages and thus to prevent their breakdown” (AL 307). It can be achieved only in a renewed educational effort from the part of the family and the Church. The document calls us to leave a casuistic logic and to put the question of education at the centre of pastoral care. The goal of such an education is to develop personal conscience and promote pastoral discernment. That demands the moral theologians to further a genuine culture of discernment in the church.¹⁴

Conclusion

The ultimate vision proposed by AL is the gospel of joyful families. Pope Francis encourages the church and the families to be realistic in

¹⁴Conor M. Kelly, “The Role of the Moral Theologian in the Church: A Proposal in the Light of *Amoris Laetitia*, *Theological Studies* 77, 4 (2016): 923.

living out the vision of marriage modelled after Christ's relation with the church. His attention to the theological vision of family is noteworthy, as it keeps moral discourse on family subsidiary to it. In a broad evaluative stroke, one may observe that Francis leaves room for healthy discussions on family at best. His convictions on vexed moral and canonical issues on family can be summarized as follows: on the one hand, the church must proclaim the full ideal of marriage and family and expound the objective teaching; on the other hand, the church shall not empty God's mercy of its meaning and significance in particular cases.¹⁵ The realization of this task rests hugely with pastoral accompaniment, discernment and integration to be done in the church.¹⁶

Even while presenting a lofty vision of family and married life, Pope Francis remains aware of the "imperfect" realities of modern families and marriages. He holds that "seeing things with the eyes of Christ" means not only caring for those in good, happy, healthy family situations but is also the basis of the Church's pastoral care for those "who are living together, or are only married civilly, or are divorced and remarried" (78). That means, the pastoral care of the church shall not be limited to the good people or people in regular marriages alone. Rather, those in "difficult situations and wounded families" must be attended to. The pastoral care of priests and bishops, Pope Francis tells, must be such that "while clearly stating the Church's teachings," they are to "avoid judgments that do not take into account the complexity of various situations." With a pastoral charity, pastors are "to be attentive, by necessity, to how people experience and endure distress because of their condition" (79). The heart of pastoral approach is typically Ignatian principle of *discernment*. Pope Francis reasserts the principle that Saint John Paul II outlined in *Familiaris Consortio*: "Pastors must know that, for the sake of the truth, they are obliged to exercise careful discernment of situations" (79; cfr FC 84). The need for pastoral discernment is well articulated depending on Thomas Aquinas in the following words:

Although there is necessity in the general principles, the more we descend to matters of detail, the more frequently we encounter defects...

¹⁵George Therukattil, "Pope Francis' Moral and Pastoral Approach in *Amoris Laetitia*," in *Pope Francis: His Impact on and Relevance for the Church and Society*, ed. Kuruvilla Pandikattu (Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapith, 2018), 73.

¹⁶Thomas P. Rausch, *Pope Francis on the Joy of Love: Theological and Pastoral Reflections on Amoris Laetitia* (Mahwah, NJ.: Paulist Press, 2018).

In matters of action, truth or practical rectitude is not the same for all, as to matters of detail, but only as to the general principles; and where there is the same rectitude in matters of detail, it is not equally known to all... (AL 304).

As we have already seen in different ways in this paper, the reason why Francis has taken up the theme of marriage and family for discussion is not because it is just problematic. Rather, he sees family as an opportunity. He states: "families are not a problem; they are first and foremost an opportunity" (AL 7). He affirms: "As Christians, we can hardly stop advocating marriage simply to avoid countering contemporary sensibilities, or out of a desire to be fashionable or a sense of helplessness in the face of human and moral failings. We would be depriving the world of values that we can and must offer" (AL 35). Though his attempt in AL has been criticized by many in various ways, AL kept itself away from "an immoderate desire for total change without sufficient reflection or grounding," and from "an attitude that would solve everything by applying general rules or deriving undue conclusions from particular theological considerations" (AL 2). Briefly, his belief that upon the theme of family the church has something to offer to the world at large is justified by the text of AL.

MARRIED LOVE AS A LIVED EXPERIENCE IN *AMORIS LAETITIA*

Joseph Loic Mben, SJ♦

The present essay intends to study the realist tone of marital love that one finds in *Amoris Laetitia* (henceforth AL), the post-synodal apostolic exhortation from Pope Francis. One clear characteristic of Francis' exhortation on marriage and love is its realism.¹ In many instances, he indicates that married love is destined to grow, or is not a perfect reality (AL 36, 38, 40, 47, 53, 74, 88, 113, etc.). This locates that love within the contingencies of history.

The realist take on marital love takes into account the supernatural dimension (marriage as icon of Christ's union with the church) and gains from the recent teachings on marriage. Likewise, one finds elements of the traditional teaching on love as the insistence on the agapic dimension (AL 67, 72, 73, 98, 131, 157, 319, 322).

The present essay will proceed in four steps. First, I will offer a definition of marital or conjugal love. Then, I will briefly survey places and authors in the Bible and in the tradition that looked realistically at marital love. Third, I will look at how AL presents marital love. Three aspects will retain my attention: the distorted vision, growth, elements fostering growth, and thriving for excellence. The last section will look

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¹I understand realism simply as a belief or doctrine rooted in sober fact or on experience. I also understand it as "the quality or fact of representing a person, thing, or situation accurately or in a way that is true to life"; see "Realism," *Dictionary* (Apple Inc., 2014).

Mben, Joseph Loic. "Married Love as a Lived Experience in *Amoris Laetitia*." In *Vocation and Mission of the Family: Reflections on Chavarul and Amoris Laetitia*, edited by Shaji George Kochuthara, 219–231. Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2020.

at concrete applications in Africa by putting it especially in dialogue with Pierre Foti's book that looks at marriage within the African context. I will also look at the issue of HIV/AIDS—completely overlooked by AL—and its possible impact on married love.

Definition

Conjugal love is the love between husband and wife (AL 120). It is “an affective union, spiritual and sacrificial, which combines the warmth of friendship and erotic passion, and endures long after emotions and passion subside” (AL 120). Francis adds that “it is a love sanctified, enriched, and illuminated by the grace of the sacrament of marriage” (AL 120).

This definition contains the Nygren triptych of eros, philia and agape.² It assumes the harmonious interweaving of the three dimensions, which follows pope Benedict XVI's insight in *Deus Caritas Est*.³ It has also the mystical dimension (spiritual, grace of the sacrament). It contains two of the traditional goods of marriage: good of the spouses/fidelity (affective union, warmth of friendship; faithfulness not explicitly mentioned but assumed) and indissolubility (not clearly mentioned too, but is implicit). Procreation is not present here, but the rest of the document mentions it and speaks also about fruitfulness (AL

²Eros comes from a Greek verb, which means to desire, to be infatuated with, and to love with passion. It is an impetuous movement that leads a person towards another in order to be united with him/her. It is sensual love. Philia is the love of friendship, taking care of another, welcoming with joy. Philia refers not only to friendship, but also to love as beneficence. Agape (caritas in Latin) is disinterested, unconditional, free and gratuitous love. See Xavier Lacroix, *Les mirages de l'amour*, Questions en débat (Paris/Outremont: Bayard Editions/Centurion/Novalis, 1997), 79–82.

³There was in the past a tendency to oppose eros to agape. Pope Benedict XVI addresses the unity of love and the apparent contradictions that exist between eros and agape. He affirms the intrinsic unity and complementarity between both dimensions. Eros is often called ascending or possessive love while agape is understood as descending or oblation love. As eros needs agape to rise to its true end, agape needs eros, because the human person cannot only always give; but must also receive love so as to be regenerated and to offer a more purified love. Benedict XVI, *On Christian Love, Encyclical Letter Deus Caritas Est* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2005), paras. 4–7, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est.html

36, 56, 80, 125, 150, 151, 167, 178, 181).⁴ Francis reaffirms *Gaudium et Spes*, # 50 by affirming that marriage outside of procreation retains all its validity (AL 178). So, the lack of mention in the definition seems deliberate.

The Forerunners

Claiming that Francis' vision of marital love is realist, does not mean that he is the first with such a take or that others before him did not address marital love without a grip on concrete reality.

One can go as far as the Song of Songs in the Bible to find the idea of dynamic love. The Song of Songs is a celebration of human erotic love.⁵ One sees both lovers seeking one another (Song 1:7–8; 3:1–3; 5:6–8; 6:1), praising the other's beauty (Song 1:15–17; 4:1–5, 7; 5:11–16; 6:4–7; 7:7–8), longing about the other's presence (Song 2:8,10, 14; 4:16; 6:1, 17; 7:1–6; 7:11; 8:13–14) and even voicing strong sexual attraction for each other (Song 1:16–17; 2:5; 5:8; 7:10–13). There is an incessant movement, back and forth between both lovers, which highlights the dynamic character of love. Although, this may look like courtship, one can surmise from this poetic text that love is always in the making, and never to be achieved once for all. There is a movement of seeking, finding, and losing each other inherent in every love relationship.

The encyclical *Casti Connubii* (1931) from Pope Pius XI indicates the possibility of growth in married love. Pius XI indicates that love is not in "the passing lust of the moment" or "pleasing words," rather "in the deep attachment of the heart which is expressed in action, since love is proved by deeds" (*Casti Connubii*, 23). Moreover, "This outward expression of love in the home... must have as its primary purpose that man and wife help each other day by day in *forming* and *perfecting* themselves in the interior life, so that through their partnership in life they *may advance* ever more and more in virtue, and above all that they *may grow* in true love toward God and their neighbor" (*Casti Connubii*, 23). One can notice that love is an incarnate reality that must be seen through concrete actions. In addition, the use of the verbs "form,"

⁴It is noteworthy that outside of paragraph 80, mentions of procreation tend to nuance its importance or contrast it with other values.

⁵Todd A. Salzman and Michael G. Lawler, *Sexual Ethics: A Theological Introduction* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2012), 15.

“perfect,” “advance,” and “grow” indicates that this love is not static, rather an embodied reality called to change.

However, the decisive change on the official theology of marriage of the church will come in 1965 with Vatican II council and its pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (henceforth GS). The latter shows the dynamic character of “married love.” The conciliar fathers recognize that married love can be “dishonored by selfishness, hedonism, and unlawful contraceptive practices” (GS 47). They add, “this love is actually developed and increased through its generous exercise” (GS 49). Moreover, “[m]arried love is uniquely expressed and *perfected* by the exercise of the acts proper to marriage” (GS 49). Elsewhere in relation with the *bonum fidei*, GS says that the mutual love of the married couple must be properly expressed, and that “it should grow and mature” (GS 50). Indeed, it is “a school for human enrichment” (GS 52). The document recognizes in relation with procreation, the size of the family and the socio-economic demands, that “it is quite difficult to preserve the practice of faithful love and the complete intimacy of their lives” (GS 51). The mention of difficulties, the use of words such as “perfected,” “developed,” “increased,” “grow,” and “mature” are signs that conjugal love is not something given once for all or a static reality, but that it is lived and incarnated in history.

Pope St John Paul II in the post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (1981) confirms the views of GS. *Familiaris Consortio* (henceforth FC) centres on marital love, which was neglected in the past. “Love is...the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being” (FC 11). This love is embodied. The couple as part of the family is invited to form a “community of persons” (FC 18). A “constant effort to develop an authentic community of persons” is needed (FC 18). Without love, the family cannot grow and develop itself into a genuine community of persons. St John Paul II indicates that the married couple is “called to grow continually in their communion through day-to-day fidelity” (FC 19). Concerning the husband, “[a]uthentic conjugal love presupposes and requires that [he] have a profound respect for the dignity of his wife” (FC 25). Patriarchal or abusive attitudes from the husband inhibit “the development of healthy family attitudes” (FC 25). In pastoral care after the wedding, St John Paul II indicates that the church must help young married couples “to live married love responsibly in relationship with its demands of communion and service

of life" (FC 69). We can see in FC that married love far from being a static reality, must develop and mature.

Before moving forward, I would like to briefly mention the contribution of the *Chavarul*, a book written by Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara from India in 1868. This book is focused on the family in general and not on married couple as such. In the first paragraph, St Chavara insists on forgiveness, which implies that family members are not perfect.⁶ The inability to forgive can destroy families. As a book aimed to instruct families, the *Chavarul* wants to help them grow in virtue and in accordance with God's will. It assumes that persons in families and couples are embodied beings in need of growth.

A Realist Vision of Love

AL is the rightful heir of GS since not only it follows the dynamic idea of love, but also because it is a pastoral document. Francis more than his predecessors, leans on the lived experience of married couples to offer guidance. One can find it striking that the word "experience" is found in the first paragraph of AL.

Distorted Vision of Married Love

A feature of this realist take is the recognition of unhealthy dynamics and forms within marital love. St John Paul II in FC had already surveyed irregular situations, in which many couples found themselves (FC 79–84): trial marriages, free unions, Catholics only married by civil authorities, divorcees, and divorcees remarried. Francis moves a step further in identifying problems within a marriage blessed in church. He acknowledges the bitter reality of "evil and violence that break up families and their communion of life and love" (AL 19). In particular, one has to pay attention to the dynamics of gender domination within the couple (AL 19). A certain type of love will succumb to the culture of ephemeral (AL 124). One has also to be wary on ways distorted expressions of sexuality (AL 153) can creep into the couple's life. There can be situations where the body of the other is objectified, oppressed and exploited. One has to face the reality of immaturity in the couple's love life (AL 239). Sexual submission must be rejected as well as

⁶Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Chavarul: Testament of a Loving Father*, trans. Saju Chackalackal CMI, 150th Anniversary Edition (Kochi: Chavara Central Secretariat, 2018), 1.

distorted interpretations of Eph 5:22 ff (AL 156). Francis recognizes the reality of marital rape (AL 154). Such an act not only violates the dignity of the spouse, but also goes against the unitive end of marriage. In addition, there is also the reality of crisis that can lead the spouses to grow apart (AL 237). Besides, there is the possibility of an experience of married love that “grows stagnant,” and, which can kill the joy of marriage (AL 219).

All the above shows that problems are not only encountered in “irregular” situations, but even in Christian marriages, and that love is far from being a given. This leads to the affirmation that married love has to be nurtured and needs to grow.

On Growth

One of the clear features is the constant call or invitation for love to grow or mature (AL 36, 38, 40, 88, 125). AL 135 captures well Francis’ vision of marital love when he says: “it is not helpful to dream of an idyllic and perfect love needing no stimulus to grow.” Marital love in this present age is not perfect—save the issue of abuses. Elsewhere, Francis adds: “Love coexists with imperfection” (AL 113). In fact, an imperfect love is real, but limited and earthly (AL 113).

The call to grow indicates the necessity of development. It is by virtue of the unitive dimension of marriage that married love must grow: “the unitive end of marriage is a constant summons to make this love grow and deepen” (AL 88). Francis indicates more than once that marital love needs to be cultivated (AL 126, 129). It is not something that is already achieved, but it is a project that needs to be patiently constructed by both spouses. The latter are invited to acknowledge their respective need and the other spouse’s need for growth. The image of craftsmanship (AL 221) illustrates those ideas of growth and project. Commenting St Paul’s hymn on love (1 Cor 13) and particularly the sentence “love hopes all things,” Francis indicates, “this phrase speaks of one who knows that others can change, mature, and radiate unexpected beauty and untold potential” (AL 116). Applied to the context of marriage, it indicates the openness to the future and the hope that things can improve, and the best is yet to come.

Whoever speaks of growth indicates that time is a factor. Indeed, “[l]ove needs time and space” (AL 226). In *Evangelii Gaudium* (henceforth EG), Francis already gave an important principle “time is greater than space” (EG 222). This principle “enables us to work slowly

but surely, without being obsessed with immediate results. It helps us patiently to endure difficult and adverse situations, or inevitable changes to our plans” (EG 223). Moreover, Francis adds that this principle “invites us to accept the tension between fullness and limitation, and to give priority to time” (EG 223). Applied to married couples, the latter are reminded that limitations and flaws are something to be expected, and that present failings are not the whole story (see AL 113).

Time also is important because as historical beings, both spouses change physically, psychologically and socially, and these changes affect their love relationship. Francis acknowledges that “[t]here is no guarantee” the spouses “will feel the same way all through life” (AL 163). Hence, the necessity to constantly renew one’s commitment as one moves in life.

Elements Fostering Growth

Sexual union is among the elements fostering the growth of conjugal love (AL 74). The meaning and value are expressed by the words of consent, by which both spouses give themselves wholeheartedly and completely to one another. Sexuality is a divine gift, which enriches married love (AL 61, 152). Sexuality illustrates the incarnated character of married love. Moreover, a “healthy sexual desire, albeit closely joined to a pursuit of pleasure, always involves a sense of wonder, and for that reason can humanize the impulses” (AL 151). Indeed, the erotic dimension enables the couple “to discover the nuptial meaning of the body” (AL 151).⁷

The other element that fosters growth is dialogue. It is “essential for expressing, experiencing and fostering love in marriage and family life” (AL 136). It comes as the fruit of a long and demanding apprenticeship

⁷John Paul II, *The Redemption of the Body and Sacramentality of Marriage (Theology of the Body) From the Weekly Audiences of His Holiness, September 5, 1979–November 28, 1984*, Electronic edition (The Catholic Primer, 2006), 35–38. The phrase “nuptial meaning of the body,” which is borrowed from St John Paul II, refers to the fact that human beings through their bodies are called to love and to mutual donation; the nuptial meaning of the body is located within the interpersonal communion, which means existing for and within a relationship of mutual donation. Originally, the human body presents three elements: solitude, unity and nakedness. The body functions as revelatory and mediator of this unity, which is expressed and achieved through the conjugal act.

(AL 136). Dialogue is not a given and it is a language one has to learn. Dialogue puts in communication at least two different people with different personalities and backgrounds. The way we communicate needs to take that into account in order to be effective. True dialogue acknowledges the other in his/her uniqueness. This is why “we need to develop certain attitudes that express love and encourage authentic dialogue” (AL 136). Although they are not clearly indicated, one can surmise from the tone of the exhortation that such attitudes may be: paying attention, listening, respect, and openness. One area where this dialogue must be present is sexual life (AL 154), and particularly on birth control (AL 222).

Another area that fosters growth is enduring together pain and sorrow (AL 130). Francis does not mean here self-inflicted pain or domestic violence. It is the ability for the couple to learn from their struggle and suffering together. He indicates some moments of crisis in the couple that can eventually help rekindle love in marriage: tensions, jealousy, new interests that sideline one’s spouse, etc. These must be seen as opportunities rather than breaking points.

Thriving for Excellence

The call to grow is an invitation to always look ahead and look for better ways. Indeed, the gift of God’s love poured out on to the spouses is a summons to constant growth in grace. Growth can only occur if the spouses respond to God’s grace (AL 134).

Moreover, married love needs to be fed by virtues. Among others, there are patience, humility, altruism and justice. Patience as Francis indicates is not meant for toleration of evil rather to let others be as they are (AL 92). Patience demands sensitivity and restraint (AL 99). Altruism reminds us that true love values the other’s achievements (AL 95). Humility is an indication that the logic of domination and (unhealthy) competition must be uprooted from family relationships (AL 98). True love means attention to justice and patterns of inequality (AL 96), and the ability to express righteous anger before serious injustices (AL 103). The call for justice reaches the outside world and invites the couple to reach out to the downtrodden and to fight for justice (AL 183).

All this must slowly lead to agapic love (charity), which perceives and values the worth of the other for himself/herself (AL 127).

Conjugal Love and Possible Applications in Africa

I do not have the pretence to speak for a whole continent. I will just limit myself to Cameroon. Looking at the preparatory document from the SECAM (Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar) for the 2015 synod on the family, there are some mentions of love in general, but few of conjugal love (paragraphs 80, 81, 110, 112).⁸ They lack originality so one needs to look elsewhere. I will look at two pastoral documents from Cameroon: *Education to life and love* and *Preparation to Marriage*. The first document is destined to teenage boys and girls, students at the secondary level of education, and young adults preparing themselves to marriage. It identifies love as the first ingredient contributing to the success of marriage.⁹ True love is the most important asset for the couple and the foundation of marriage. Moreover, love like a fruit must grow and become ripe before being suited for consumption.¹⁰ However, this image seems suited for teenagers in the context of the book and does not directly apply to married love.

The *Preparation to Marriage* of Father Pierre Foti in chapter 13 speaks about love in two pages.¹¹ Foti insists on four elements, namely, the entire person, looking for the good of the other, gratuitousness, and sacrifice. The agapic dimension of love takes precedence over the other dimensions in this chapter. Chapter 20 speaks about affective and community life.¹² There, both spouses are invited to grow in the intimate knowledge of each other, learn to take the other as she/he is and show appreciation to the other one. Dialogue is identified as an important ingredient that fosters common life. All these point to conjugal love, but unlike AL Foti does not use the word 'love' here.

This synopsis illustrates that the ideas of AL about love and marriage are not new as such. What is new is the strong connection of growth

⁸SCEAM, *L'avenir de La Famille, Notre Mission: Contribution à La 14e Assemblée Générale Ordinaire Du Synode Des Evêques Sur La Famille* (Accra: SCEAM-SECAM Publications, 2015).

⁹Service Catholique de la Santé, ed., *Education à La Vie et à l'amour: Guide Des Éducateurs* (Yaoundé, Cameroon, 1992), 119.

¹⁰Service Catholique de la Santé, *Education à La Vie et à l'amour*, 22.

¹¹Jean Pierre Foti, *Préparation au mariage: quelques grandes lignes*, 3rd ed. (Bafoussam, 2006), 56–58.

¹²Foti, *Préparation au mariage*, 79–81.

within marriage. The other novelty is the fact that the Pope does not hesitate to use the word love where others would speak in general of affective life or communion or community.

African Christians already understand marriage as a process.¹³ However, that process ends with the wedding ceremony or the birth of a child. Francis suggests the process goes on throughout the marriage. The African soil presents a fertile ground that could accommodate Francis' insight into its ministry to married couples. A way of doing that is helping people see that in fact marriage is a lifelong process that goes on different stages as the relationship matures. For instance, the passage from being childless, to becoming parents and later grandparents imply changes in the way each spouse understands himself/herself, or the way the couple views themselves. These different stages come with increased responsibility and expectations, and involve the extended family in one way or the other.

The Issue of HIV/AIDS

One clear pushback against AL is the disturbing absence of mention of HIV/AIDS, which impacts the life of millions of families in the world and in Sub-Saharan African in particular.¹⁴ The silence may be due to the fact that the relationship dynamics within couples with at least one partner affected with HIV/AIDS have not been consistently studied or

¹³Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1997), 125. The following information on marriage process is given from the perspective of the Basa group (Cameroon) to which I belong. The process starts with courtship, then continues with the introduction of the future bridegroom to the bride-to-be's parents. If the parents and their daughter agree with the marriage proposal, then two separate ceremonies follow. In the first one, the bridegroom's family—precisely his uncles and aunts—come to ask the woman's hand in marriage to her family—her uncles and aunts too. They generally bring gifts. If the process is positive, the bride is united to the bridegroom, and they are considered wedded. However, there is another ceremony that needs to be performed for the marriage to be sealed. That ceremony tends to involve a large group like the extended family or the whole village. It is during this ceremony that the "food for the people" is handed over to the girl's family. In some groups, it is during this second ceremony that the bridegroom's family pays the bride price. It is only after this that according to the custom, both are considered fully wedded.

¹⁴According to "Latest Statistics on the Status of the AIDS Epidemic," unaids.org, July 2018, aidsinfo.unaids.org, in 2018, more than 25.7 million people infected by HIV were living in Africa, which represents 70% of the global number.

attended to in the literature.¹⁵ Even among bishops, the issue of married couples living with HIV/AIDS barely surfaces.¹⁶ The preparatory document of SECAM for the 2015 synod on the family does not mention HIV/AIDS once.¹⁷ This shows that the question of married couples living with HIV/AIDS is a non-issue for the hierarchy of the African church. This sounds odd in a continent where 50 percent of medical facilities that offer services related to HIV/AIDS belong the church.¹⁸

It is essential to reflect on the challenges to married love level by the pandemic, especially in the case of serodiscordant¹⁹ couples. For starters, the HIV/AIDS frustrates the ability of the couple to have sexual intercourse. What is supposed to be a moment of cherished intimacy and strengthening of marital bond, becomes a potential death-giving encounter. This creates a serious crisis in the marriage. The Catholic bishops' conference of Zimbabwe summarizes the dilemma clearly: (1) the continuation of sexual intercourse puts the non-infected spouse at risk of being infected; (2) the use of condom reduces that risk, but does not eliminate it completely; (3) abstinence from sexual intercourse may put the marital fidelity at risk.²⁰ The other thing is that HIV/AIDS

¹⁵For instance, none of the essays in the following collective works specifically deal with the issue of couples affected by HIV/AIDS: Jacquineau Azetsop, ed., *HIV and AIDS in Africa: Christian Reflection, Public Health, Social Transformation* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2016); Bénézet Bujo and Michael Czerny, ed., *AIDS in Africa: Theological Reflections* (Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 2007).

¹⁶Outside of the Zimbabwe's conference of bishops in 1991, Mozambique's episcopal conference in 2004, and Cote d'Ivoire's episcopal conference in 2008, mentions of married couples infected are rare; see *Catholic Bishops of Africa and Madagascar Speak out on HIV & AIDS: "Our Prayer Is Always Full of Hope," A Collection of Excerpts 1987–2005*, revised edition (Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 2006), 38, 126; Conférence des évêques de Côte d'Ivoire, "Lettre pastorale de la conférence des évêques de Côte d'Ivoire sur la lutte contre le VIH/SIDA" (lettre pastorale by "Ferkessédougou," January 20, 2008), para. 5.

¹⁷Paragraph 122 mentions in passing "great pandemics" see SCEAM, *L'avenir de La Famille, Notre Mission*.

¹⁸Festo Mkenda, "Of Things Old and New: The African Sociohistorical Context of an HIV-and-AIDS Theology," in *HIV and AIDS in Africa: Christian Reflection, Public Health, Social Transformation*, ed. Jacquineau Azetsop (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2016), 7.

¹⁹Serodiscordant couples refer to a situation when one of the partners is infected by HIV and the other is not.

²⁰*Catholic Bishops of Africa and Madagascar Speak out on HIV & AIDS*, 38.

negatively impacts one's self-identity,²¹ and this is true of serodiscordant couples. Actually, even the healthy spouse may have a confused perception of his/her medical condition.²² A serodiscordant couple has to manage the feeling of betrayal and mistrust that may characterize one partner towards the other. The couple has also to "learn to negotiate family planning and sexual intimacy while coping with stigma and fear."²³

The other issue is stigma, which occurs even in married life. Narratives of people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA)—especially women—indicate that a divorce could occur.²⁴ That risk of being abandoned by a partner/spouse is reported by the scholarly literature.²⁵ That risk is particularly higher for women compared to men.²⁶ The other thing is that women can become victims of domestic violence as a result of disclosing their status to their male partners.²⁷ Even if the reality of couples living with HIV/AIDS is not all gloomy, the fact is that HIV/AIDS affects married love of PLWHA, and deserves more pastoral

²¹Juliet Iwelunmor et al., "Disclosure Narratives of Women Living with HIV in South Africa: Disclosure Narratives," *Journal of Social Issues* 73, 2 (June 2017): 281–82, <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12216>.

²²Kondwani Wella and Sheila Webber, "Embodying HIV and AIDS Information: Experiences of Serodiscordant Couples," *Library Trends* 66, 4 (2018): 456, <https://doi.org/10.1353/lib.2018.0012>.

²³Elizabeth C. Pasipanodya and Laurie Heatherington, "Relationship Satisfaction of HIV-Positive Ugandan Individuals with HIV-Negative Partners," *AIDS Care* 27, 5 (May 4, 2015): 675, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540121.2014.985181>.

²⁴Conrad A. Folifack, "Biblical Narratives on Sickness and AIDS Patients' Stories: The Case of Psalm 38," in *HIV and AIDS in Africa: Christian Reflection, Public Health, Social Transformation*, ed. Jacquineau Azetsop (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016), 112.

²⁵Irene Maeri et al., "'How Can I Tell?' Consequences of HIV Status Disclosure among Couples in Eastern African Communities in the Context of an Ongoing HIV 'Test-and-Treat' Trial," *AIDS Care* 28, sup 3 (June 2, 2016): 61, 63, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540121.2016.1168917>; Romel D. Mackelprang et al., "High Rates of Relationship Dissolution Among Heterosexual HIV-Serodiscordant Couples in Kenya," *AIDS and Behavior* 18, 1 (January 2014): 189–93, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10461-013-0529-6>.

²⁶A study in Kenya has shown that couples where women are seropositive and the men are non-positive to HIV have two to five times more chances to break up. See Mackelprang et al., "High Rates of Relationship Dissolution in Kenya," 192.

²⁷Maeri et al., "'How Can I Tell?," 63.

attention. As a moment of crisis, it can become a breaking point or an opportunity for growth.

Conclusion

Francis offers in AL an exhortation that is grounded on a reflection of married love as a lived experience. As such, he warns against distorted meanings of married love, and he stresses the necessity to grow. Married love is not a static reality, and it must be nurtured. This dynamic aspect finds echoes in Africa, where marriage is viewed as a process until the wedding ceremony. AL suggests that this idea must be carried within marriage. However, the fact that AL does not mention HIV/AIDS is troublesome. The pandemic puts a strain on hundreds of thousands of married relationships across the continent. There needs to be a more robust ministry toward couples living with HIV/AIDS, especially discordant couples.

AMORIS LAETITIA AND THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S FAMILIES

Julie Clague♦

“The welfare of the family is decisive for the future of the world and that of the Church.”¹

St Kuriakose Elias Chavara’s *Testament of a Loving Father*, written in 1868, offers sage advice about family life and household management, and reflects rural life in an agrarian economy untouched by the forces of capital, industrialisation, urbanisation, etc., and the population explosion that would later propel India to the position of economic superpower. Yet, the social reforms that St Kuriakose introduced played a significant role in the subsequent development of Keralite society. In response to a decree by his bishop, St Kuriakose helped establish schools in every parish, defying convention by opening them to the Dalit community, the most needy and marginalised group in society, and he ensured that each schoolchild received a midday meal to promote nutrition as well as learning. This initiative had an enormous impact on Keralite literacy and helped lift many people out of poverty. Through these and similar activities, St Kuriakose responded to the cry of the poor and made visible the social concern of the Church.

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¹Pope Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (2016), #31.

Clague, Julie. “*Amoris Laetitia* and the State of the World’s Families.” In *Vocation and Mission of the Family: Reflections on Chavarul and Amoris Laetitia*, edited by Shaji George Kochuthara, 232–260. Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2020.

A century later, Pope Paul VI issued his celebrated encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (1967), which mobilised Catholics to work for the integral human development of every person and nation. Like St Kuriakose, Paul VI had witnessed the travails of ordinary Indian families. Paul was the first pope in modern times to leave Italy and to see for himself the emerging world Church. His papal visitations involved travel to many parts of the developing world in Asia, Africa, Oceania and the Americas. In 1964, Paul embarked on an unprecedented journey to India for the Eucharistic Congress, which included visits to a hospital and an orphanage. This encounter with the reality of life in India made a deep impression on him. In *Populorum Progressio*, Paul refers to his “first-hand knowledge of the difficulties” confronting India as one of the “impoverished nations” in its “struggle for further development.”² He describes the nature of the development challenge facing humanity in *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971), sister-text of *Populorum Progressio*:

Flagrant inequalities exist in the economic, cultural and political development of the nations: while some regions are heavily industrialized, others are still at the agricultural stage; while some countries enjoy prosperity, others are struggling against starvation; while some peoples have a high standard of culture, others are still engaged in eliminating illiteracy. From all sides there rises a yearning for more justice and a desire for a better guaranteed peace in mutual respect among individuals and peoples.³

Paul's words remain true today: inequalities and injustices of various kinds hold back the development and flourishing of the greater portion of humanity, while new demographic headwinds place nations and families under further strain.

The aim in what follows is to consider some of these global development challenges in light of Pope Francis' Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (2016), which in its focus on the welfare of families touches upon many of these concerns. The underlying premise of this long and wide-ranging text is that, throughout the world, families are in meltdown, with marital and familial bonds strained to breaking point, because they are unable to cope with the combined force

²Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio* (1967), #4.

³Pope Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971), #2.

of complex global problems and assorted modern-day evils. The situation is urgent and grave: “The welfare of the family is decisive for the future of the world and that of the Church,” declares Francis (AL 31), and echoing the Synod Fathers, states: “evangelization needs unambiguously to denounce cultural, social, political and economic factors—such as the excessive importance given to market logic—that prevent authentic family life and lead to discrimination, poverty, exclusion, and violence” (AL 201).

However, one issue in *Amoris Laetitia* has overshadowed all the rest. In the Church and in the wider world, discussion of *Amoris Laetitia* has been dominated by the question of the pastoral care of the divorced and remarried. At times this has degenerated into a divisive and unseemly intra-ecclesial debate about rule-based orthodoxy, to the neglect of urgent matters concerning the health and wellbeing of families everywhere. The world’s media raised the topic of divorce–remarriage as soon as Francis announced the 2014 Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on “Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelization,” prompting then-Monsignor Lorenzo Baldisseri, Secretary General to the Synod of Bishops to state: “The Synod is about family, not divorce. Let’s not monopolize it with Western problems... we want to walk and view the global challenges to find an answer in the light of the Gospel.”⁴ With one of those global challenges firmly in his sights, and *Amoris Laetitia* newly published, Pope Francis travelled to Lesbos, Greece—a port of refuge for thousands of migrants—to highlight the refugee crisis, arranging asylum for three Syrian families who accompanied him on his return flight to Rome.⁵ During the in-flight press conference, in response to the inevitable questions about divorce–remarriage, Francis remarked:

When I called the first Synod, most of the media were concerned with one question: Will the divorced and remarried be able to receive

⁴Mons. Lorenzo Baldisseri, Intervention at the press conference on the III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (5–19 October 2014), 3 October 2014; cfr Elise Harris, “Vatican official says synod ‘is about family, not divorce,’” Catholic News Agency, 3 October 2014 <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/vatican-official-says-synod-is-about-family-not-divorce-52870>.

⁵John Allen & Claire Giangravé, “Two Years on, Refugees who Flew with Pope are Living the Dream,” *Crux* online magazine, 13 April 2018 <https://cruxnow.com/vatican/2018/04/13/two-years-on-refugees-who-flew-with-pope-are-living-the-dream/>.

communion? Since I am not a saint, this was somewhat annoying to me, and even made me a bit sad. Because I think: those media that say all these things, don't they realize that that is not the important issue? Don't they realize that the family, all over the world, is in crisis? And the family is the basis of society!⁶

This study seeks to widen discussion beyond the question of divorce-remarriage and examine some of the challenges facing families and the Church in the era of *Amoris Laetitia*. It will draw on statistical data relating to key economic, demographic and development indicators, many of which correspond to specific goals and targets within the United Nations *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.⁷ This data is highly relevant for attempts to assess the state of the world's families, which in turn can help inform the Catholic Church's response to the challenges facing families in the twenty-first century.

Catholic Population Data

Catholic families are found on every continent and in most countries; a majority live in the global South, where development challenges loom largest. According to the Vatican's Statistical Office, as of 30 June 2017, the total number of baptised Catholics was 1,313 million (17.7 percent of a world population of 7,408 million), comprising 234 million baptised Catholics in Africa (19.2 percent of an African population of 1,221 million), 637 million in the Americas (63.8 percent of an Americas population of 999 million), 145 million in Asia (3.3 percent of an Asian population of 4,429 million), 286 million in Europe (39.7 percent of a European population of 719 million), and 11 million in Oceania (26.4 percent of an Oceanian population of 40 million).⁸ Table 1 lists the sixteen countries with the largest Catholic populations, detailing for each the number of baptised Catholics in the general population and the proportion of the population that is Catholic. With 175 million baptised Catholics, Brazil has the largest Catholic population of the sixteen. Poland

⁶Pope Francis, "Visit of His Holiness Pope Francis to Lesbos (Greece) In-Flight Press Conference Lesbos to Rome," 16 April 2016.

⁷Cfr United Nations General Assembly, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, Resolution A/Res/70/1, 25 September 2015, 14–27 <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>.

⁸Rationarium Generale Ecclesiae Secretaria Status, *Statistical Yearbook of the Church 2017* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2019).

has the highest proportion of Catholics in the general population (98 percent), whereas India's 22 million Catholics comprise just 1.7 percent of India's 1.3 billion-strong population. These sixteen countries, which span five continents and account for 899 million (68 percent) of the world's Catholics, will provide the focus for subsequent discussion.

Table 1. The sixteen countries with the largest number of baptised Catholics, and the proportion of the national population that is Catholic⁹

Country	Rank by size of Catholic population	Number of baptised Catholics	Number of Catholics per 100 inhabitants
Brazil	1	175m	84
Mexico	2	113m	92
Philippines	3	86m	82
USA	4	73m	23
Italy	5	58m	96
France	6	49m	75
Colombia	7	46m	94
DRC	8	45m	52
Spain	9	43m	93
Argentina	10	42m	94
Poland	11	37m	98
Nigeria	12	29m	14
Peru	13	29m	90
Venezuela	14	28m	88
Germany	15	24m	29
India	16	22m	1.7

Economic Development Indicators

Standards of living vary across the globe. Table 2 shows the national average standard of living in our sixteen focus countries as of 2017, according to the United Nations Development Programme's *Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical Update*.¹⁰ Income levels are given as Gross National Income (GNI) per capita using 2011 purchasing power parity (PPP) rates.¹¹ Of the sixteen nations, the USA

⁹*Statistical Yearbook of the Church 2017.*

¹⁰United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical Update* (New York: United Nations, 2018), <http://hdr.undp.org/en/2018-update>.

¹¹This measure converts currencies using a 2011 standard that "eliminates the effects of the differences in price levels between economies." Cfr World Bank Group,

has the highest average income (\$54,941); Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), one of the world's poorest nations, has the lowest (\$796). Globally, the average income level is \$15,295.

The World Bank classifies countries into four economic income groupings: low, lower-middle, upper-middle, and high, according to GNI per capita.¹² Table 2 shows the 2019 income classification of the sixteen countries with the largest Catholic populations.¹³ Six are classified as high-income countries (USA, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Poland). A further six are upper-middle-income (Argentina, Mexico, Brazil, Colombia, Peru, Venezuela). The Philippines, India and Nigeria fall within the lower-middle-income grouping. DRC is low-income. India, with a Gross Domestic Product of \$8,606.5 billion (2011 PPP) has one of the world's largest economies,¹⁴ but the average income of its huge population places it in the bottom third of the table of wealthy nations.

Table 2 also shows estimates of national GNI per capita disaggregated by gender, indicating differences between female and male income levels.¹⁵ The figures are derived from "the ratio of female to male wages, female and male shares of economically active population and gross national income (in 2011 purchasing power parity terms)."¹⁶ In every one of our sixteen countries, female income levels are considerably lower than those of their male counterparts. The disparity between male and female income levels is often startling. In Italy, for instance, (GNI per capita \$35,299), the GNI per capita is \$25,767 for females and \$54,326 for males.

Amoris Laetitia notes that impoverishment is a barrier to participation in society (AL 44) and draws attention to "families living in dire poverty and great limitations," noting that "problems faced by poor households

Purchasing Power Parities and the Real Size of World Economies: A Comprehensive Report of the 2011 International Comparison Program (Washington DC: World Bank, 2015), 301, <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/ICPEXT/Resources/ICP-2011-report.pdf>.

¹²These GNI values are calculated using a different method to that used in *the 2018 Statistical Update*. Cfr World Bank, "How does the World Bank classify countries?," <https://datahelpdesk.worldbank.org/knowledgebase/articles/378834-how-does-the-world-bank-classify-countries>.

¹³World Bank, "World Bank Country and Lending Groups," June 2019 <https://datahelpdesk.worldbank.org/knowledgebase/articles/906519-world-bank-country-and-lending-groups>.

¹⁴*Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical Update*, 60.

¹⁵*Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical Update*, 34-37.

¹⁶*Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical Update*, 37.

are often all the more trying” (AL 49). Recalling 1 Cor 11:17–34, Francis calls out the “shameful situation” whereby wealthier church members neglect and exclude the poorer ones with whom they express their unity through Holy Communion (AL 185); the celebration of the Eucharist is a “constant summons...to open the doors of the family to greater fellowship with the underprivileged...When those who receive it turn a blind eye to the poor and suffering, or consent to various forms of division, contempt and inequality, the Eucharist is received unworthily” (AL 186).

Table 2. Country classification by income, and Gross National Income (GNI) per capita, for the sixteen countries with the largest Catholic populations, ranked by GNI per capita

Country	World Bank country classification by income level 2019 ¹⁷	Gross National Income per capita (2011 PPP \$) 2017 ¹⁸	Estimated Gross National Income per capita (2011 PPP \$) 2017 Female ¹⁹	Estimated Gross National Income per capita (2011 PPP \$) 2017 Male ²⁰
USA	High-income	54,941	43,899	66,208
Germany	High-income	46,136	37,689	54,843
France	High-income	39,254	32,518	46,218
Italy	High-income	35,299	25,767	54,326
Spain	High-income	34,258	26,954	41,850
Poland	High-income	26,150	20,367	32,343
Argentina	Upper-middle-income	18,461	12,395	24,789
Mexico	Upper-middle-income	16,944	11,065	22,873
Brazil	Upper-middle-income	13,755	10,073	17,566
Colombia	Upper-middle-income	12,938	10,271	15,692
Peru	Upper-middle-income	11,789	8,446	15,140
Venezuela	Upper-middle-income	10,672	7,401	13,976
Philippines	Lower-middle-income	9,154	7,582	10,705
India	Lower-middle-income	6,353	2,722	9,729
Nigeria	Lower-middle-income	5,231	4,433	6,008
DRC	Low-income	796	703	889

¹⁷World Bank, “World Bank Country and Lending Groups,” June 2019, <https://datahelpdesk.worldbank.org/knowledgebase/articles/906519-world-bank-country-and-lending-groups>.

¹⁸*Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical Update*, 22–25.

¹⁹*Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical Update*, 34–37.

²⁰*Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical Update*, 34–37.

Human Development Indicators

The Human Development Index (HDI) is an important measure of development and reflects an underlying principle: "National development should be measured not only by income per capita...but also by health and education achievements."²¹ Nations are ranked according to HDI value and grouped in terms of low, medium, high and very high human development.²² The HDI is a composite measure of four development indicators corresponding to health, education and standard of living, namely: life expectancy at birth, expected years of schooling, mean years of schooling, and GNI per capita. Using HDI, a nation's economic development becomes one element in a wider metric of development. Placing the wealth of a nation within a broader context—one that factors in national levels of longevity and educational access—better reflects a nation's capacity to promote human flourishing. Worldwide, average life expectancy is 72.2 years.²³ The global averages for expected years of schooling and mean years of schooling are 12.7 and 8.4 years respectively.²⁴

Table 3 ranks the sixteen nations with the largest Catholic populations in descending order according to GNI per capita, listing for each nation the values for life expectancy at birth, mean years of schooling, human development classification, and the human development index national ranking out of 189 nations. Life expectancy ranges from 83.3 years in Spain to 53.9 years in Nigeria; a shocking gap of almost 30 years. Germany ranks highest for the average length of time spent in schooling (14.1 years) among the sixteen nations, and globally. Nigeria has the lowest mean years of schooling of the sixteen (6.2 years). Most of the countries are classified as having high or very

²¹*Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical Update*, 1.

²²Cfr *Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical Update*, 1 & 3.

²³Life expectancy at birth is defined as: "Number of years a newborn infant could expect to live if prevailing patterns of age-specific mortality rates at the time of birth stay the same throughout the infant's life": *Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical Update*, 25.

²⁴Expected years of schooling is defined as: "Number of years of schooling that a child of school entrance age can expect to receive if prevailing patterns of age-specific enrolment rates persist throughout the child's life"; Mean years of schooling is defined as: "Average number of years of education received by people ages 25 and older, converted from education attainment levels using official durations of each level": *Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical Update*, 25.

high levels of human development, except for the Philippines and India (medium level development), Nigeria and the DRC (low human development). In terms of HDI ranking, the sixteen nations range from the fourth most developed nation (Germany) to one of the least developed (DRC), ranked 176th out of 189 nations. Table 3 offers a stark picture of the gulf in human development between nations. It also shows the strong correspondence between a person’s economic wellbeing and their health and education prospects. The richest nations afford their citizens drastically better life chances than do the poorest nations. In richer nations, inhabitants live longer and have greater educational opportunities than in poorer nations.

Amoris Laetitia recognises the suffering caused to families by lack of access to adequate healthcare, and the “economic constraints” that “prohibit a family’s access to education” (AL 44). Through its 5,269 hospitals and 16,068 dispensaries,²⁵ and its 221,392 kindergartens, primary and secondary schools that cater for over 62 million children,²⁶ the Catholic Church is one of the world’s largest providers of healthcare and education, making a major contribution to human flourishing, the welfare of families, and international development.

Table 3. Life expectancy, mean years of schooling, human development rank and classification for the sixteen countries with the largest Catholic populations²⁷

Country	Gross National Income per capita (2011 PPP \$) 2017	Life expectancy at birth (years)	Mean years of schooling (years)	Human development classification	Human development Index ranking (out of 189 countries)
USA	54,941	79.5	13.4	Very high	12
Germany	46,136	81.2	14.1	Very high	4
France	39,254	82.7	11.5	Very high	23
Italy	35,299	83.2	10.2	Very high	28
Spain	34,258	83.3	9.8	Very high	25
Poland	26,150	77.8	12.3	Very high	34
Argentina	18,461	76.7	9.9	Very high	47
Mexico	16,944	77.3	8.6	High	74
Brazil	13,755	75.7	7.8	High	79

²⁵Statistical Yearbook of the Church 2017, 365.

²⁶Statistical Yearbook of the Church 2017, 250–251.

²⁷Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical Update, 22–25.

Colombia	12,938	74.6	8.3	High	89
Peru	11,789	75.2	9.2	High	86
Venezuela	10,672	74.7	10.3	High	77
Philippines	9,154	69.2	9.3	Medium	111
India	6,353	68.8	6.4	Medium	129
Nigeria	5,231	53.9	6.2	Low	156
DRC	796	60.0	6.8	Low	176

Child Labour and Under-Five Child Mortality

Child Labour

Child labour affects 152 million children worldwide (10 percent of the child population). 73 million children undertake hazardous work.²⁸ Almost half of all child labourers are aged 5 to 11.²⁹ According to the United Nations International Labour Office, only a quarter of child labourers are in paid employment; the majority are put to work by their families: “More than two-thirds of all children in child labour work as contributing family labourers...on family farms and in family enterprises.”³⁰ Economic circumstances and extremis (e.g., family and national fragilities and crises, armed conflict) drive families to work their children, particularly in low- and lower-middle-income countries.³¹ One fifth (72.1 million) of African children are child labourers (31.5 million involved in hazardous work). There are 62 million child labourers in Asia and the Pacific. Together these regions account for nine out of every ten children in labour.³²

Sustainable Development Goal 8, target 7 (SDG8.7) seeks to “secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms.”³³ One of the indicators used to track the progress of this target is the proportion and number of children aged 5–17 years engaged in economic activities at or above certain age-specific hourly thresholds. For children aged 5 to 11 the threshold is at least one hour

²⁸International Labour Office (ILO), *Global Estimates of Child Labour: Results and Trends, 2012–2016* (Geneva: ILO, 2017), 28 http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_575499.pdf.

²⁹*Global Estimates of Child Labour: Results and Trends, 2012–2016*, 13.

³⁰*Global Estimates of Child Labour: Results and Trends, 2012–2016*, 13.

³¹*Global Estimates of Child Labour: Results and Trends, 2012–2016*, 30–33.

³²*Global Estimates of Child Labour: Results and Trends, 2012–2016*, 28.

³³*Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 20.

per week economic activity, for children aged 12 to 14 the threshold is at least 14 hours per week, and for children aged 15 to 17 it is more than 43 hours per week.³⁴ Using data from the United Nations Global SDG Database, Table 4 shows the proportion of children aged 5 to 17 engaged in economic activity in eight of our sixteen nations. Child labour prevalence ranges from 2.9 percent in Colombia to 28.7 percent in Nigeria. DRC records a child labour prevalence rate of 20.6 percent.³⁵

Amoris Laetitia discusses: the dignity of labour (AL 23); its necessity for family life (AL 24); the suffering caused by unemployment and its damaging consequences for families (AL 25); lack of jobs and job insecurity, especially for youth, and the effects of long hours on family life (AL 44, AL 50); job creation as a duty of the state (AL 43); the pressurised nature of the workplace (AL 224); the effects on families of workplace problems (AL 236). Child labour is not discussed. However, Pope Francis has spoken out against child labour in other contexts, often to coincide with the annual World Day Against Child Labour.

Under-five Child Mortality

‘When death makes us feel its sting’ (AL 253).

Many of the world’s children die before their fifth birthday. In 2017, 5.4 million (1 in 26) under-fives died across the globe, largely from preventable or treatable causes; this equates to 15,000 under-five deaths every day. The under-five mortality rate is the probability of dying between birth and exactly age 5, expressed per 1,000 live births. Globally, the under-five mortality rate is 39 per 1,000 live births.³⁶ However, this figure masks wide regional variation:

Sub-Saharan Africa remains the region with the highest under-five mortality rate in the world. In 2017, the region had an average under-five mortality

³⁴United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Statistics Division, “SDG Indicators Metadata Repository,” October 2018 <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/files/Metadata-08-07-01.pdf>.

³⁵United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Statistics Division, “United Nations Global SDG Database,” 1 August 2019 <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/database/>.

³⁶United Nations Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation (UN IGME), “Levels & Trends in Child Mortality: Report 2018, Estimates developed by the United Nations Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation” (New York: United Nations Children’s Fund, 2018), 6, <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/mortality/child-mortality-report-2018.asp>.

rate of 76 deaths per 1,000 live births. This translates to 1 in 13 children dying before his or her fifth birthday—14 times higher than the average ratio of 1 in 185 in high-income countries...³⁷

SDG3.2 aims to reduce under-five child mortality to 25 per 1,000 live births. Table 4 shows the under-five mortality rate (2017) for the sixteen countries with the largest Catholic populations. DRC, India, Nigeria, Philippines and Venezuela currently fall short of the SDG target. The health of the national economy is strongly linked to child health and survival rates. The high-income nations all record single digit values for under-five child mortality. Nigeria has one of the highest under-five mortality rates in the world (100 deaths per 1,000 live births); 714,000 Nigerian under-fives died in 2017.³⁸

Given the alarming scale of preventable child deaths in the poorer parts of the world, it is a great pity that *Amoris Laetitia* omits to mention this tragic phenomenon. Nonetheless, *Amoris Laetitia* offers thoughtful reflections on when “family life is challenged by the death of a loved one,” stating: “We cannot fail to offer the light of faith as a support to families going through this experience” (AL 253). Francis asks: “how can we even begin to understand the grief of parents who have lost a child?” (AL 254). By way of consolation, he turns to the Scriptures and the compassion shown by Jesus, who “hears the desperate wailing of the widow of Nain for her dead son (cfr Lk 7:11–15)” (AL 21).

Table 4. Proportion of children engaged in economic activity, and under-five mortality rate for the sixteen countries with the largest Catholic populations, ranked by GNI per capita

Country	World Bank Country Classification by Income Level 2019	Proportion of children engaged in economic activity (% ages 5–17) ³⁹	Under-five Mortality Rate (deaths per 1,000 live births) 2017 ⁴⁰
USA	High-income	-	7
Germany	High-income	-	4
France	High-income	-	4
Italy	High-income	-	3
Spain	High-income	-	3

³⁷UN IGME, “Levels & Trends in Child Mortality,” 3.

³⁸UN IGME, “Levels & Trends in Child Mortality,” 34.

³⁹“United Nations Global SDG Database,” 1 August 2019.

⁴⁰UN IGME, “Levels & Trends in Child Mortality,” 30–38.

Poland	High-income	-	5
Argentina	Upper-middle-income	-	10
Mexico	Upper-middle-income	3.8	13
Brazil	Upper-middle-income	3.4	15
Colombia	Upper-middle-income	2.9	15
Peru	Upper-middle-income	13.3	15
Venezuela	Upper-middle-income	-	31
Philippines	Lower-middle-income	4.3	28
India	Lower-middle-income	4.3	39
Nigeria	Lower-middle-income	28.7	100
DRC	Low-income	20.6	91

Population Trends

According to a major study of population and fertility by the Global Burden of Disease (GBD) Group, between 1950 and 2017 global population increased by 5 billion: from 2.6 billion in 1950 to 7.6 billion in 2017.⁴¹ As the global population has grown, the population distribution has shifted towards sub-Saharan Africa and south Asia.⁴² The GBD authors state: “With each year, a larger proportion of the birth cohort is represented in regions with lower incomes and lower educational attainment because of different speeds of changing fertility in different locations...”⁴³ Despite global population growth, 33 countries—mainly in central, Eastern and Western Europe and the Caribbean—registered declining populations.⁴⁴

Population growth has affected the age structure of the global population.⁴⁵ In high-income countries, the proportion of the population that is of working age is decreasing, while the elderly population is increasing.⁴⁶ The GBD authors note that “[p]opulation decline and the

⁴¹Global Burden of Disease 2017 Population and Fertility Collaborators, “Population and Fertility by Age and Sex for 195 Countries and Territories, 1950–2017: A Systematic Analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2017,” *Lancet* 392 (November 10, 2018): 1995–2051, at 1995. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(18\)32278-5/fulltext#seccestitle180_The Statistical Yearbook of the Church 2017](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(18)32278-5/fulltext#seccestitle180_The%20Statistical%20Yearbook%20of%20the%20Church%202017) cited above, which relies on UN estimates, puts global population at 7.4 billion. This figure falls within the GBD uncertainty interval.

⁴²“Population and Fertility... 1950–2017,” 2005.

⁴³“Population and Fertility... 1950–2017,” 2035.

⁴⁴“Population and Fertility... 1950–2017,” 2008.

⁴⁵“Population and Fertility... 1950–2017,” 2005.

⁴⁶“Population and Fertility... 1950–2017,” 2034.

associated shift to an older population has profound cultural, economic, and social implications."⁴⁷ These implications include "reductions in economic growth, decreasing tax revenue, greater use of social security with fewer contributors, and increasing health-care and other demands prompted by an ageing population."⁴⁸

Profiles of Ageing 2019, published by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, sheds further light on the changing age profiles of populations. In 2019, the proportion of the global population aged 0–14 years was 25.6 percent; the proportion aged 65 years or over was 9.1 percent, with the global proportion of over 65s projected to reach 15.9 percent by 2050. These global averages mask enormous differences in age structure at national level. For the sixteen countries in our survey, the proportion of the population aged 0–14 years ranges from 13.2 percent in Italy to an extraordinary 46.0 percent in DRC. In Germany, France and Italy, more than one in five of the population is aged 65 years or over, with the proportion of the over 65s ranging from 2.7 percent in Nigeria to 23.0 percent in Italy. The small proportion of elderly people in Nigeria is a sobering reminder that Nigerian life expectancy is just 53.9 years. By 2050, more than one in three of the population will be over 65 in Spain and Italy, whereas in Nigeria and DRC, fewer than one in twenty will be over 65. The age structures of the sixteen countries are very different. In high-income countries, the age pyramid tends to be skewed towards the older generations, whereas in low to middle-income countries, the age pyramid is weighted towards the youth and young adults. In 2019, these demographic and economic differences translate into very different living arrangements for the elderly. In France, Germany and Italy, one in three people over 65 lives alone, whereas in India just 4 percent of over-65s live alone.⁴⁹ Table 5 places data on income classification and life expectancy at birth alongside data on age 0–14 and age 65+ population cohorts, 2050 projections for the proportion of over 65s in the general population, and data on the proportion of over 65s who live alone.

Francis devotes considerable attention to the plight of the elderly, regarding their neglect as an aspect of the "throw-away culture" (AL 191):

⁴⁷"Population and Fertility... 1950–2017," 2033.

⁴⁸"Population and Fertility... 1950–2017," 2034.

⁴⁹United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (POP/DB/PD/WPA/2019), *Profiles of Ageing 2019* Interactive Database <https://population.un.org/ProfilesOfAgeing2019/index.html>.

Just as God asks us to be his means of hearing the cry of the poor, so too he wants us to hear the cry of the elderly...We must reawaken the collective sense of gratitude, of appreciation, of hospitality, which makes the elderly feel like a living part of the community. Our elderly are men and women, fathers and mothers, who came before us on our own road, in our own house, in our daily battle for a worthy life (AL 191).

Amoris Laetitia emphasises the valuable role that the older generation plays within the extended family (AL 192–193), while recognising the strain that elder care can place on loved ones (AL 48). It praises “those associations and family movements committed to serving the elderly, both spiritually and socially,” and notes that “[a] great number of elderly people are cared for in Church institutions, where, materially and spiritually, they can live in a peaceful, family atmosphere” (AL 48). According to the Vatican, there are 15,735 Catholic homes for the elderly, chronically ill and disabled.⁵⁰

Table 5. Age 0–14 and age 65+ population cohorts (2019), age 65+ population cohorts (2050), and the proportion of over 65s who live alone for the sixteen countries with the largest Catholic populations, ranked by GNI per capita

Country	World Bank country classification by income level 2019 ⁵¹	Life expectancy at birth (years) ⁵²	Proportion of population aged 0–14 years (%) 2019 ⁵³	Proportion of population aged 65 years or over (%) 2019 ⁵⁴	Estimated proportion of population aged 65 years or over (%) 2050 ⁵⁵	Proportion of population aged 65 or over who live alone (%) ⁵⁶
USA	High-income	79.5	18.5	16.2	22.4	29
Germany	High-income	81.2	13.8	21.6	30.0	34
France	High-income	82.7	17.8	20.4	27.8	35
Italy	High-income	83.3	13.2	23.0	36.0	33
Spain	High-income	83.3	14.6	19.6	36.8	20
Poland	High-income	77.8	15.2	18.1	31.1	26

⁵⁰*Statistical Yearbook of the Church 2017*, 365.

⁵¹“World Bank Country and Lending Groups.”

⁵²*Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical Update*, 22–25.

⁵³*Profiles of Ageing 2019 Interactive Database*.

⁵⁴*Profiles of Ageing 2019 Interactive Database*.

⁵⁵*Profiles of Ageing 2019 Interactive Database*.

⁵⁶*Profiles of Ageing 2019 Interactive Database*.

Argentina	Upper-middle-income	76.7	24.6	11.2	17.3	21
Mexico	Upper-middle-income	77.3	26.2	7.4	17.0	13
Brazil	Upper-middle-income	75.7	21.0	9.3	22.7	15
Colombia	Upper-middle-income	74.6	22.6	8.8	21.0	12
Peru	Upper-middle-income	75.2	25.3	8.4	18.9	15
Venezuela	Upper-middle-income	74.7	27.4	7.6	15.3	8
Philippines	Upper-middle-income	69.2	30.5	5.3	11.8	7
India	Upper-middle-income	68.8	26.6	6.4	13.8	4
Nigeria	Upper-middle-income	53.9	43.7	2.7	4.0	10
DRC	Low-income	60.0	46.0	3.0	4.1	12

Child Marriage and Domestic Violence

Table 6 lists the percentage of women ages 20–24 who were first married or in union before age 18, and the percentage of the female population ages 15 and over who have ever experienced intimate partner violence.

Child Marriage

SDG5.3 aims to: “Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation.” Child marriage includes any formal marriage or informal union where at least one of the parties is under 18 years of age. The practice affects a small proportion of boys and a large proportion of girls. Child marriage hinders life chances in a variety of ways, with poor health and educational outcomes, especially for females. Although child marriage is in decline, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) estimates that one in five women were married as children.⁵⁷ The prevalence of child marriage is measured as the percentage of women aged 20 to 24

⁵⁷United Nations Children’s Fund, *Child Marriage: Latest Trends and Future Prospects* (New York: UNICEF, 2018), 2 <https://data.unicef.org/resources/child-marriage-latest-trends-and-future-prospects/>.

years who were first married or in union before age 18.⁵⁸ According to the UNDP 2018 *Statistical Update*: “In low human development countries 39 percent of women ages 20–24 were married before their 18th birthday. Childhood marriage determines their way of life and—more often than not—undermines their opportunities for education, income and independence.”⁵⁹ UNICEF data on child marriage is available for eight of our sixteen countries (Table 7). Prevalence rates range from 15 percent in the Philippines to 44 percent in Nigeria.⁶⁰ With a prevalence rate of 36 percent and an estimated three million child brides, Brazil outlawed child marriage for under-16s in March 2019.⁶¹

Regrettably, *Amoris Laetitia* does not address the problem of child marriage, though it urges families to “provide love and support to teenage mothers” (AL 197). Sadly, it is families driving the continuation of this harmful practice; many marry off their girlchildren for financial as well as cultural reasons. Francis addressed the problem of girls “forced into marriages at a young age or against their will” in 2015.⁶²

Domestic Violence

SDG5.2 aspires to “eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.” Within families, domestic violence takes many forms, physical, psychological and emotional. Intimate partner violence refers to physical and sexual violence perpetrated by an intimate partner, such as a lover or spouse. Measures of intimate partner violence focus on female victims. Prevalence is defined as: “Percentage of the female population ages 15 and older that has ever experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner.”⁶³ Domestic violence is very common and occurs across all countries, but measuring its incidence is difficult. According to the 2018

⁵⁸*Child Marriage: Latest Trends and Future Prospects*, 6.

⁵⁹*Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical Update*, 7.

⁶⁰United Nations Children’s Fund, “Child Marriage,” March 2018 <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/child-marriage/>.

⁶¹Plan International, “Brazil Bans Child Marriage for Under 16’s,” 22 March 2019 <https://plan-international.org/news/2019-03-22-brazil-bans-child-marriage-under-16s>.

⁶²Pope Francis, Message on the occasion of the international conference “Women and the Post-2015 Development Agenda: The Challenges of the Sustainable Development Goals?,” 22–24 May 2015.

⁶³*Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical Update*, 97.

Statistical Update: “Some 31.7 percent of women in South Asia, 31.5 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa and 26.3 percent in Europe and Central Asia have experienced intimate partner violence (other regions lack data).”⁶⁴ The *2018 Statistical Update* provides prevalence data for 11 of our sixteen countries (Table 6), though differences in methods of data collection limit the degree of comparability across countries. Spain and Poland report the lowest prevalence rate (13.0 percent). DRC reports the highest prevalence rate: a shocking 50.7 percent.⁶⁵

Data on attitudes towards domestic violence also give cause for concern. A recent study examining male and female attitudes to domestic violence in 49 low- and middle-income countries found that societal acceptance of domestic violence is widespread: 36 percent of people in the 49 countries surveyed believe domestic violence is justified in certain situations and, in 36 of the 49 countries (mainly in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia), women are more likely to justify domestic violence than men. The proportion of women and men who ever justified domestic violence in Nigeria is 29.7 percent, in DRC the figure is 67.2 percent. Three of the countries surveyed have majority Catholic populations. In Sao Tome Principe, where 71.9 percent of the population are baptised Catholics, the proportion of women and men who ever justified domestic violence was 20.4 percent. In Burundi, where 74.0 percent of the population are baptised Catholics, the proportion of women and men who ever justified domestic violence was 58.2 percent. In Timor-Leste, where 98.0 percent of the population are baptised Catholics, the proportion of women and men who ever justified domestic violence was a staggering 83.5 percent—the highest level of acceptance of domestic violence out of the 49 countries surveyed.⁶⁶

Amoris Laetitia adopts an uncompromising stance towards domestic violence:

Unacceptable customs still need to be eliminated. I think particularly of the shameful ill-treatment to which women are sometimes subjected,

⁶⁴*Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical Update*, 7.

⁶⁵*Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical Update*, 97.

⁶⁶Sardinha L., Nájera Catalán H.E., “Attitudes towards Domestic Violence in 49 Low- and Middle-Income Countries: A Gendered Analysis of Prevalence and Country-Level Correlates,” *PLoS ONE* 13, 10 (2018): e0206101. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0206101>. Catholic population data source: *Statistical Yearbook of the Church* 2017.

domestic violence and various forms of enslavement which, rather than a show of masculine power, are craven acts of cowardice. The verbal, physical, and sexual violence that women endure in some marriages contradicts the very nature of the conjugal union (AL 54).

The reality of domestic violence is one aspect of what Francis describes as “a bitter truth found throughout sacred Scripture,” namely “the presence of pain, evil and violence that break up families and their communion of life and love” (AL 19). Typical Christian justifications for wife-beating involving recourse to Scripture, deployed by both sexes, are flatly dismissed: “Every form of sexual submission must be clearly rejected. This includes all improper interpretations of the passage in the Letter to the Ephesians where Paul tells women to ‘be subject to your husbands’ (*Eph* 5:22)” (AL 156). *Amoris Laetitia* presents marriage as a loving relationship based on equality and mutual reciprocity, where there is no place for authoritarianism or patriarchy. The ideal husband and father is a new man who is comfortable with his masculinity and has no need to project *machismo*. He is a kind and caring protector (AL 55; AL 175–177): a St Joseph (AL 65) rather than a King David (cfr AL 20).

Francis is forthright in stating that, while separation should be a last resort, “[a]t times it even becomes morally necessary, precisely when it is a matter of removing the more vulnerable spouse or young children from serious injury due to abuse and violence, from humiliation and exploitation, and from disregard and indifference” (AL 241). In cases such as “situations of violence, where one parent is forced to flee with the children...single parents must receive encouragement and support from other families in the Christian community, and from the parish’s pastoral outreach,” Francis explains; “[o]ften these families endure other hardships, such as economic difficulties, uncertain employment prospects, problems with child support and lack of housing” (AL 252). Francis points to the role played by Catholic social service organisations in offering support in cases of domestic violence (AL 229) and calls for appropriate pastoral training for parishes responding to emergency situations involving violence in the home (AL 204). Francis also discussed the evil of intimate partner violence in 2015:

A symbol of life, the female body is also, unfortunately, often assaulted and disfigured by those who should take care of her and be life partners...I would like to call attention, in this context, to the plight of so

many poor women, forced to live in dangerous conditions, exploited, relegated to the margins of society and rendered victims of a throwaway culture.⁶⁷

Francis' strong advocacy for victims of intimate partner violence follows similarly supportive statements by Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI.⁶⁸

Table 6. *Child marriage prevalence, and intimate partner violence prevalence, for the sixteen countries with the largest Catholic populations, ranked by GNI per capita*

Country	Women ages 20–24 who were first married or in union before age 18 (%) ⁶⁹	Intimate Partner Violence against women ever experienced (% of female population ages 15 and over) ⁷⁰
USA	-	-
Germany	-	22.0
France	-	26.0
Italy	-	19.0
Spain	-	13.0
Poland	-	13.0
Argentina	-	-
Mexico	26	14.1
Brazil	36	-
Colombia	23	-
Peru	22	33.2
Venezuela	-	-
Philippines	15	16.9
India	27	28.7
Nigeria	44	16.2
DRC	37	50.7

Gender Inequality, Maternal Mortality and Boy Preference

Gender Inequality

SDG5 aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Two composite indices directly relate to this goal: the Gender

⁶⁷Pope Francis, "Address to Participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Culture," Saturday, 7 February 2015.

⁶⁸Cfr Pope John Paul II, "Letter to Women," (1995) #5; Pope Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus*, 2011, #56.

⁶⁹UNICEF, "Child Marriage."

⁷⁰*Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical Update*, 93–97.

Development Index and the Gender Inequality Index. The Gender Development Index compares female and male HDI values, measuring differences between the sexes in relation to GNI per capita, life expectancy at birth, expected years of schooling, and mean years of schooling. The *2018 Statistical Update* reports:

Worldwide, the average HDI value for women (0.705) is 5.9 percent lower than that for men (0.749). Much of the gap is due to women's lower income and educational attainment in many countries. The gender gap is widest in low human development countries, where the average HDI value is 13.8 percent lower for women than for men. Among developing regions the gender gap is narrowest in Latin America and the Caribbean (2.3 percent) and widest in South Asia (16.3 percent) and the Arab States (14.5 percent).⁷¹

The Gender Inequality Index (GII) is a composite measure based on the share of parliamentary seats held by women, the percentage of the female population with at least some secondary education, the female participation rate in the labour force, the adolescent birth rate (the number of births per 1,000 women ages 15–19), and the maternal mortality ratio (the number of deaths due to pregnancy-related causes per 100,000 live births). The higher the GII value, the greater the gender inequality. The global GII value is 0.441. In OECD countries, GII is 0.186; in sub-Saharan Africa, 0.569.⁷² Table 7 gives the Gender Inequality Index national ranking (out of 189 countries) for the sixteen countries with the largest Catholic populations.

Globally, the proportion of parliamentary seats held by women is 23.5 percent. In terms of our cohort of sixteen nations, the parliamentary presence of women ranges from 5.8 percent in Nigeria, to 41.4 percent in Mexico. The percentage of the global population ages 25 and older that has reached (but not necessarily completed) a secondary level of education is 62.5 percent for females, and 70.9 percent for males. Of our sixteen nations, DRC records the greatest gulf between the sexes in terms of secondary education (36.7 percent for females; 65.8 percent for males). Worldwide, men dominate the labour market; the male participation rate is 75.3 percent, the female participation rate 48.7 percent. This paid employment trend is reflected in our sixteen nations: males outnumber females in each country's labour market. India has the greatest disparity

⁷¹*Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical Update*, 5–6.

⁷²*Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical Update*, 6.

in levels of participation (27.2 percent female; 78.8 percent male). Globally, the adolescent birth rate is 44.0 per 1,000 women ages 15–19. Out of our sixteen nations, the high-income nations have an adolescent birth rate significantly lower than the global average, as does India (23.0). The adolescent birth rate is highest in DRC (124.2).⁷³

The disparities in access to resources and opportunities that exist between nations and between the sexes was subjected to astute analysis by Pope John Paul II:

In fact, development and progress imply access to resources and opportunities, *equitable access* not only between the least developed, developing and richer countries, and between social and economic classes, but also *between women and men* (Cfr *Gaudium et Spes*, 9). Greater efforts are needed to eliminate discrimination against women in areas that include education, health care and employment. Where certain groups or classes are systematically excluded from these goods, and where communities or countries lack basic social infrastructures and economic opportunities, women and children are the first to experience marginalization. And yet, where poverty abounds, or in the face of the devastation of conflict and war, or the tragedy of migration, forced or otherwise, it is very often women who maintain the vestiges of human dignity, defend the family, and preserve cultural and religious values.⁷⁴

Amoris Laetitia continues in this vein; gender-based discrimination is presented as incompatible with Christianity. “The equal dignity of men and women makes us rejoice to see old forms of discrimination disappear,” Francis states. However, he is aware that, across the globe, progress is uneven: “I would like to stress the fact that, even though significant advances have been made in the recognition of women’s rights and their participation in public life, in some countries much remains to be done to promote these rights.” Failures in this regard include women’s “lack of equal access to dignified work” and their limited access to “roles of decision-making” (AL 54).

Maternal Mortality

“Pregnancy is a difficult but wonderful time. A mother joins with God to bring forth the miracle of a new life” (AL 168).

⁷³Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical Update, 38–41.

⁷⁴Pope John Paul II, Letter to Mrs. Gertrude Mongella, Secretary General of The Fourth World Conference on Women of The United Nations, 26 May 1995, #6.

For many women and especially for girls, having children is life-threatening. According to UNICEF:

The number of women and girls who died each year from complications of pregnancy and childbirth declined from 532,000 in 1990 to 303,000 in 2015... Still, over 800 women are dying each day from complications in pregnancy and childbirth. And for every woman who dies, approximately 20 others suffer serious injuries, infections or disabilities. Almost all maternal deaths (99 per cent) occur in developing regions. Two regions, sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, account for 88 per cent of maternal deaths worldwide. Sub-Saharan Africans suffer from the highest maternal mortality ratio—546 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births, or 201,000 maternal deaths a year. This is two thirds (66 per cent) of all maternal deaths per year worldwide. South Asia follows, with a maternal mortality ratio of 182, or 66,000 maternal deaths a year, accounting for 22 per cent of the global total.⁷⁵

The first target of SDG3 (ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages) is: “By 2030, reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births.”⁷⁶ The global maternal mortality ratio (MMR) is 261.0; however, this figure masks astonishing variation across the globe, with MMR values ranging from 3 in Finland, Greece, Iceland and Poland, to 1,360 in Sierra Leone. Table 7 gives the most recent MMRs (2015) for our sixteen nations, which vary from single digit figures for the European nations to the scandalous figure of 814 for Nigeria.⁷⁷ 58,000 Nigerian women and girls lost their lives in pregnancy or childbirth in 2015, almost one in five of the global total of 303,000 maternal deaths that year.⁷⁸ There is a strong correlation between levels of national income and levels of maternal mortality, as UNICEF indicates: ‘Almost all maternal deaths can be prevented, as evidenced by the huge disparities found between the richest and poorest countries.’⁷⁹

⁷⁵UNICEF, “Maternal Mortality,” February 2017 <https://data.unicef.org/topic/maternal-health/maternal-mortality/>.

⁷⁶*Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 16.

⁷⁷*Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical Update*, 38-41.

⁷⁸United Nations Children’s Fund, “Trends in Estimates of Maternal Mortality Ratio (maternal deaths per 100,000 live births) 1990–2015,” February 2017 <https://data.unicef.org/topic/maternal-health/maternal-mortality/>.

⁷⁹UNICEF, “Maternal Mortality.”

Depending on where you live, being pregnant and giving birth significantly increase your chances of dying.⁸⁰ By taking into account maternal mortality rates and fertility rates it is possible to calculate regional and national values for lifetime risk of maternal death, defined as “the probability that a 15-year-old girl will die from complications of pregnancy or childbirth over her lifetime.”⁸¹ UNICEF explains: “in a high-fertility setting, a woman faces the risk of maternal death multiple times, and her lifetime risk of death will be higher than in a low-fertility setting.”⁸² As with maternal mortality rates, the probability of dying from pregnancy-related causes is income-related, as UNICEF data illustrates: “In 2015, the lifetime risk of maternal death in low income countries as a whole was 1 in 41, compared to 1 in 3,300 in high-income countries. Among regions, women in sub-Saharan Africa face the highest lifetime risk (1 in 36), followed by South Asia (1 in 200).”⁸³ Table 7 shows the lifetime risk of maternal death for our sixteen countries. The riskiest place to be pregnant is Nigeria, where the lifetime risk of dying for would-be mothers is a frightening 1 in 22.

“In poor and developing countries, women bear the heaviest burdens: it is they...who too often die in childbirth.”⁸⁴ This remark by Pope Francis, made at the time when an SDG target relating to maternal mortality was being proposed, remains the only papal reference to maternal mortality. Given the Church’s great solicitude for marriage and family life, its emphasis on procreation, and the quantities of papal ink spilled extolling the virtues of motherhood, the Church’s inattention to matters of maternal morbidity and mortality, and to the devastation caused to families by this needless quotidian death count, is incomprehensible.

⁸⁰“The lifetime risk of maternal death is the probability that a 15-year-old girl will die from complications of pregnancy or childbirth over her lifetime; it takes into account both the maternal mortality ratio and the total fertility rate...Thus, in a high-fertility setting, a woman faces the risk of maternal death multiple times, and her lifetime risk of death will be higher than in a low-fertility setting.” UNICEF, “Maternal Mortality.”

⁸¹UNICEF, “Maternal Mortality,” February 2017.

⁸²UNICEF, “Maternal Mortality,” February 2017.

⁸³UNICEF, “Maternal Mortality,” February 2017.

⁸⁴Pope Francis, Message on the occasion of the international conference “Women and the Post-2015 Development Agenda: The Challenges of the Sustainable Development Goals?,” 22–24 May 2015.

Boy Preference

Gender discrimination begins before birth. Boy preference has increased the male to female livebirth ratio in several countries. The highest livebirth sex ratios were found in India (where 110 males are born for every 100 females), Armenia (where 114 males are born for every 100 females), Azerbaijan (where 115 males are born for every 100 females), and China (where 117 males are born for every 100 females).⁸⁵ The GBD study states:

Sex ratios in most countries remain in the narrow band of 1.03–1.07 male livebirths for every female livebirth. We found in some countries, most notably India and China, that since the availability of ultrasonography in the early 1980s, the ratio of males to females has increased. In China, the sex ratios in 2017 were in excess of 1.16 males for every female. These ratios imply very substantial sex-selective abortion and even the possibility of female infanticide.⁸⁶

In 2017 in India, there were 12,872,000 male livebirths and 11,696,000 female livebirths.⁸⁷ Allowing for a natural preponderance of male to female livebirths of up to 1.07:1.00, one would expect at least 12,030,000 female livebirths. The difference between actual and expected number of female livebirths in 2017 equates to 334,000 missing girls.

Boy preference is also exposed in relation to under-five mortality rates, as UNICEF data confirms:

On average boys are expected to have a higher probability of dying before reaching age 5 than girls. The estimated under-five mortality rate in 2017 was 41 deaths per 1,000 live births for boys and 37 for girls...In some countries, the risk of dying before age 5 for girls is significantly higher than what would be expected based on global patterns. These countries are primarily located in Southern Asia and Western Asia. The number of countries showing these gender disparities fell by more than half between 1990 and 2017, from 19 to 9.⁸⁸

⁸⁵"Population and Fertility... 1950–2017," 2008.

⁸⁶"Population and Fertility... 1950–2017," 2035.

⁸⁷"Population and Fertility... 1950–2017," Appendix 2 <https://ars.els-cdn.com/content/image/1-s2.0-S0140673618322785-mmc2.pdf>.

⁸⁸United Nations Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation (UN IGME), "Levels & Trends in Child Mortality: Report 2018, Estimates Developed by the United Nations Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation," United Nations

India is one of the countries where the rate of under-five girlchild deaths (40 per 1,000 livebirths) exceeds the rate for boys (39 per 1,000 livebirths).⁸⁹ The data suggests that some Indian families prioritise the health and survival of their boychildren over that of their girlchildren; the practice of female infanticide cannot be discounted.

Francis spoke out against the killing of the girlchild in 2015: "At times they are even denied the right to life simply for being female."⁹⁰ *Amoris Laetitia* does not discuss boy preference, sex-selective abortion or female infanticide, but Francis states: "Here I feel it urgent to state that, if the family is the sanctuary of life, the place where life is conceived and cared for, it is a horrendous contradiction when it becomes a place where life is rejected and destroyed" (AL 83). Francis also addresses the phenomenon of unwanted children:

from the first moments of their lives, many children are rejected, abandoned, and robbed of their childhood and future...If a child comes into this world in unwanted circumstances, the parents and other members of the family must do everything possible to accept that child as a gift from God and assume the responsibility of accepting him or her with openness and affection (AL 166).

In order to highlight the way that children enrich the household, Francis quotes from Psalm 127: "'Lo, sons are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb, a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the sons of one's youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them! He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate' (Ps 127:1, 3-5)" (AL 14).

Aware of the Psalm's overt boy preference, Francis refers to its historical context and offers a more gender-inclusive reading of it: "These images reflect the culture of an ancient society, yet the presence of children is a sign of the continuity of the family throughout salvation history, from generation to generation" (AL 14). Would that the Psalmist's images were a poetic relic of a long-dead androcentric world. Tragically, these biblical images perfectly reflect the culture of many

Children's Fund, New York, 2018, p. 9 <https://data.unicef.org/resources/levels-and-trends-in-child-mortality/>.

⁸⁹"Levels & Trends in Child Mortality," 33.

⁹⁰Pope Francis, Message on the occasion of the international conference "Women and the Post-2015 Development Agenda..."

contemporary societies. In nations rich and poor, boy preference is widespread; and it grows into man preference. Too often, it is the male who takes pride of place, who receives the financial backing, who represents power and success. Females are second-best not centre-stage, they are working in the wings, or even surreptitiously placed in refuse sacks, waste products of our throw-away culture.

Table 7. Gender Inequality Index rank, Maternal Mortality Rate, and Lifetime Risk of Maternal Death for the sixteen countries with the largest Catholic populations, ranked by GNI per capita

Country	World Bank Country Classification by Income Level 2019	Gender Inequality Index Rank (out of 189 countries) ⁹¹	Maternal Mortality Rate (deaths per 100,000 live births) 2015 ⁹²	Lifetime Risk of Maternal Death 1990-2015 ⁹³
USA	High-income	41	14	1 in 3,800
Germany	High-income	14	6	1 in 11,700
France	High-income	16	8	1 in 6,100
Italy	High-income	18	4	1 in 19,700
Spain	High-income	15	5	1 in 14,700
Poland	High-income	32	3	1 in 22,100
Argentina	Upper-middle-income	81	52	1 in 790
Mexico	Upper-middle-income	76	38	1 in 1,100
Brazil	Upper-middle-income	94	44	1 in 1,200
Colombia	Upper-middle-income	87	64	1 in 800
Peru	Upper-middle-income	83	68	1 in 570
Venezuela	Upper-middle-income	105	95	1 in 420
Philippines	Lower-middle-income	97	114	1 in 280
India	Lower-middle-income	127	174	1 in 220
Nigeria	Lower-middle-income	Not available	814	1 in 22
DRC	Low-income	152	693	1 in 24

⁹¹Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical Update, 38–41.

⁹²Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical Update, 38–41.

⁹³Trends in Maternal Mortality: 1990 to 2015.

Concluding Remarks

'*Vasudhaiva kutumbakam*' (The entire world is a family).⁹⁴

The foregoing discussion provides a health report on the state of the world's families. It makes for sober reading, laying bare some brutal economic facts of life. Many families face challenges that are matters of life and death. Children and women especially are at risk; collateral damage in an economy that kills (cfr Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 53). With his astute awareness of the capital importance of the family to social life, and his fatherly concern for all God's children, what would St Kuriakose Elias Chavara make of the sorry situation of so many families on God's earth, and how would he regard the particular vulnerability of women and children?

St Chavara described children as God's investment in the hands of their parents, and he encouraged families to give their children the best start in life. His pioneering schools initiative advanced a socially inclusive education system accessible to all, regardless of social status, which did much to promote socio-economic development in Kerala.⁹⁵ Chavara's establishment of a women's convent and girls' school, long before women's rights became common parlance, was a visionary action that went against the cultural grain. He saw that once liberated from their domestic confinement, women's social status would improve and that education would lead not only to their own betterment but also to that of their families and wider society.⁹⁶ St Chavara's legacy continues in the work of the male and female religious congregations that he founded, the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI) and the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel (CMC), both of which make education a focus of their apostolate. These congregations run hundreds of institutes of learning, including kindergartens, schools, seminaries, and higher education facilities, staffed by thousands of religious sisters and brothers, and attended by hundreds of thousands of Indian children and young people.⁹⁷

⁹⁴The Sanskrit saying comes from the *Maha Upanishad* 6, 71–73.

⁹⁵Cfr Namith Rose CMC, "Apostolate of Family Renewal: St Chavara & St Euphrasia," in *A Dream Comes True: Saint Chavara & Saint Euphrasia*, ed. Sr Dr Cleopatra CMC (Aluva: Mount Carmel Generalate, 2014), 107–119, at 110–111; Joseph Varghese Kureethara CMI, "Education as a Mission that is Inclusive," *EDUCA International Catholic Journal of Education* 2 (2016): 1–11.

⁹⁶Namith Rose CMC, "Apostolate of Family Renewal," 111–112.

⁹⁷Cfr "CMI at a Glance 2017," Carmelites of Mary Immaculate website: <http://www.cmi.org.in/CMIStatistics.aspx>; Congregation of Mother Carmel website: <https://web.archive.org/web/20091223083934/http://www.cmcsisters.org/education.php>.

Notwithstanding this remarkable legacy, one hundred and fifty years after the saint's death, many of the problems that were rife in Chavara's day still hold back India today. India's human development data provide abundant evidence of the malignant cultural, social, political and economic forces that conspire to undermine family life and foment discrimination, poverty, exclusion, and violence (cfr AL 201). India's infant mortality rate is ten times that of Europe's. Indian children receive less than half the schooling of children in the richest nations. Entrenched sexist attitudes and discriminatory cultural practices persist, with profoundly damaging effects on the lives of women and girls. Rather than regard the girlchild as a divine blessing—God's investment in the hands of parents—many families see her as a liability and burden to be disposed of like human garbage; buried or burnt, and wiped off the face of the earth. Sex-selective abortion and female infanticide are rampant. Shockingly, in 2017, one third of a million girlchildren were missing from India's birth statistics. India's suspiciously high number of female infant deaths tells a similarly sinister story. Annually, tens of thousands more girls die than boys. Of those females who survive infancy, one in four is married off as a child, and one in four will suffer domestic violence.

This is hardly the model of a loving family that Pope Francis had in mind in *Amoris Laetitia*. How well does Pope Francis's Apostolic Exhortation on Love in the Family confront these stark realities? *Amoris Laetitia* is addressed to the world Church, but in its focus on Western concerns such as divorce-remarriage it neglects to adequately address the multiplicity of problems facing families—including the large number of Catholic families—who live in the global South, including in India. In so doing, it misses an important opportunity to broaden Catholic discourse about marriage and family life, and to mobilise Catholic action on behalf of the world's poorest families and their most vulnerable and victimised members.

WORLDWIDE RECEPTION OF *AMORIS LAETITIA*

Stanislaus Alla, SJ♦

The Context

Speaking to the Jesuits at Vilnius, Lithuania on 23 September 2018, Pope Francis urged them to pray for the continuation of the Church's reform in the spirit of Vatican II. His appeal is unambiguous and insightful: [According to Historians] "it takes 100 years for a council to be applied. We are half the way there" and "if you want to help me, do whatever it takes to move the council forward in the Church."¹ Assessment of the 'reception' of *Amoris Laetitia* globally (and locally) will be possible only if it is seen in the larger context of the reception of Vatican II, as Pope Francis exhorts. Australian Jesuit and world-renowned theologian Gerald O'Collins rightly reminds that *Amoris Laetitia* ought to be read and appropriated in conjunction with the sections on marriage and family in *Gaudium et Spes*, and *Familiaris Consortio*—the 1981 post-synodal Apostolic exhortation on the Christian Family.² How well *Amoris Laetitia* is received will depend largely on how well these other documents on similar themes have been studied, understood and pastorally applied. These three major documents (one could add *Humanae Vitae*) have to be held together as a part of the continuum.

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¹For the quote and other aspects of Pope's conversation with the Lithuanian Jesuits, see <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2018/10/18/pope-god-wants-change-church-stricken-perversion-clericalism>.

²Gerald O'Collins, SJ, "The Joy of Love (*Amoris Laetitia*): The Papal Exhortation in its Context," *Theological Studies* 77, 4 (2016): 905-921.

Alla, Stanislaus. "Worldwide Reception of *Amoris Laetitia*." In *Vocation and Mission of the Family: Reflections on Chavarul and Amoris Laetitia*, edited by Shaji George Kochuthara, 261-269. Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2020.

Similarly, another way to assess the reception of *Amoris Laetitia* is to take a note of those who attended the Synod and what their expectations were, as well as their preparedness, unpreparedness and fears. As Thomas Reese reminds, the participants came from very different backgrounds, and with “very different theological and pastoral attitudes towards family issues.”³ They came to Rome with “very different cultural and pastoral experiences of family:” and, for instance, the “First world delegates (and the first world media) were concerned about divorced and remarried Catholics and gays, while bishops from Africa and Asia were coming from nations with very different cultural attitudes towards gays and women.”⁴ While the hot-button topics got much attention, it is helpful to remember that many other issues related to marriage and family emerged in 1980, 2014 and 2015 synods. At these synods the concerns included divorce, cohabitation, irregular marriages, abortion, birth control, poverty, polygamy in Africa, interfaith marriages, annulments, extramarital sex, child rearing, human trafficking, female genital mutilation, war, displacement, etc.⁵ Reception of the synod would be more complete when we are able to employ multiple parameters and study how different participants were able to work on diverse fronts and arrive at contextually-sensitive conclusions and not discuss, and not being limited to some specific subjects.

Let me illustrate. Cardinal John Njue from Nairobi said that solution to the marriage and family related problems “lies not in tinkering with doctrine,” and, “the language of the movements that are fighting for the destruction of the family” has to be opposed.⁶ Instead, according to him, the concerns of family that need urgent attention are “impact of migration and displacement, high rates of domestic violence and high mortality rates for women giving birth.”⁷ His theological position as well as fears that some concerns would eclipse others is evident here. Not only does he represent a section of the prelates (they could come from Africa or Asia or any part of the world) that embrace a particular point of view, but he also upholds a spectrum of concerns that escape

³Thomas J. Reese, “Divided Synod Limp to Conclusion,” *Concilium* 2 (2016): 143.

⁴Reese, “Divided Synod Limp to Conclusion.”

⁵Reese, “Divided Synod Limp to Conclusion.”

⁶For Cardinal John Njue’s views expressed in *The Tablet* Interview, see <https://www.thetablet.co.uk/features/2/6218/kenya-s-plain-speaker>.

⁷<https://www.thetablet.co.uk/features/2/6218/kenya-s-plain-speaker>

the attention of some of the prelates coming from the developed world. Hence, reception of *Amoris Laetitia* would proportionately vary depending on what the participants were willing to contribute, learn from, and seek clarity and guidance on matters they considered important.

Three Keys

Pope Francis himself offers some keys that are extremely significant—with far reaching consequences—in going ahead with the renewal and reform of the Church, and in facilitating all concerned understand and implement the fruits of the synod. Three are mentioned below. The first major Franciscan insight—a ground-breaking theological/hermeneutical principle—is found in *Amoris Laetitia* #3:

Since “time is greater than space,” I would like to make it clear that not all discussions of doctrinal, moral or pastoral issues need to be settled by interventions of the magisterium. Unity of teaching and practice is certainly necessary in the Church, but that does not preclude various ways of interpreting some aspects of that teaching or drawing certain consequences from it... Each country or region, moreover, can seek solutions better suited to its culture and sensitive to its traditions and local needs. For ‘cultures are in fact quite diverse and every general principle... needs to be inculturated, if it is to be respected and applied.’⁸

While reviewing the reception of *Amoris Laetitia*, one can see the significance of this principle and how it is expected to change our understanding of magisterial teaching and the implementation of the synod. Many ensuing discussions and deliberations across the continents on *Amoris Laetitia* and its adaptation truly took into account the diverse contexts of the faithful and their lived experiences. Pope Francis has been an active proponent of ‘sound decentralization’ modelled after the ‘inverted pyramid,’⁹ suggesting that authority and decision-making processes can be re-envisioned in newer ways. Largely due to this papal teaching (deliberate and authoritative), some bishops’ conferences, groups of bishops and individual prelates were able to

⁸For the text of *Amoris Laetitia*, see http://www.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf.

⁹<https://catholicstarherald.org/the-popes-inverted-pyramid-vision-of-the-church/>

offer pastoral guidelines on some particular concerns to the faithful under their care and 'own up' the process. Also, some took contrastingly different stands.

Second, during the 2015 Synod and even during the previous meetings, Pope Francis has been asking the participants to speak fearlessly. He exhorts all 'stakeholders' to pray, to speak out and to listen. Trying to transform and tone up the quality of the discussions, the pope refers to *parresia* (free audacity to say whatever one thinks), implying that they should share their experiences, concerns and insights without being worried about pleasing or disappointing others.¹⁰ Deliberations on *Amoris Laetitia* and its implementation attest to this. For instance, in the theological consultations on *Amoris Laetitia* organized by James Keenan, bishops and theologians invited the laity and all were willing to listen to and learn from each other and their experiences, and explore ways to understand and implement it.¹¹ At these conferences Cardinal Cupich said that the Church is to learn from the faithful on married life.

If the first key is about a hermeneutical principle, and, the second key is related to *parresia*, the third key points to the role of the language, especially as it is employed by the papal teachings. More often than not, it has been unintelligible, alienating, antagonistic and condemnatory. Like Pope John XXIII, Pope Francis is known to employ a language (in his interventions, speeches and formal writings) that is clear, simple, understandable, dialogical and relational. His language and style do make a theological statement. Agreeing that 'language is an attitude,' the pope uses himself and recommends that, like a mother, the Church should use a language of love and compassion in its documents and guidelines.¹²

Along with these, we need to recall also the importance Pope Francis attaches to the role of 'conscience' and the process of 'discernment.' Staying firmly rooted in the Church's tradition, he says that conscience is inviolable and indispensable, and the Church ought to form and

¹⁰<https://www.ncronline.org/news/vatican/pope-calls-synod-speak-boldly-cardinal-defends-current-teachings>.

¹¹For further details on these conferences and the views shared in them, see <https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/conference-amoris-laetitia-was-dialogical-grounded-reality>.

¹²<https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/poet-popes-pastoral-discernment>.

empower peoples' consciences so that their agency—their capacity to make decisions—is activated and nourished.¹³ Similarly, discernment is a vital spiritual tool and it “must help to find possible ways of responding to God and growing in the midst of limits” (*Amoris Laetitia* #305). All of this indicates what Cardinal Cupich calls a ‘paradigm shift,’ originally envisioned by Vatican II and Paul VI but got eclipsed in the course of time.¹⁴ It requires that all sections of the faithful, the bishops and theologians, scholars and laity have to come together, learn from each other, submit themselves to the guidance of the Spirit and evolve pastoral guidelines/concrete programs that are in line with the Church’s teachings, and yet sensitive to their concrete situations.

Worldwide Reception of *Amoris Laetitia*

A caution is in order. As observed generally, from among the topics that were brought to the attention of the synod, subjects such as ‘Communion to the divorced and remarried,’ ‘same sex marriages,’ ‘contraception,’ etc., captured global media’s attention at the pre-synod consultation stage, synod discussions, and the publication of post-synodal exhortation. Even at the later stages, discussions and commentary and controversies continue to revolve around these topics.¹⁵ In a way this limits our ability to know how well *Amoris Laetitia* has been received with respect to its other dimensions of the Exhortation. Nevertheless, it indicates how an important concern is being received (varying from acceptance to resistance and all other different shades in between), and how, eventually, ‘controversial’ subjects are likely to be discussed, applied and received in future in this new paradigm.

Acceptance

Some Bishops’ Conferences, bishops, theologians and laity welcomed *Amoris Laetitia* and began to engage its teaching, particularly the chapter

¹³For Thomas Reese’s comments on conscience and discernment and how they permeate Pope Francis’s views, see <https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/conference-revisits-amoris-laetitia>.

¹⁴<https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2018/02/09/cardinal-cupich-pope-francis-family-teaching-paradigm-shift-church>.

¹⁵<https://www.ncronline.org/news/world/europes-bishops-still-odds-over-how-apply-amoris-laetitia>.

titled “Accompanying, Discerning and Integrating Weakness.” Bishops’ Conferences of Argentina, Malta, Germany and others have made efforts to understand and apply *Amoris Laetitia* and translate it into pastoral guidelines.

On 13 January 2017 the Maltese Bishops published “Criteria for the Application of Chapter VIII of *Amoris Laetitia*” to serve as a set of guidelines for priests.¹⁶ The text implies that “the door to Communion for divorced and civilly married Catholics is open.”¹⁷ The bishops state it clearly:

If, as a result of the process of discernment, a separated or divorced person who is living in a new relationship manages, with an informed and enlightened conscience, to acknowledge and believe that he or she is at peace with God, he or she cannot be precluded from participating in the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist.¹⁸

Through Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri the Pope thanked the Catholic Bishops of Malta for their interpretation of *Amoris Laetitia*.¹⁹

On 1st February 2017 the German Bishops’ Conference issued a document titled “The Joy of Love, which is Lived in the Families, is also the Joy of the Church.”²⁰ The sub-title “An Invitation to a Renewed Marriage and Family Pastoral Care in Light of *Amoris Laetitia*” reflects an open and welcoming attitude, suggesting that in certain cases the remarried may receive Communion. On 7th May 2018, the Conference also released a marriage preparation document in light of *Amoris Laetitia*.²¹

While these and other bishops continue to prepare and publish guidelines on how to understand and interpret *Amoris Laetitia*, the

¹⁶<https://cruxnow.com/uncategorized/2017/01/13/maltese-bishops-remarried-catholics-peace-can-receive-communion/>.

¹⁷<https://cruxnow.com/uncategorized/2017/01/13/maltese-bishops-remarried-catholics-peace-can-receive-communion/>.

¹⁸<https://cruxnow.com/uncategorized/2017/01/13/maltese-bishops-remarried-catholics-peace-can-receive-communion/>.

¹⁹<https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/report-pope-francis-thanks-malta-bishops-for-allowing-remarried-divorcees-t>.

²⁰<https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/german-bishops-say-the-divorced-and-remarried-may-receive-communion-43199>.

²¹<https://www.ncronline.org/news/world/german-bishops-release-marriage-prep-document-based-amoris-laetitia>.

document prepared by the Argentinian Bishops made headlines in a big way. In September 2016 Argentinian Bishops published “Basic Criteria for the Implementation of Chapter VIII of *Amoris Laetitia*.”²² Pope Francis acknowledges receiving this document and formally endorses it: “The document is very good and thoroughly specifies the meaning of chapter VIII of *Amoris Laetitia*. There are no further interpretations. I am confident that it will do much good.”²³ Eventually, the Pope instructed that the Buenos Aires document and his letter endorsing it be published in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*. Being designated as ‘correct’ and ‘balanced’ and promulgated as ‘authentic magisterium,’ it gained prominence and, also invited some negative comments.

Resistance

If there have been prelates and theologians who interpret *Amoris Laetitia* in a particular way, there have been always others who were opposed to such a ‘liberal’ interpretation. For instance, in late December 2017 three bishops in Kazakhstan have published a document titled “Profession of the Immutable Truths about Sacramental Marriage.”²⁴ Seeing their statement not as a rebuke or a challenge but as ‘a service in charity and truth,’ they believe that “divorced people living with someone else would not dare ask for holy Communion because they know they are living in a situation of sin. It would be blasphemy.”²⁵ Similarly, Nigerian Cardinal Francis Arinze, known to uphold orthodoxy, says that Communion cannot be shared with friends like beer or cake since Communion is “exclusively for the Catholics in a state of grace.”²⁶ Archbishop Charles Chaput of Philadelphia who offered in July 2016 Guidelines to correctly understand and interpret *Amoris*

²²<https://cruxnow.com/global-church/2016/09/18/guidelines-buenos-aires-bishops-divorcedremarried/>.

²³<https://cruxnow.com/global-church/2016/09/18/guidelines-buenos-aires-bishops-divorcedremarried/>.

²⁴<https://cruxnow.com/global-church/2018/01/04/bishops-kazakhstan-say-no-communion-divorced-remarried-catholics/>.

²⁵<https://cruxnow.com/global-church/2018/01/04/bishops-kazakhstan-say-no-communion-divorced-remarried-catholics/>.

²⁶<https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2018/05/25/communion-cannot-be-shared-friends-beer-or-cake-cardinal-says>.

Laetitia calls for a sensitive accompaniment.²⁷ However, he is clear about the teaching of *Amoris Laetitia*: “As with all magisterial documents, *Amoris Laetitia* is best understood when read within the tradition of the Church’s teaching and life. In fact, the Holy Father himself states clearly that neither Church teaching nor the canonical discipline concerning marriage has changed.”²⁸

While some have taken a rigorous stand, others have gone too far in criticizing Pope Francis. Some call him a ‘heretic’ and seek his ‘resignation’ and it only manifests how strong the resistance is for the pope’s attempts to carry on with Church’s reforms.²⁹ Amidst all of this, Pope Francis has been clear: while he says he understands the anxieties of the clergy and the faithful “who prefer a more rigorous pastoral care which leaves no room for confusion... But I sincerely believe that Jesus wants a Church attentive to the goodness which the Holy Spirit sows in the midst of human weakness.”³⁰

Beyond the ‘reformists’ and ‘alarmists,’ there are many other prelates and theologians, and some committed laity, who are trying to interpret and apply *Amoris Laetitia* to their own specific contexts. They form a large group and were convinced of the ‘internal forum’ solution, actively supported by Cardinal Müller.³¹ Such initiatives have to be accounted, whether they come from Manila or Mumbai,³² knowing that they play an indispensable role in the reception of *Amoris Laetitia*.

Conclusion

As noted, globally ‘reception’ is largely confined to Chapter Eight of *Amoris Laetitia* and it raises a question about the fate of other synod

²⁷<https://www.ncregister.com/news/archbishop-chaput-s-guidelines-for-amoris-laetitia-can-serve-as-model-for-us-church>.

²⁸<https://www.ncregister.com/news/archbishop-chaput-s-guidelines-for-amoris-laetitia-can-serve-as-model-for-us-church>.

²⁹<https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/theologians-accuse-pope-of-heresy-39597>.

³⁰<https://www.thetablet.co.uk/features/2/8269/compassion-is-this-pastor-s-watchword>.

³¹<https://cruxnow.com/global-church/2017/10/cardinal-muller-backs-pope-francis-critics-amoris-laetitia/>.

³²For the views of Cardinal Oswald Gracias, the Archbishop of Bombay, see <https://www.nconline.org/news/vatican/cardinal-gracias-synods-final-document-doesnt-give-answers-lays-out-questions>.

concerns and how they are received. At this point we must note that many other important issues emerged at every stage of the synod, some of them having greater impact on the world's poor. Whether the issues are related to dignity and rights, poverty and sickness, violence and discrimination, unemployment or fundamentalism, migrants or refugees, they were raised in the pre-synod stages, during the synod, in the Exhortation and in the ensuing studies. Pope Francis frequently refers to many critically important issues related to marriage and family and they have been received by the faithful. The pope himself and many prelates draw upon *Amoris Laetitia*, and it will not be wrong to imagine that the insights of *Amoris Laetitia* continue to inspire and guide pastoral programs and action plans in many areas.

This brief assessment of reception of *Amoris Laetitia* indicates that Pope Francis' efforts to reform the Church began to bear fruits. In this paradigm, he sees a Church that is empowered to review itself and reshape its structures and institutions and pastoral guidelines. Its success will strengthen the process and motivate the faithful to participate actively in it. Good and diverse thoughts need to be nourished in receiving *Amoris Laetitia*. Let me end these views by quoting Rig Veda (1.89.1): *Aano bhadra krtavo yantu vishwatah* which translates, "May good thoughts come to us from all directions."

RECEPTION OF *AMORIS LAETITIA* IN INDIA

Bishop Lawrence Pius Dorairaj♦

The document, *Amoris Laetitia* (henceforth, AL) is the fruit of two synods on family in 2014 and 2015.

During the Synod of Bishops on the family, the bishops in Rome struggled to find a way that the church could be a loving mother while still being a clear teacher. The bishops realized that a very large percentage of the faithful are in either irregular unions (cohabitation, divorced and remarried, gay relationships) and / or are practicing birth control. How to pastorally deal with these people was one of the central questions at the synod. On the other hand, overemphasizing the 'loving mother,' they feared, would give the impression that these were minor issues that could be ignored. People would conclude that all sexual unions are equal, and there is no reason to be married in the church.¹

The divorce and sexual revolutions have brought about huge changes in the traditional culture's support of lifelong marriage. In Western countries, cohabitation has become a widely accepted step in the journey toward marriage and also as a permanent alternative to marriage. Acceptance of the Catholic vision of marriage can no longer

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¹*Family Link*, Bulletin of the Archdiocesan Family Commission, Mumbai, 13, 2 (December 2014): 5 & 6.

Dorairaj, Lawrence Pius. "Reception of *Amoris Laetitia* in India." In *Vocation and Mission of the Family: Reflections on Chavarul and Amoris Laetitia*, edited by Shaji George Kochuthara, 270–280. Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2020.

be assumed, even among those adults who are weekly Mass-goers. The world has become a global village, so winds of the West are hovering over the Indian continent.

Yet, the optimism, the aspiration, the dream of the Indian family for life in fullness in the Reign of God is one that never fades. Even in the midst of apparently insurmountable misery, poverty, and other problems, Indian families live this hope not without reason with vibrant, even exuberant joy. The positive experiences of Indian families who find continuing happiness and well-being by being family are signals of the Spirit of God at work.² It is God's Spirit working in the cultures of India that sustains and explains the closeness, harmony, resilience, relative stability³ and many other positive values that endure in Indian families.

The Vision of Pope Francis: Joy of Love in the Family

From the commencement of his pontificate, Pope Francis had special love for the family because he was convinced of the teaching of Vatican II. The "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," *Gaudium et Spes*, affirmed that "the well-being of the individual person and of both human and Christian society is closely bound up with the healthy state of conjugal and family life," so that married people and parents may "fulfill their lofty calling."⁴ The post-conciliar Magisterium of Pope Francis has richly interpreted the Council's teaching, reminding us that the conjugal love of a man and a woman proclaims the same saving message that we hear each Sunday at Mass: "God loves his people."⁵

It is typical of Pope Francis to see "dramatic beauty" even in a family crisis, because it opens out life to new possibilities. When he rejects "cold bureaucratic morality," he is not pointing the way to a lukewarm, relativist attitude, but to greater generosity and deeper commitment. He admits that there is "no easy recipe," but invites pastors to be

²Cfr O. Dijkstra, *A Christian Response to the Gift of Human Sexuality* (Bangalore: CCBI Commission for Laity, 1987): 67.

³In comparison with West, marriage and family life is fairly stable in India. Cfr Antony Chundellikatt, "Pastoral and Theological Significance of the 'Catechism on Human Love' in Indian Context," *Anthropotes* 25, 1-2 (2009): 75.

⁴Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 47.

⁵John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 9.

conscientious and responsible in discernment. His aim is certainly not to water down the challenges of the Gospel, but their fuller realization.⁶ “The Pope suggests that different ways of interpreting Church teaching can co-exist in the Church with allowance for local needs and traditions in various countries or regions.”⁷

The family’s mission to others extends, therefore, to the social, cultural, political, and educational fields. The family “is one of the of the Church’s most effective agents of evangelization.”⁸ It is a challenge of empowering the family for mission by helping the members to live out their marriage and family life in accord with the values of God’s Reign or the teachings of the Gospel and of the Church. How this empowerment takes place has to be the principal concern of family ministry. Pope Francis’s teaching not only enlightens us but also acts as a guiding light to the family, Church and society.

Reception of *Amoris Laetitia*

1) AL is a very rich document. It incorporates the various findings of the two synods of Bishops and the interventions of synod fathers, the teachings of Vatican II, and those of Popes Paul VI, John Paul II and Benedict XVI on marriage and family.

2) There are a lot of insights in AL. To cite but a few—daily dialogue between married partners, only through long and patient practice one learns the art of dialogue the breath and heartbeat of love (AL 136). This is also insisted upon in the Marriage Encounter Movement. Children living in the natural and primary institution of family imbibe and internalize humanizing values and attitudes; are socialized to live in the greater home of the society, world and nature (AL 277). Family “has always been the nearest hospital” (AL 321), etc.

3) Pope Francis’ Apostolic Exhortation AL comes after *Misericordiae Vultus* (The Face of Mercy/compassion). The whole exhortation especially chapters 6 and 8 on Pastoral Concern and Practice reflects and manifests the church’s attitude of the compassionate love of Jesus. “Because of the variety of mitigating circumstances the partners living in irregular marriages may not be subjectively as guilty as it appears on

⁶John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 9.

⁷John Thavis, “*Amoris Laetitia* for Pastoral Flexibility,” *The Examiner*, April 23-29, 2016, 13.

⁸John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, 46.

the surface.” Hence, “church is called to witness Christ’s mercy in all situations.”

Responses from Bishops, priests and the laity indicate enthusiasm about AL and appreciation for its hope-filled positive tone about marriage. Many noted that the exhortation has been well received by Catholics as a whole in India and that the emphasis on accompanying marriages and families was particularly appreciated. Responses also affirmed the pastoral nature of AL, its wide-ranging scope and its positive tone. It was noted that media reports and comments have inclined at times to present a narrow-minded view of AL, with interest in only a few topics out of a wide range covered in the exhortation, and that this has sometimes presented a challenge to the proper reception of the document. The fundamentalist groups gave and still give negative propaganda to the Church’s teachings.

Responses from the survey conducted before the 29th Plenary Assembly of CCBI in 2017 indicated that more than 70% of the Latin dioceses animated seminars/ workshops on AL for the priests and the laity. Many Regional Bishops Councils had a study seminar on the document. A National Conference on “*Amoris Laetitia* and Evangelization of the Family” was held at Navajyoti Niketan Centre, Bihar Regional Pastoral Centre, Patna from 29th November to 1st December 2016. Six Bishops and 130 priests apart, 20 plus laity participated in the Conference. The CCBI Commission for Family conducted training seminars on AL in all 14 Regions of India for the Directors, Secretaries and laity involved in the family apostolate.

Delegates (priests and laity) from 41 dioceses participated in the National Symposium organized by the CCBI Commissions for Family and Doctrine and Theology, CBCI Office of Justice, Peace & Development, FIAMC Biomedical Ethics Centre, and Diocesan Human Life Committee, Mumbai, at St Pius X College, Goregaon, from Friday, October 13 to Sunday, October 15, 2017. The symposium was organized to have a deeper understanding of the Apostolic Exhortation AL, to reflect and to formulate a pastoral response to the call for strengthening, enriching and supporting families and gradually leading them to find joy in living the ideal concept of Christian marriage. The inputs covered a wide range of topics on marriage and family life from the biblical, theological, spiritual, moral, canonical, sociological, psychological, cultural, ecological, socio-economic, human and pastoral perspectives.

The laity participants present at the Symposium were able to assimilate different aspects of AL. At the symposium, it was clarified that the document AL reaffirms the traditional teachings of the Church on unity and indissolubility of marriage. All the participants were very responsive to the talks and took a positive message home.

The Church Hierarchy (Leadership)

A number of bishops and Catholic leaders said that reading and reflecting on AL has inspired further attention as to how Catholics in irregular marital situations can be welcomed, accompanied and integrated into the Church. Others reported that the exhortation has sparked discussion about how marriage preparation and marriage ministry ought to be renewed and strengthened in light of the document, for example by using mentor couples and providing ongoing support for couples in their early years and beyond. This was evident in the 29th Plenary Assembly of CCBI held at Bhopal in February 2017. The 29th Plenary Assembly was on the theme “*Promoting the Joy of Love in Our Families: Amoris Laetitia and its Message for India.*” Input sessions paved the way for the General Group Discussions and the Region-wise discussion aimed at drawing up an Action Plan.

During the Assembly, in the light of AL, the Bishops deliberated how families have their challenges due to poverty, unemployment, drug abuse, illiteracy, sickness, etc. Unemployment results in migration. Migration causes separation of spouses and due to this, children are neglected. Because of separation, there is also the risk of new uncalled for relationships. Alcoholism, negative influence of media, affiliation to different denominations, consumerism, use of contraceptives, emotional incompatibility, female foeticide, domestic violence, poor living conditions, landless farmers and mixed marriages are some of the reasons for the suffering families undergo.

What was remarkable was the fervour with which the Bishops participated in the group discussions. As Chairman of the CCBI Commission for Family I can say that there was no controversy or negative reaction from the Bishops even to chapter VIII of AL which has come under fire from many quarters.

However, there seems to be some reluctance from some of the Bishops to openly discuss chapter 8 of AL, among priests and faithful for fear of confusion, though AL no. 3 gives ample room for such

discussion, discernment, and decision in particular cases considering the context by National and Regional Bishops' Conferences.

In the Indian situation, Church's teachings are often contradictory to the government policies. The Church teaches openness to life, but government and social groups promote restrictions. There is an orchestrated campaign on the part of the government to say that small families are happy families. Moral and ethical values taught by the Church are seen as contradictory to the secular values. Christian teachings are seen as impractical, conservative and old fashioned. The Church's stand on contraception and homosexuality are difficult to understand. The Church is reluctant to allow divorce.⁹ The Bishops felt that AL is the guiding light in the present context. I am sure other sui-juris churches must have had extensive discussion on the document.

Interfaith Marriages: There is a great variety of situations in marriage and the family today, and they pose new challenges. The Holy Father makes an excellent expose of the difficulties and challenges of marriage and the family in AL. Pope Francis gives us almost a comprehensive list of the many of the complex situations that people are confronted within marriage and the family. However, Archbishop Felix Machado of Vasai empathetically states, "I expected some clear light from AL on the situation of interreligious marriages. However only passing mention is made about the phenomenon of the increasing number of interreligious Marriages."¹⁰

The Theologians and Clergy

The compassionate and loving concern of the person of Pope Francis and he being in touch with the ground realities of today's marriages and families, without simply moralizing and sermonizing, yet firmly upholding the basic traditional magisterial teaching on marriage and family are much appreciated by the Indian theologians.

AL has also stimulated discussion about what new forms of missionary activity can be explored and how clergy and other leaders can best respond to the needs of families today and accompany families,

⁹The 29th Plenary Assembly Report, Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI), Bangalore.

¹⁰Archbishop Felix Machado, "Understanding *Amoris Laetitia* in the Indian Situation: Implications of *Amoris Laetitia* for Pastoral Care and Ministry to Different Types of Families," National Symposium 2017, Mumbai.

particularly those in serious difficulties. Some priests desire to educate their parishioners about AL.

There was a 3-day National meeting held for the diocesan secretaries of the Family Commission at Velankanni recently. During that meeting the question of communion to the civilly divorced and remarried (Chapter VIII of AL) was discussed. There were more than 100 priest secretaries at the meeting. The vast majority of the priests welcomed Pope Francis's suggestion of discerning each case by the local Bishop and the parish priests as regards giving communion to the civilly divorced and remarried.

Quite a few clergy are of the opinion that there was no proper training given to them on AL and the church expects them to do self-study, which quite often is not practical or possible. Some clergy feel that a few dioceses arranged one or two sessions of AL and decided that that was all what was required. Quite a few of the clergy knew of the AL document and were able to recall the name of the document but few were able to explain the content to a reasonable degree of accuracy. Some slightly knowledgeable clergy knew about AL but had not taken any action quoting regular parish activities.¹¹

With regard to chapter 8 of AL, there had been a difference of opinion and thinking among priests and a few Bishops. Some of them welcome the new openings with regard to constantly accompanying broken and irregular marriages. Some others are of the opinion that Pope Francis seems to water down the traditional teaching on marriage and family. The former group of priests seems to uphold the new pastoral approach suggested in AL. AL has given room for a healthy discussion, especially giving communion to partners living in irregular marriage and trying to bring them to full communion into the church.

The Indian Church has become more aware of the sharp increase in divorces and subsequent remarriages, though in some quarters the idea that it is basically a Western problem continues to prevail.¹² In the past

¹¹Mr Alan Doulton, who is the part of *E-VAAC Group, Pune (a lay initiative)* who has provided various inputs, has a fairly good knowledge of Church activities across the country. After interacting with a number of clergy and laity he claimed that many did not know of AL.

¹²Shaji George Kochuthara, "Understanding *Amoris Laetitia* in the Indian Situation: Implications of *Amoris Laetitia* for Pastoral Care and Ministry to Different Types Of Families," National Symposium 2017, Mumbai.

the hierarchy and even faithful have taken a rigorous stand regarding persons in difficult or irregular situation.¹³ From the Indian pastoral perspective, it is safe to conclude that AL urges every pastor of souls to abandon the condemnatory attitude towards the divorced and remarried. However, some lay faithful are reluctant to accept the merciful approach to divorced and remarried.

Religious

A random sampling interview with some religious—both women and men—shows that the religious on the whole do not seem to have received AL with great interest or enthusiasm, just because most of them are either working in religious educational institutions or in healthcare or social service, etc. But some among them—particularly the priests and sisters who are involved in pastoral apostolate such as visiting families, preparing girls and boys for marriage, trying to help broken families and irregular marriage partners, etc., were interested in AL, and have taken part in meetings, discussions and debates on the document. Besides some religious—both men and women—who are teaching moral theology, ethics, etc. were involved in discussing AL at length particularly “in forming mature conscience in Christians and not replacing them.”

The Lay Faithful

AL was translated in vernacular languages, namely Hindi, Malayalam, Marathi, etc. so that common people can have access to the document. In some dioceses organized special input sessions/workshops on AL was conducted for the laity. Those laity who are involved in the parish activities like parish family cells, family movements were given some kind of orientation about AL.

Mr Alan Doulton, who is the part of *E-VAAC Group (a lay initiative), Pune* and who has a good knowledge of Church activities across the country, states that after interacting with a number of laity it was found that many did not know of AL and training and education of AL was next to negligible for laity as the clergy who were to impart training were themselves not trained. However, the simple commentary of I Corinthians 13:4-8 in AL is liked by many family people.

¹³Charles Bertille, “Marriage and Family in Asia Today in the Light of *Amoris Laetitia*,” *Word & Worship* 50, 1 (January–March 2017).

The compassionate Jesus' attitude towards irregular marriage partners is welcomed by many, especially the innocent partner in marriage. Together with this the non-condemnatory sympathetic attitude to homosexuals, people living together without proper marriage, etc. is also welcomed by the laity.

The presence of lay people, families, especially women in the formation of seminarians, including the experience of the broad oriental tradition of a married clergy is welcomed by family people.

There seems to be a better receptivity among partners living in irregular union and deserving to receive communion after due preparation and the sacrament of reconciliation and being reinserted into the community of the faithful.

During the diocesan directors/ secretaries' National Biennial meeting on 1st to 3rd October at the Basilica of Our Lady of Good Health, Vailankanni, Nagapattinam, Tamil Nadu, one of the sessions was devoted to the reception of AL. It was an open session moderated by Bishop Lawrence Pius and Fr X.D. Selvaraj. During the session, diocesan directors and the representatives of Family Movements appreciated the document. Among the pastoral arguments put forward regarding communion to the divorced and remarried, was, to quote the Pope in AL, "the Eucharist is not a prize for the perfect but a medicine for the sick" (AL, footnote 351). The counter arguments put forth by a few lay persons was that the Eucharist is to be taken in a state of grace, adultery cannot be condoned, and the prerequisite for communion was repentance. I quote from a letter from a western region couple who hold the view:

Your Lordship you will remember that..., many of the members declared point-blank that they do not promote AL because of the errors that we saw and even though they are ambiguous in AL, at least 4 Bishops' Conferences worldwide: Argentina, Belgium, Germany and Malta have interpreted AL as promoting communion to the divorced and remarried and Pope Francis has publicly endorsed the Argentine Bishops' promotion of this as the "correct interpretation."

Dear Bishop, it really saddens us to the core of our being, we who are striving to be holy and to be faithful to the Apostolic Tradition are being subjected to a studied and deafening silence in the face of our questions. It appears that our Shepherds and Pastors are taking the cue from Pope Francis, who publicly claims to be open to dialogue and welcomes it, but consistently replies with Silence when he is questioned.

Thus, we have noticed that a handful of the laity from family movements outrightly rejected chapter eight of AL. Some felt that the document speaks about different pastoral situations but does not speak about arranged marriage, dowry system, patriarchal system which is very peculiar to the Indian situation.

On the other hand, Archbishop Thomas Menamparampil writes:

Christians among tribal communities understand very well when the Pope says, "Large families are a joy for the Church," that a "kind look" is important, that the wider family of relatives and friends provides security and builds up confidence, that every member of the family and each individual child is "unique," that memories of old wounds need to be healed, that believing families should evangelize each other, and that a family spirituality should be fostered.¹⁴

Conclusion

Pope Francis is proposing a model of Church leadership and pastoral activity that is modelled on Jesus, who was not afraid to reach out to sinners and the lost, to engage them as people in the often difficult circumstances of their lives. Francis is calling the Church to a deeper conversion than a mere change in the rules.¹⁵ He reminds the whole Church that this great enterprise of evangelization and theology and pastoral accompaniment must flow from the root of the Christian Gospel, and not let any theological or cultural or canonical encrustations frustrate the Church from its primary mission of announcing that Gospel, most especially to the poor and the marginalized, the Gospel of Mercy.

AL was well received in the Indian diaspora. Moreover, as Fr K. Poovathumkudy observes:

Many feel that AL has definitely brought some fresh air into married life. Its warm encouragement to families to place love at the center of their lives, its clear invitation to pastors to accompany Catholics in the "complexity" of their situations and its strong reminder that the Church needs to recover an appreciation of the role of conscience have been

¹⁴Thomas Menamparampil, "Amoris Laetitia as seen from India," *Crux* April 13, 2016, 6.

¹⁵<http://ncronline.org/blogs/distinctly-catholic/amoris-laetitia-francis-challenges-church>.

welcomed by millions of Catholics as a sign that the Church wants to meet them where they are.¹⁶

The Christian community as a whole should be made aware of the thrust of AL so that its members can extend the hand of friendship and acceptance to those who feel isolated and distanced from the Church because of their marital situation. Compassionate pastoral concern can take the form of a group where the pastor works with a team of lay professionals (lawyers, counsellors, persons in stable marriages, etc.) offering assistance to those in difficult marital situations or irregular unions.¹⁷

Finally, we cannot reduce the entire document to an argument over whether divorced and remarried persons could receive Holy Communion. It would be doing injustice to AL and the vision of Pope Francis concerning marriage and family.

¹⁶Kuriakose Poovathumkudy, "Amoris Laetitia—Celebration of Family Love," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 80 (December 2016): 23.

¹⁷Errol D'Lima, SJ, "Mercy to those Living in Difficult Marital Situations," *Journal of Indian Theology* 9, 2 (May–August 2016) 48.

PASTORAL ACCOMPANIMENT: *AMORIS LAETITIA* AS A PARADIGM?

Antonio Autiero♦

The figure of accompaniment, linked to that of discernment, takes on a very specific significance in the ethical and pastoral vocabulary of recent decades. The Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (AL) by Pope Francis has made a central contribution to the rediscovery of the importance of this idea.¹ Taking up once more the principle of the primacy of time over space, which had already been declared in *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG 222-225), AL elaborates a scenario of the relationship between values and norms and between doctrine and praxis that refuses to be constricted into the mere linear logic of the deductive application of the former to the latter. Instead, AL postulates a circularity in the relationship between experience and values, and between praxis and theory, to such an extent that a reciprocal “contamination” of the two spheres becomes transparent, with significant implications.²

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¹Daniel J. Fleming, “‘All Who Saw It Began to Grumble’: Reflections on Accompaniment and Conscience transformation,” in *The Catholic Ethicist in the Local Church*, ed. Antonio Autiero and Laurence Magesa (Maryknoll/NY: Orbis Books, 2018), 42–55.

²I further develop this thesis of “contaminating proximity” between Moral Theology and Pastoral Theology in my “*Amoris laetitia* tra teologia pastorale e

Autiero, Antonio. “Pastoral Accompaniment: *Amoris Laetitia* as a Paradigm?” In *Vocation and Mission of the Family: Reflections on Chavarul and Amoris Laetitia*, edited by Shaji George Kochuthara, 281–291. Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2020.

The topic of accompaniment is articulated fully in Chapter VIII of AL, in the framework of the triad of “Accompanying, discerning, and integrating weakness” (219–292), but it is present throughout the entire discourse of AL.³

I should like to take two steps in my reading of the topic of accompaniment. The first step goes backwards, in a certain sense, in order to bring out some aspects of its importance. My starting point will be the genesis of the term “accompaniment” itself. The second step seeks to move ahead and grasp better the contents of accompaniment. Here, I shall follow the axis of the intersection between the pastoral meaning and the ethical meaning of accompaniment.

Genesis

The idea of accompaniment is a very rich idea, present in many strands of thought. We find it in the different traditions of spiritual theology, as a leading idea for the direction of souls, by monks and masters of the spirit.⁴ Likewise, it is present in the currents of pedagogical thought, especially in relation to developmental age.⁵

In a more exquisitely theological context, the idea of accompaniment is articulated in the Latin American horizon of liberation theology. In this sense Staughton Lynd’s supposition is interesting when he writes: “The Practice that came to be called ‘accompaniment’ was widespread among followers of liberation theology in the 1970s and 1980s. Oscar Romero, Archbishop of El Salvador from 1977 until his assassination in 1980, was apparently the first person to use the term.”⁶

To approach the theme more consistently, we must note the use of the term in the sphere of medical ethics. It was, above all, attention to

teologia morale,” in *Per una nuova cultura pastorale. Il contributo di Amoris laetitia*, ed. Antonio Autiero (Milano: Edizioni San Paolo, 2019), 23–39.

³The centrality of Chapter VIII is outside any discussion. For this reason, it deserves special attention. However, it must not be isolated from the context of the entire apostolic exhortation. A very interesting key to this chapter is offered by Francesco Card. Coccopalmerio, *A Commentary on Chapter Eight of Amoris Laetitia* (Mahwah/NY: Paulist Press, 2017).

⁴See Raimondo Frattallone, *Direzione spirituale. Un cammino verso la pienezza della vita in Cristo* (Roma: LAS, 2006).

⁵Renato Palma, “Educazione come accompagnamento,” *Educazione aperta* 4 (2018): 209-216.

⁶Staughton Lynd, *Accompanying: Pathways to Social Change* (Oakland/CA: PM Press, 2013), 83.

problems connected with death and dying that generated a strong emphasis on the category and the metaphor of accompanying, as a new form of the relationship between the patient, the dying person, and the one who assisted him or her.

In the 1980s, Paul Sporken, the Dutch moral theologian and bioethicist, made use of the term “accompaniment” (*Begeleiding—Begleitung*) and demonstrated the differentiated character of its semantics.⁷ In general, this concept implies both the attitude of one who guides another person along a certain path and the presence of the one who helps that person to walk along the path that has been identified.

Accompaniment includes every attempt to stand alongside the other as a human person, to discover and to appreciate all of his or her possibilities. Accompaniment does not mean solving the problems of the other, or taking his place by bearing his burden, but supporting him in such a way that he can tackle his own problems and lead his own life.⁸

The genesis of the concept of accompaniment and its reference to the field of medicine and health lead to two particular emphases.

The first concerns the significance of accompaniment in the physiological process of the growth and the coming to maturity of a person. AL demonstrates the pedagogical meaning of this kind of accompaniment and relates it to moral discernment, which “is dynamic; it must remain ever open to new stages of growth and to new decisions which can enable the ideal to be more fully realized” (AL 303).⁹ This path of growth, in the ethical sense, is open to “the Gospel demands of truth and charity, as proposed by the Church” (AL 300). This is why Pope Francis emphasizes that it is important to “encourage the development of an enlightened conscience, formed and guided by the responsible and serious discernment of one’s pastor, and to encourage an ever greater trust in God’s grace” (AL 303).

We can define the second focus in the concept of accompaniment as its “therapeutic” character. Here, it means a “treatment” that is based on

⁷Paul Sporken, *Begleitung in schwierigen Lebenssituationen. Ein Leitfaden für Helfer* (Freiburg i.Br.: Herder, 1984).

⁸Paul Sporken, *Begleitung in schwierigen Lebenssituationen*, 24.

⁹The dynamic nature of accompaniment and discernment emphasizes the sense of time, of processuality in the moral and pastoral itinerary, as well articulated by Alain Matheeux, “Le discernement pastoral après *Amoris laetitia*: découvrir le kairos,” *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 139, 4 (2017): 587–604.

the concept of taking care of the other, of his/her fragilities, and of his/her problems. AL displays a particular sensitivity with regard to this medicinal and therapeutic dimension of discernment and of accompaniment, when the text describes the relationship between the pastor and the persons who are entrusted to his care or who seek in him a guide. This accompaniment cannot be based on the reduction of one in a fragile situation to an object in the hands of another person who thinks that he is able to accompany him and heal him. The specific character of the relationship between mature and responsible subjects entails a form of closeness to the other that does not deprive him or her of the prerogative of being a subject who takes one's own life in one's hands, and who walks on the path that opens up before him/her. For this reason, AL does not breathe the air of paternalism. It opens up a paradigmatic vision of a responsible and relational autonomy.

Articulations

It is undoubtedly true that AL has a typically pastoral character.¹⁰ But this does not mean that Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation contains nothing more than indications about the practical strategies that are to be employed in order to tackle the topics of the family and of marriage. On the contrary, this text contains a systematic discourse on the meaning of love and of the realizations of love in the history of persons and of families. The systematic focus allows it to touch on points that are doctrinal to the highest degree, especially in the field of the ethics of the conjugal and family relationship, and more generally with regard to the moral vision of what persons are. In this sense, the category of accompaniment also acquires a particular meaning as a moral category, not only as a pastoral category. It also sounds like a fruitful provocation for the re-understanding of the role of the moral theologian and of the nature of his/her theological work.¹¹

In this second step of my reading of this topic, I should like to identify some articulations of the concept of accompaniment that can better show the expressive power of something that touches the field of fundamental moral theology itself.

¹⁰This is particularly well expressed by Antonio Spadaro, "*Amoris Laetitia: Struttura e significato dell'Esortazione apostolica post-sinodale di Papa Francesco*," *La Civiltà Cattolica* II (2016): 105–128.

¹¹Conor M. Kelly, "The Role of the Moral Theologian in the Church: A Proposal in Light of *Amoris laetitia*," *Theological Studies* 77 (2016): 922–948.

Accompaniment and Imagination

In a genuinely theological context, the term “imagination” is used in a particular and profitable way by David Tracy in recent decades. For Tracy the way of “analogical imagination” allows theology as a whole to be a significant and distinct voice in the cultural horizon of today’s pluralism.¹² This is reflected in Nicolas Steeves’ articulated inquiry into the use of the category of imagination which extends from fundamental theology to various other areas of theology, particularly touching theological ethics.¹³ Not to be overlooked would also be the close and complex relationship that John Henry Newman draws between imagination, *phronesis* and conscience, bearing in mind the broad horizon of the experience of faith, as a recent study by Bernard Dive well highlights.¹⁴

Traditional ethics—and this is true of moral theology also—has always appealed to a rational structure in its description of the moral subject and of the ways to establish the norms to which this subject must pay heed. Philosophical anthropology likewise emphasized strongly this dominant—or “formal” (in Kant’s vocabulary)—character of the reason, leaving the world of feelings and of moral intuition on the second level. However, Max Scheler, with his critique of Kant, has taught us how important it is to recover this sphere of feeling, which constitutes an autonomous epistemological field, because it is endowed with original contents of its own that are related intentionally to the values.¹⁵

More recently, the Italian philosopher Laura Boella has initiated a rehabilitation of the moral imagination by means of an appreciation of the intuition of values, as an opening on to the ethical dimension of human life.¹⁶ It is precisely by means of the moral imagination that

¹²David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981).

¹³Nicolas Steeves, *Grace à l’imagination. Intégrer l’imagination en théologie fondamentale* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cherf, 2016). See in particular chapter VII: “Éthique et imagination,” 381–424.

¹⁴Bernard Dive, *John Henry Newman and the Imagination* (New York: T&T Clark Bloomsbury, 2018).

¹⁵See Max Scheler, *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik: Neuer Versuch der Grundlegung eines ethischen Personalismus* (Halle a.d.S.: Niemeyer, 1927).

¹⁶L. Boella, *Il coraggio dell’etica. Per una nuova immaginazione morale* (Milano: Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2012).

“there takes place a widening of perception. One sees not only data and things, but meanings and values. Disparate elements of reality enter into contact with each other [...]. The imagination can be considered a true and specific organ that widens and deepens the perception of reality.”¹⁷

In its appeal to accompaniment, AL inspires an ethical vision that is based first and foremost on horizons of life, on projects regarding one’s own self and one’s own relationships. These are not fixed from the outside but arise from the personal imagination and from the interpersonal encounter. The conscience becomes the place where such projects are perceived, where one’s own moral profile is established. The conscience is the source of the responsibility for realizing this profile as well as possible in one’s life story. This is why a serious and constructive accompaniment leads pastors “to form consciences, not to replace them” (AL 37).

Accompaniment and Argumentation

AL gives us a severe and demanding diagnosis of the conception of morality that is based on rigid norms that are often absolutized on a pretext of doctrinal objectivity that pays little attention either to the value of the moral truths for praxis or to the context of the life story in which each one must make his or her ethical choices.¹⁸

Accompaniment is not at the service of such an ethical vision. Instead, it helps to rediscover the existential, dynamic, and sometimes conflictual dimension of moral demands. Accordingly, accompanying means going back to the life story, to the unfolding of the personal biographies with their evolutions and their complications. The relationship to the norms is mediated by argumentation, both in establishing the norms themselves and in evaluating whether and how they can and must be followed. A moral theology based on obedience to the norms is replaced by an itinerary of considering the moral goods and values in their relationship to the life of persons, and with recourse to the practical reason that argues in each specific instance in view of the ethical choices that are to be taken.

¹⁷Laura Boella, *Il coraggio dell’etica*, 170.

¹⁸“We have long thought that simply by stressing doctrinal, bioethical and moral issues, without encouraging openness to grace, we were providing sufficient support to families, strengthening the marriage bond and giving meaning to marital life” (AL 37).

To refuse such a vision, by conjuring up the spectre of a presumed and dangerous “situation ethics,” or even more by appealing to the objective value of the norms themselves, distorts the meaning of history and of people’s life stories in their anthropological aspect—which ultimately is also a theological aspect. An ethics that is substantiated by accompaniment corrects the narrownesses of an objective moral theology, opening it up to a salvation-historical dimension that must not be neglected. Cataldo Zuccaro has written that

The discernment carried out by the Christian brings into play a theology of history and, in a special manner, a theology of the situation. This kind of situation must not be seen as a mere fragment or an isolated moment within the horizon of history. Rather, without losing anything of the value of its singularity, it is integrated into the eschatological dynamism of the existence of the believer in Christ. And this is why it is oriented to the *eschaton*.¹⁹

Accompaniment and Narrative

A third articulation connected to accompaniment and to discernment brings us to the relationship between action and narrative, an open and fertile field that has been the subject of considerable reflection in recent decades, both in moral philosophy and in theological ethics.²⁰ There is a growing awareness that narrative does not belong to the epidermic sphere that is secondary in ethics, but shares in the vital space of the genesis of moral discourse.

The task of accompaniment, as this is described in AL, can find interesting and decisive cues in the narrative approach in ethics, which give the act of accompanying the value of a relational circuit that is open and reciprocal, and that is attentive to the experience that is lived by the subjects who are involved. The narrative figure means that

¹⁹Cataldo Zuccaro, “L’esercizio del discernimento nel nostro tempo,” in *Il discernimento. “Questo tempo non sapete valutarlo?”* (Lc 12, 56), ed. Armando Matteo (Città del Vaticano: Urbaniana University Press, 2018), 13–39, 22.

²⁰On this, see William J. Ellos, *Narrative* (Avebury: Routledge, 1994); *Narrative Ethik. Das Gute und das Böse erzählen*, ed. Karen Joisten (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2007); *Ethik und Erzählung. Theologische und philosophische Beiträge zur narrativen Ethik*, ed. Marco Hofheinz (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 2009); Francesca Cattaneo, *Azione e narrazione. Percorsi del narrativismo contemporaneo* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 2008); Francesca Cattaneo, *Etica e narrazione. Il contributo del narrativismo contemporaneo* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 2011).

accompaniment loses its paternalistic valences, reducing to the minimum the risk that one may indoctrinate the other person thanks to an asymmetry of the roles and of the respective ranks in the church and in society.

The narrative is not an account of what has happened, but the framework on which one can weave visions of life and of history, the relevance of subjectivity and of relationships, openness to the table of values, and discernment of the concrete choices that must be taken in order to realize these values. In this sense, the narrative brings into circulation a dense web of experiences that have been lived, reflected upon, and communicated. And these experiences open up creative horizons in terms of the reciprocity of subjects, all of whom are under way in the stories of their lives.

Recognizing the ethical-practical valency of narrative leads to the generation of attitudes that are appropriate, calibrated, and responsible. The testing ground of a narrative that is appropriate or inappropriate, in the course of accompaniment, consists precisely in the modality of the use of language itself. This can be persuasive and convincing, but it can also be dominating and manipulative; it can be aggressive and exclusive, just as it can also be inclusive, moderate, and respectful. Above all, the use of language can be assertive and dogmatically ideological; but it can also be argumentative and open with regard to the results that one wants to obtain or can obtain.

We must take very seriously the insistent appeal of AL to the pastoral wisdom of the one who is called “to accompany with mercy and patience the eventual stages of personal growth as these progressively appear” (308). But this wisdom also leads those pastors who practice accompaniment to feel that they themselves need to be accompanied, in a communicative circuit of life that makes each one more open to the good, and also more conscious of one’s own wounds. Knowing how to narrate life stories to each other unleashes energies that expand the network of relationships that heal and that impart a strong sense of the realism of history. This is the context of the appeal to a “gradualness in pastoral care” (AL 293) in which “the invitation to pursue the *via caritatis* must be clearly heard” (AL 306).

The willingness to set out on a path translates into existential and concrete terms the ethos of synodality that must look, not only at the institutional structures, but also at the life of persons and of communities. A similar ethos of synodality ultimately represents an

indispensable resource for the church to adequately carry out her mission today.²¹

Accompaniment and Transformation

By relating the term accompaniment to the Latin American language of liberation theology, as we have indicated above, we gain a very important starting point for understanding the accompanying dynamic as a dynamic of transformation. This is because we know that for liberation theologians, the practice of theology is itself aimed at the transformation of praxis, at the recognition of the conditioning structures and at overcoming them. The expectation of “a new heavens and a new earth” (2 Pt 3:13) is not postponed beyond the present life but finds its beginning in a liberated and liberating personal and community life. The action of the One who says of himself: “I am making everything new!” (Rev 21:5), brings into play a dynamic of salvation which runs through history and brings it to its fulfilment. Theology, with its reflection and its praxis, takes care of reality and accompanies it on the path of renewal and transformation.

According to Gustavo Gutiérrez, “The theology of liberation attempts to reflect on the experience and meaning of the faith based on the commitment to abolish injustice and to build a new society... Liberation from every form of exploitation, the possibility of a more human and dignified life, the creation of a new humankind.”²² And for the Salvadorian bishop Oscar Romero, all this is expressed in the idea of transfiguration, which he assumes as a paradigm of his theology and his praxis of pastoral accompaniment.²³

AL makes an impressive juxtaposition between accompaniment and change, transformation, growth, things that touch the lives of individuals and the quality of love relationships: “Change, improvement, the flowering of the good qualities present in each person—all these are possible. Each marriage is a kind of “salvation

²¹Richard E. Gaillardetz, “Does Synodality Help the Church Live Out Her Mission Today?,” in *Amoris Laetitia. A New Momentum for Moral Formation and Pastoral Practice*, ed. Grant Gallicho and James F. Keenan SJ (Mahwah/NJ: Paulist Press 2018), 130-135.

²²Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation* (Maryknoll/NY: Orbis Books, 2000 [20th edition]), 174.

²³Margaret R. Pfeil, “Oscar Romero’s Theology of Transfiguration,” *Theological Studies* 72 (2011): 87-115.

history,” which from fragile beginnings—thanks to God’s gift and a creative and generous response on our part—grows over time into something precious and enduring” (AL 221).

But transformation and growth concern not only the practical forms of life, but also the awareness and knowledge of the truths by which it must be inspired. Here there is a very close relationship between fidelity to doctrine and the need for the renewal and reconstruction of love relationships. Those who face this problem with static paradigms of respect for orthodoxy, that is, of the doctrines that the tradition hands down to us, but ignore the evolution of life stories and the incidence of fragility, which cries out for mercy, posit an undue contrast between this and to the truth, ignoring the central approach taken by the Post-Synodal Exhortation. Indeed: “The challenge of receiving AL will be discerning how mercy and truth fit together.”²⁴

And Pope Francis warns in *Evangelii Gaudium*:

There are times when the faithful, in listening to completely orthodox language, take away something alien to the authentic Gospel of Jesus Christ, because that language is alien to their own way of speaking to and understanding one another. With the holy intent of communicating the truth about God and humanity, we sometimes give them a false god or a human ideal which is not really Christian (EG 41).

A sensitive and sincere accompaniment pays particular attention to the life story, to one’s own and that of others, recognizing the authenticity of evolutionary processes, even when they pass through failure and open up to reconstruction. Precisely this “truth of life,” to use the expression of Adrian VI,²⁵ can become a highway to a creative look at the truth of the Gospel and its possible forms of implementation in history.

Conclusion

My intention here has been to offer a brief summary of what seems to me the essential nucleus of what AL has to say on the topic of

²⁴Julie Hanlon Rubio, “The Newness of *Amoris Laetitia*: Mercy and Truth, Truth and Mercy,” in *Amoris Laetitia. A New Momentum...*, 61–69, 62.

²⁵See Rudolf B. Hein, *Gewissen bei Adrian von Utrecht (Hadrian VI.)*, *Erasmus von Rotterdam und Thomas More. Ein Beitrag zur systematischen Analyse des Gewissensbegriffs in der katholischen nordeuropäischen Renaissance* (Münster: LIT-Verlag, 1999), 228–232.

accompaniment. I believe that we can conclude that to call this accompaniment “pastoral” must not lead us to reduce it merely to a complex of operative strategies that are adapted in some way to changed situations. The accompaniment and discernment of which *AL* speaks are much more than solely pastoral. They form a part of the theoretical structure of the moral vision and bring with them the whole nexus of concepts and categories that govern the path of the renewal of moral theology, as a fruit of the Second Vatican Council.

Ultimately, they give proof of the idea that precisely *Amoris Laetitia* is a turning point in moral theology.²⁶

Yes, indeed: *AL* can be taken as a paradigm for understanding today the complexity, but also the fruitfulness, of ethical-theological discourse, and it can inspire existential praxis and visions of the church that are capable of having a future.²⁷

²⁶For a recent discussion of this question, see *Amoris laetitia. Un punto di svolta per la teologia morale?*, ed. Stephan Goertz and Caroline Witting, (Italian version edited by Antonio Autiero, Milano: Edizioni San Paolo, 2017).

²⁷Christoph Theobald, “Il corraggio di anticipare il futuro della chiesa,” *Concilium* 54 (2018/4): 21–31.

FAMILY TODAY:
REFLECTIONS IN LIGHT OF *CHAVARUL* AND
AMORIS LAETITIA

Keynote 3

FAMILY: CHALLENGES AHEAD

Jose Kuriedath, CMI♦

As we are all brought up in a family, we feel at the gut level the challenges the family faces today, even if our knowledge may not be scientifically supported or articulated. Hence my job in this address is to delineate some of the most important among these challenges from a sociological perspective. So, without a long introduction, I go straight to the chief points I would like to highlight and discuss.

From Roles to Persons

Probably the most serious challenge the family faces in modern times is the importance it gives now to persons than their roles. This challenge is the result of a paradigm shift in the vision of family. Traditional family was built on the well-defined roles each member was expected to perform according to the cultural demands of the society. Depending on the roles, each member was assigned a specific position or status in the family. Both were well recognized by the society and solidly established through long traditions.

In the traditional family, it was these roles, rather than the persons which were related to, and interacted with each other. These well-defined roles determined all processes within a family. The persons were selected and/or groomed by the society to perform the expected

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Kuriedath, Jose. "Family: Challenges Ahead." In *Vocation and Mission of the Family: Reflections on Chavarul and Amoris Laetitia*, edited by Shaji George Kochuthara, 295–308. Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2020.

roles. These roles were also neatly matched and meshed like interlocking gear wheels. As long as the roles were performed well, the family was considered well-built and healthy, irrespective of the individual satisfaction of the persons performing the roles.

Today, however, all these are undergoing a paradigmatic change. Marriage is being considered the relationship of two persons. They are assumed to enter into such a relationship for their well-being—physical, sexual, emotional and social. It is these two persons who are determining who should do what for obtaining the well-being or satisfaction. Here the roles become secondary and changeable, and the person and his/her fulfilment become supreme. The family roles undergo changes or even disappear for the sake of the persons. In this perspective, marriage comes into being through a personal decision of two people, consequent to getting to know each other and falling in love, and hence can be terminated in the same manner. Marriage and the family should not hinder the freedom of the partners to pursue their career and fulfilment. The family stability depends not on the established social roles, but on the expectations, emotions and fulfilment of the persons. Hence family stability becomes vulnerable. If the role-demands and expectations had been persuading the members to make sacrifices for successfully playing the roles, the emphasis on persons, on the other hand, persuades them now to seek personal fulfilment through the family, and if the family is found to be not very conducive to provide fulfilment, people are ready to quit.

The assertion of individuality is a key feature of an urban society. The importance given to collectivity in a tribal and rural society disappears in the urban society, and the collectivity is conceived as a mere help to the growth of the individual. In other words, the individual becomes supreme and absolute, while the collectivity is downgraded as secondary and relative. Those who enter into marriage with this vision have no qualms in quitting it, if and when the bond is seen or experienced as a bondage of the individual. So, the challenge before us is: In a culture in which the individual and his/her career is glorified and conceived as the goal of life, how can we maintain a balance between the importance of the individual and that of the family?

Personal Selection of Spouse and Growing Importance of Romantic Love

Consequent to the importance the individual is gaining in family, probably the fastest change and challenge the institution of marriage faces in the Indian society is the gradual shift from arranged to personally selected partnership in marriage. As we know, in arranged marriages, it is not the mutual liking and attraction, but the decision of the elders on the basis of suitability from the point of view of caste, class, religion, family background, etc. that forms the family base. In personal selection, on the other hand, it is the liking, attraction and love that is often the sole basis of selection. Other considerations like caste, class, etc. do not come into the picture directly, and if at all, these are found to be agreeable in such a selection, mostly it is due to the influence of the subconscious attitude of the partners and the social circle in which they move about. If one or more of such factors do not coincide with the expectations of the elders, the selection becomes unacceptable in the families, creating estrangement of relations, non-cooperation or even rejection from the part of the parents, sometimes even leading to what is now called 'honour killings.' This challenge is definitely growing and spreading very fast in all sections of the Indian society due to the free mingling of men and women in educational institutions and employment fields, and because women are becoming economically self-reliant.

Here, the challenge is not merely the difficulty in accepting a different pattern of partner selection and consequent side-lining of parental authority. Definitely they are there and are themselves grave issues in a traditional society. Under this shift lies a more serious issue—that of accepting the public expression of romantic love or *pranayam* between man and woman in our society. If you ask the old generation whether they have had *pranayam* in their life, i.e., even after marriage, the answer is usually a 'No.' Of course, the husband and wife accepted each other and loved each other in the sense of doing their duties or pre-defined roles, for the sake of the other. Apart from that, our Indian families did not have room, in its physical as well as social sense to express their emotional love freely. In other words, *pranayam* was out of the picture of an Indian family, even though it is being depicted in our cinemas for at least six to seven decades now. Since it was not expressed even within the family, I need not say, it was never

ever considered socially acceptable in the open society. As it is socially unacceptable, the modern-day youngsters, who feel this *pranayam* to someone, while studying, working or mingling together in the society, try, unlike in western societies, to hide it from the elders as if it is something evil. Consequently, they do not get any guidance from the latter during this period and several of them fall prey to their own immaturity in choosing and relating to the partner.

So, I think, the most important challenge ahead in our Indian society is to develop a harmonious mixing and balancing of the growing number of personal selections with parental guidance. And for this the society needs to undergo a deep attitudinal change with regard to the role of *pranayam* between men and women both before and after marriage.

The role of romantic love in marriage is gaining importance due to another reason also. In the pre-industrial agrarian society, it was the family and groups of related families that functioned as the agent of most of the functions of the society. The different layers of such functions helped the family to strengthen the bond among its members. Today, many of such functions have been taken over by the state/society and we are already used to the changes. In recent times, however, the state/society seems to be intruding further into the family, leaving practically romantic love alone as the bonding base of the latter. A few of the very recent examples of such take-over by the society with consequent weakening of family bond are: the care of the elderly, society's rules regarding the bringing up and disciplining of children, the ease of communication available beyond family boundaries with the help of modern technology. Such over-arching functions of the society have, so to say, liberated the individual from the control of the family and brought it under its own, so much so that the family has now been reduced to a fragile unit with few strengthening functions.

Patriarchy and Empowerment of Women

Probably, one of the most explosive challenges the modern families, especially of educated couples, in India faces is the tension rising from the difficulty in shifting from a patriarchal power style to a power sharing mode. In modern families, there arise not rarely two power centres—husband and wife. Not only of husband and wife or father and mother, but also of the children who are also gradually becoming

capable decision makers due to education and exposure to the outside world. Hence the families are forced to joint decision making, rather than the male-centred pattern of the past. In this context, a great deal of re-learning has to take place—the males learning to adjust to the new and growing power of women and children, the females and the youngsters to make responsible decisions without the support of the traditional patriarchal structure. The joint decision-making pattern that emerges can nurture a covenantal relationship more efficiently and help the growth of the spouses as one unit and in unity. This pattern can also falter if the egos of the spouses come in the way of the give and take that becomes necessary in a joint decision-making process. Social psychologists would point out that in such patterns of decision making, the compromises from both sides are not always possible; sometimes one has to concede to the other, and at other times, they may have to agree to disagree with dignity and without bitter feelings, and learn to celebrate the differences in perceptions and interests.

Though the male domination and the patriarchal style exist in the general society also, there it has not yet created enough tension to generate an explosive situation. (Still, we may recall the questions heard and widely applauded in a recent movie (*How old are you?*), like ‘Why have there been only one woman President and one woman Prime Minister out of the 28 presidents and prime ministers of independent India? Was it because there have been no capable women or due to something else?’ or ‘Who fixes the expiry date of women’s dreams and ambitions?’). Even so, the society continues to tolerate it. But it is not so in families.

Decline of Parental Authority and New Patterns of Decision Making

Though I mentioned above in passing about the decision making by children, it needs to be analysed further. In the past in large families, there existed what may be called two ‘worlds’—the adult world and the children’s world. There existed a respectable separation between the two in several functions. A number of activities like working, eating, spending leisure time, etc. were carried out within the subgroups rather than in the whole family. From the perspective of the children, the mother and/or senior female members remained closer to them than the male members. Psychologically speaking, the father was a distant figure, who spent more time outside, who did not usually or often

engage in intimate physical contacts with the children, and to whom all the cases for decision making, particularly those of disciplinary issues were ultimately referred. Moreover, due to the low and negligible status given to the children, no serious issues or family problems were discussed in their presence.

Today, however, things have drastically changed. Due to the small size of the family, all family activities take place as a single unit, in which the children get involved fully along with the parents. (We should remember that there exist no adults other than the parents in a nuclear family). On account of the ongoing and constant interactions between the parents and the children in family activities, and also of other factors like better education, etc., the parents have become today the friends of their children. Like friends, together they engage in several activities like spending time together for watching TV, playing indoor games, discussing socio-cultural events, going out for shopping or relaxation, etc. When I was a kid, though my father loved me very much and took care of all my needs, I did not consider him, nor did he consider me, as a friend. Friendship, as we know, entails mutuality and generally speaking equality also. This psychological transformation has considerably affected the parental authority. Though the development of more intimacy and consequent friendship between parents and children is in itself a positive change, there is a flip side to this. A friend can never enforce his decision, he can only persuade and encourage; so, in case of conflict of interests or values particularly due to the immaturity of the children, the parents become rather helpless without sufficient enforcement power. I need not explain to you how this change affects the formation process of the children.

The above noted decline of parental authority, the better education and exposure of the children to the outside world and the increased influence of peer groups in the modern educational institutions, and such other factors have created a condition in which the children are given freedom as well as opportunity to take more and more decisions. Many of the decisions the parents took in the past for the sake of the children are now being actually taken by the children themselves, parents giving a final approval just for the sake of formality. The choice of utility articles including not only dress or ornaments but even equipment for personal contacts like internet, mobile phone, etc., the creation of friendship circle, the manner and frequency of contacts with

them, journeys not only in large groups but even in small groups of friends, etc. are some of the significant among them. Even though the matters on which decisions are made may appear to be not very major, the power ambience it creates provides sufficient freedom and independence to the youngsters, so much so that they feel free from the tutelage of the parents much ahead of reaching the maturity for taking major decisions. And, not seldom, the children take some major decisions without sufficient reflection, surprising their parents and often damaging their future itself. The formation of serious relationship leading to socially or religiously unacceptable marriage, morally and even legally harmful relationships, etc. are a couple of them. Here again, due to the loss of authority, the parents ultimately turn out to be spectators with ambivalent feelings. Such decisions also reflect the declining hold of value formation in the individuals, about which I shall speak elsewhere below.

Growing Number of Small Families and Decline of Christian Population

Probably the most conspicuous social change which many have already noticed and discussed, and which some bishops, priests and volunteer organizations have tried to address with debatable success and acceptance is the growth in the number of small families in the Catholic community—small numerically and generationally, while the general population in India is growing fast. Both types of changes have raised a number of issues that we need to address, even though solutions may not be easy.

Though the decline in the number of children generates issues like the dwindling percentage of the Catholics in the general population, and the narrowing pool of prospective candidates to priesthood and religious life, my main concern is not such problems. However, a word may be said about the first consequence. I do not consider the declining percentage of the community in the general population a permanent or lasting feature, when you consider it from the long range of history. The deliberate reduction in the number of children should be perceived from the changing scenario of most Catholic families. As the present generation is getting highly educated and moving out of their traditional agrarian occupations to more city-based jobs, the large number of children becomes more an economic liability than an asset,

unless they are capable of competing and winning coveted urban jobs (which need not be the case in most families). Even if they get well educated and obtain jobs of their ambition, the money being spent for the training for such jobs is, as we know, several times more than what needs to be spent for the mastery of skills for an agriculture-related job. Apart from those who still emotionally hold on to the agricultural background, the others who move closer to the towns and cities live in small plots of housing which cannot be subdivided into several smaller units (for the sake of children). As the family settles down permanently in urban areas, the agricultural land becomes a burden and is gradually sold out either for want of time for care and cultivation, or for the sake of capital investments for the urban way of life including the educational expenses of the children, except in the case of highly rich families. Besides, as the number of women working outside the family has considerably increased, it becomes rather impossible for them to set apart long years for pregnancy and child-care (for the sake of several children). These are probably the chief reasons why the modern urban couples opt for small families. I expect that, as the other communities also begin to go through this dynamics of social advancement in large numbers, their percentage will also come down, finally settling down to the pattern of population that existed during the time of large families in all communities. Recently it was reported that even the traditional Muslim community has begun to grow less fast compared to the previous decades, probably indicating the effect of education in that community.

Challenge of Maintaining Community Culture in Trans-local Families

Today, the Christian families are migrating to various parts of the world in large numbers, probably more in percentage than other religious communities. These trans-local families live in a cultural milieu quite different from the religious and ritual culture of their native community. In spite of the efforts of the Church to accompany them and provide pastoral care and faith formation, I doubt if these families have been made sufficiently capable of keeping up their religious and social traditions. The success in empowering these families to meet the challenges of keeping up the family culture in a new social milieu, I think, varies in India and abroad. In India, the families seem to be rather successful in transmitting the culture to the second and third

generations, especially when strong pastoral support is available. The chief reason, I think, is that both the parents and the children of the migrant families are generally not very eager to merge with the local culture. So, they remain rather isolated keeping up their distinctness in language and other lifestyle expressions. But the situation in foreign countries appears to be different. Even though we have established our own dioceses and parishes and are trying to help the families to grow in our specific religious and family culture, it seems, the efforts have been only partially successful, that is, I would say, in the case of the first generation migrants. The second and third generations appear to be not very enthusiastic to keep up their ritual as well as ethnic identities. Though they may follow the directions of their parents regarding church participation, maintaining of their special family values and so on till their teenage, they establish their individuality and distinct identity the moment they become independent from the parental care, which, according to the American and European cultures, happens as soon as they reach sixteen. Even if they remain religious in a generic sense with their faith in God and core Christian values, they are not very eager to embrace it covered in specific ritual garb. It would seem that the only identity they want to develop is just American/ Canadian/ European, not much more than that—not merely in language, food, dress etc. but even in religion.

Challenge of Relativization of External Social Controls and Softening of Internal Controls

Relativization and Heterogeneity of External Social Controls: As we know, our personality is groomed and shaped by a double control mechanism—external and internal. External social controls include law, customs, mores, practices, etc. of the society, while values, attitudes, visions, convictions, etc. are known as internal controls. In a fast-growing society, which is becoming urban and consequently heterogeneous, the external social controls become rather relative, sometimes tolerating even morally or religiously unacceptable values. Laws regarding birth control, abortion, same sex relationship, and pre-marriage relations are some of the most serious examples among them. Unlike a village atmosphere in which uniformity of practices is enforced, an urban society not merely is tolerant to but even encourages heterogeneity. In such a cosmopolitan context and in the absence of

absolute practices, the youngsters find it rather easy to break or bypass the practices the previous generation cherished well, unless they are deeply anchored on solid internal controls.

The anchoring on strong internal values, attitudes and convictions is a very problematic dynamics in modern times. Values, as we should know, are never imbibed and practiced purely based on the knowledge about them. Value information can be given cheaply by anyone and it remains a cerebral content, never an operative value, unless it is cherished by the recipient. Our religious and moral instruction classes are the best examples of providing value information, not value formation. The latter takes place through modelling alone. As the parents of the agrarian society were leading a comparatively simple and straightforward life, modelling was rather easy for them. They lived what they believed in and it was quite transparently revealed to their children, who imbibed the positive (as well as negative) dimensions of such lived values. Today, in the urban and commercial setting, life has become quite multi-layered and the people are constrained to act with different degrees of transparency and commitment toward different sections. This, so to say, entails a great deal of acting out, which the children cannot fail to notice. So, quite often, the cerebral value and the operative value remain at two different levels in the children too. And, at the operative level, the children, not rarely, fascinated by the success of the multi-layered transparency of the parents' life, imitate them and try to live out a similar style, i.e., high profile cerebral values and multi-layered operative values that can be flexible and accommodative in different degrees in different contexts. In other words, compared to the substantive values practiced in general by the past generation, the present generation of the parents as well as of the children transforms them into instrumental values. If one does not see any gain, but only loss, he/she tends to adjust the personal and operative value system accordingly.

Substantive values mean values that are accepted and cherished for their own sake; instrumental values are those accepted for their instrumental effectiveness or utility for the individual. The latter type of values is accepted or rejected at the operative level according to its benefit for the individual. For example, a person who considers the unity of the family as a substantive value sticks to it, whatever be the cost; on the other hand, one who considers it merely as an instrumental

value, stands for the unity of the family as long as it is beneficial to him/her, and gives up when he/she realizes that it is not conducive to his/her development. Instead of the substantive values which are not generally accommodative, the new generation seems to be tempted to act out instrumental values today.

Underdevelopment of Superego: If we borrow the Freudian terminologies, the command system within us, which controls and regulates, through necessary do's and don'ts, the haphazard and indiscriminate expression of the needs and wants of the Id is known as the Superego. It is the internalized form of the strong do's and don'ts that we have been receiving from outside, chiefly from the parents, teachers and so on, right from our infancy. If we can conceive a combination of the manifold family changes that were described above under 'Decline of the Authority of the Parents,' 'Shift of Decision Making Power' and 'Relativization of External Social Controls,' we can visualize a scenario with an underdeveloped Superego and consequently weak internal command system in the new generation. This makes them easily shift, back and forth, between the varying and fluctuating desires and wants, with least regard for any value consideration and/or the control systems of the society. That is probably why the youngsters of the new generation have very little guilt feeling in breaking the value-related rules of the society regarding, say, the use of drugs, boy-girl relationship, cheating in financial transactions, etc. In this context, the great challenge before us, parents, teachers and priests, is to groom a healthy internal command system in the youngsters through our own example and modelling.

Challenge from the Co-existence of New Inheritance Laws and Dowry

We know that the new inheritance laws of the country provide equal share in the ancestral property to the male and female progeny. At the same time, the custom of dowry continues to exist in our community even against the law abolishing the same. In the case of the poor families, the daughters are often married off, after giving a dowry much higher than what their share (of a few cents of land) would amount to. For this, their parents and in several cases their brothers also might have taken upon themselves heavy financial burden beyond what they can afford to. The girls from such poor families may not be easily accepted in marriage merely on the strength of their meagre share alone. Even so,

in a number of families, especially if the relationship between the parents/brothers and married daughters get estranged, family feud arises due to the demand from the latter's part for family share beyond or in addition to the dowry they got at the time of the marriage, which itself, as I just said, had been in most cases much more than the family share. Probably the custom of dowry arose in our families in order to maintain the family property undivided within the 'tharavad' (joint or extended family) itself in an agrarian society. In those days, dowry might have been conceived as the daughter's share in cash and/or jewellery which she could carry to her husband's family; a share in landed property might have been easily sold out to third parties, due to the difficulties in care and maintenance. Instead of blindly outlawing dowry or conniving at it, can we not conceive a system in which it is duly regarded as a share of the daughter's property (and also gift, if it is more) and hence properly recorded or accounted, so that it is perceived so by the parties concerned? Can we convince the government to change the laws accordingly?

Care of the Seniors and Guilt Feeling

In the fast change of our society from the agrarian into an urban and commercial one, the extended family of the past, as we already noted, is being replaced by the nuclear family, and the grown-up children are forced to live away from their parents on account of jobs. Thus, a good number of the grown-up children of the present generation are unable to look after their parents in their old age. Till the last generation, the family used to live together and work together; so, the present transition to nuclear, urban families and the consequent difficulties in performing the conventional caring roles are creating a great deal of guilt-feeling in the children. On the one hand, on account of the cultural demands that have not yet disappeared, they feel that they are obliged to personally look after their parents and on the other, they are unable to do so due to the pressures of modern life. This pressure and the consequent guilt-feeling and tensions are a major problem among many of them. Such feelings begin to disturb them more after the parents have disappeared; then the children feel the burden of the guilt-feeling more, as there is no more opportunity to rectify the 'mistake.'

The modern teaching by some sects regarding the bondage of souls specifically addresses these persons alleging that, due to their

negligence, the parents did not receive necessary spiritual/religious care for the reparation of their sins and failures, and demands from them (children) substitute reparations in the form of prayers and other expensive rituals. Whether the souls of their own parents have had serious sins or not, whether they are in actual bondage or not, and whether the departed are freed from the alleged bondage or not, the religious ceremonies give enough consolation and relief to the children, imparting a feeling that at last they could do something to their parents, which unfortunately they could not during the latter's life-time. Thus, the teaching becomes rather therapeutic in the case of those who are disturbed emotionally regarding their relationship with the parents, dead or alive. But it inculcates, we should know, a wrong theological perception and cultivates enough opportunity for the marketing of religion for financial gain.

Another religious short-cut experimented by some modern sellers of religion may also be noted in this connection. These people offer facile solutions for problems that should genuinely be solved with responsibility and strong discipline in life. Most of the problems we face today in our personal as well as collective life are the result of our own irresponsible and/or wrong decisions (either of those who are currently living or those who took the wrong decisions in the past). Several examples may be mentioned: living beyond one's means and ending in debt, not getting trained or not sufficiently equipping oneself for a decent job and consequently becoming unemployed or underemployed, wrong decisions in business and other financial transactions leading to huge fall in socio-economic position, alcoholism, lack of control of one's life and consequent stress and strain in family relationships, break-down or even break-up of family relations, lifestyle sicknesses and so on. The reasonable solution is to correct one's behaviour pattern and straighten one's path, of course with prayers for God's help, to get rid of such problems. But that is quite hard to accept and even harder to put into practice. Recognizing this difficulty of the ordinary people, the modern sellers of easy solutions shift the responsibility to the sins and failures of the past generation and make the people do comparatively easier performance of some rituals and prayers, providing an unfounded hope for the better. And naturally, these marketing agents reap rich harvests in money.

For the success of this gimmick, these interpreters of religion often invoke stray statements from the OT that attribute some problems of the

society to the sins of the ancestors. Of course, we know that some of the current problems of the society are the result of the wrong decisions taken by some responsible persons of the past. It is a universal law that every action has its effect in the universe; in that broad philosophical sense, the concept is acceptable. But to link every problem like illnesses, failure in career, marital problems, etc. directly to ancestral causes is a very damaging attempt to bring back an outdated tribal worldview. In the tribal culture, as we know, the tribe is conceived as one person and is known as corporate personality in anthropology and sociology. We can find such a world view in the OT, which is the history of a tribal society. To return to that antiquated view of the society would be, to say the least, not only a refusal of the modern and enlightened perception but even quite damaging to the mental health of the people who live with a modern world view in other matters.

Other Miscellaneous Problems and Conclusion

Above, I selected nine important challenges which the modern transition families of our community face. Besides, there are several other problems that have existed for long such as alcoholism which seems to spread wider day by day, domestic violence, poverty and its effects including increasing suicides, and modern problems like the negative influence of the internet through pornography, violence, etc. These issues have been discussed quite widely in several forums. There are also still different issues like cohabitation, increase and spread of mixed marriages and civil marriages, children outside wedlock, single motherhood, sexual abuse of children, abandoned children, prostitution, etc. which are also grave challenges to the health of the modern family.

What I tried here is to draw our attention to a few emerging challenges that might not have directly confronted us. I know, I have not proposed any solutions, nor am I capable of doing it. They should emerge from our collective deliberations. Let us put our heads together and try to chalk out some practical plans to address these challenges and overcome their negative impacts.

LIFE IN A MULTI-OPTIONAL SOCIETY AS A PASTORAL CHALLENGE

Family Ideal and Family Realities in Germany

Klaus Vellguth♦

Statements on the subject of the family are invariably subjective. They are determined by a person's cultural context as well as by personal family experiences. As the Chairman of the German Bishops' Conference, Reinhard Marx, once said: "Family is never abstract, it is always specific. When the discussion turns to family matters, everybody can draw on their own personal experiences."¹ Anyone who has grown up in a small family, for instance, in which the members have shown care and affection for each other and the relationships between them have withstood all the problems and crises that life holds in store, will

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¹Reinhard Marx, "Entziehe dich nicht deinen Verwandten!," in *Familie. Auslaufmodell oder Garant unserer Zukunft?* Ed. George Augustine/Rainer Kirchdörfer (Freiburg, 2014), 199–214, at 200.

Vellguth, Klaus. "Life in a Multi-Optional Society as a Pastoral Challenge: Family Ideal and Family Realities in Germany." In *Vocation and Mission of the Family: Reflections on Chavarul and Amoris Laetitia*, edited by Shaji George Kochuthara, 309–329. Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2020.

have a completely different attitude to the family than someone who has experienced little security in family life and may have been exposed to strife, envy, hate or even violence.

Reflections on marriage and the family are, therefore, always closely bound up with personal experience of marriage and the family in a particular biographical context. The context you live in becomes the *locus theologicus*. In looking at the situation of marriage and the family, my thoughts will reflect my own specific experience as a married family father living in a pluralistic society in Germany. As a married man and the father of three children, I know from my own personal experience that you can make a success of marriage and family life, which is then a recurring source of happiness. From my own experience of marriage and family life I can say that marriage is, indeed, an institution which enables people to live “life to the full” (Jn 10:10). Husband and wife can experience boundless happiness in marriage if they are blessed with children. They can experience boundless solidarity when, in the rush hour of life, they jointly endeavour to balance the requirements of their jobs with the needs of their children. They can experience boundless trust in their marriage and family life in the knowledge that, despite their individual inadequacies, they truly accept and support each other. And husband and wife can experience boundless gratitude in their marriage and family if they jointly come through strenuous and sometimes difficult days and nights with each other and for each other. A *locus theologicus* rooted in deep personal experience strikes me as important in any endeavour to set out a Christian understanding of family based on one’s own firm standpoint and free of any fears or reservations about different forms of family life.

Family and Marriage in Germany

I do not wish to limit my remarks to my own particular situation in life but rather to broaden them in order to take in the situation of family and marriage in Germany as a whole. For a long time, the form that marriage and the family took in Germany was largely seen as being synonymous with that of a middle-class nuclear family.² In actual fact,

²It was of no consequence that this model of marriage and the family had evolved under specific conditions. In the 19th century, married couples mostly spent only a few years together without their children, whereas nowadays a partnership free of the task of raising children can frequently extend to twenty or thirty years.

however, it was not until the middle of the 19th century that this became established as the normative ideal of the family in connection with the growth of towns and cities and the emergence of the middle classes in Europe.³ At that time a specific model of the family arose that was accompanied by an official Church approach to family life. This found expression *inter alia* in the inclusion of the Feast of the Holy Family—which in certain regions had been celebrated as far back as the 17th century—in the liturgical Church calendar in 1921.⁴

There can be no disputing that family life in Germany continues to be held in great esteem. Three-quarters of the German population think the family is what matters most in life.⁵ Over the past twenty-five years the number of adults who see a family as essential for a happy life has increased steadily from below 50 per cent to almost 80 per cent.⁶ A survey conducted by the Allensbach Institute established that more than 50 million Germans—well over half the population—think it is “particularly important to do what you can for the family.”⁷ And, repudiating those who see the advent of post-modernity as marking the end of the age of the family, sociologists such as Franz-Xaver Kaufmann, Robert Hettlage, Rosemarie Nave-Herz and Laszlo A.

Many men also remarried, having lost their wives in childbirth. “In talking today about lifelong marriage, we are referring to an institution which has never existed before in this form.” Ingrid Jost, “Ehe als Lebensentscheidung im Kontext gesellschaftlicher Veränderungen und persönlicher Entwicklung,” in *Geschieden—wiederverheiratet—abgewiesen? Antwortender Theologie*, ed. Theodor Schneider (Freiburg, 1995), 143–153, at 144.

³See Ines Weber, “Geht Vaters Karriere immer vor?,” *Eheliche Beziehungsweisen in den 60er Jahren des 20. Jahrhunderts, Theologisch-Praktische Quartalsschrift* 163, 4 (2015): 379–389.

⁴See Kurt Koch, “Heilige Familie: Urbild und Kraftquelle der christlichen Familie als Hauskirche,” in *Familie. Auslaufmodell oder Garant unserer Zukunft?*, ed. Augustine/Kirchdörfer, 215–236, at 215. In the wake of the Second Vatican Council the Feast of the Holy Family now takes place on the “liturgically prominent” Sunday between Christmas and New Year.

⁵See Renate Köcher, “Veränderte Einstellungen zur Familie,” in *Allensbacher Jahrbuch der Demoskopie 2003–2009*, vol. 12, ed. Renate Köcher (Berlin/New York 2009), 659–663, at 659.

⁶See Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Woman and Youth, ed., *Familienreport 2012, Leistungen, Wirkungen, Trends* (Berlin, 2012), 12.

⁷Quoted from Andreas Püttmann, *Wertschätzung und Wandel von Familie—Empirische Erkenntnisse in christlicher Perspektive*, in *Familie. Auslaufmodell oder Garant unserer Zukunft?*, ed. Augustin/Kirchdörfer, 99–113, at 99.

Vascovics emphasise the undiminished esteem for, and relevance of, the family in Germany and other Western European societies.⁸

The fact of the matter is—and this strikes me as crucial—that there are different types of family in Germany today, which makes it impossible to focus on the nuclear family model and reduce everything to that. Nowadays the middle-class nuclear family is just one of several family options and it can no longer be taken for granted that there is an inherent connection between marriage and family. Almost 59 per cent of adult Germans say their family status is “married, living together,” 23 per cent say they are “single,” eight percent “widowed” or “divorced” respectively and two per cent “married, living apart.”⁹ However, although the majority of adults still adhere to marriage as their preferred form of cohabitation and for starting a family, this model has long ceased to be the only possible form of family life—it has forfeited its monopoly in the post-modern age. The reasons for this are many and varied. They range from flight and migration via industrialisation (with the separation of job and home which that entails), the collapse of the household, processes of freedom, personalisation and individualisation, and the opening up of gender issues to diverse economic, sociological and cultural factors.¹⁰

Marriage and the family no longer belong inextricably together in Germany. Only a minority of Catholics in the country still support the Church’s view that family and marriage go hand in hand and that couples should marry before starting a family. Very revealing is the outcome of a survey carried out by the German Bishops’ Conference in the run-up to the Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in October 2014 on pastoral care for families and sexual morality. It established that great store is set by a successful life in a stable partnership which is monogamous, lasting and binding.¹¹ Large

⁸See Eberhard Schockenhoff, “Die Zukunft der Familie: Anthropologische Grundlagen und ethische Herausforderungen,” in *Familie. Auslaufmodell oder Garant unserer Zukunft?*, ed. Augustin/Kirchdörfer, 69–82, at 71.

⁹See TNS Infratest Sozialforschung 2011, quoted from Püttmann, “Wertschätzung und Wandel von Familie—Empirische Erkenntnisse in christlicher Perspektive,” 101.

¹⁰Cfr Walter Kasper, “Die Zukunft der Familie aus christlicher Sicht,” in *Familie. Auslaufmodell oder Garant unserer Zukunft?*, ed. Augustin/Kirchdörfer, 181–198, at 182f.

¹¹Susanne Breit-Keßler, “Familie heute,” *Lebendige Seelsorge* 65, 2 (2014): 74–78, at 78.

numbers of the faithful do not identify with the Church's statements on sexual morality, however: "In a large number of positions on sexual morality, which were long seen as distinctively Catholic, the majority of the faithful now have attitudes which differ from the official Church teachings."¹² In respect of marriage, too, Catholics now have a much more pluralistic understanding than is apparent from a first glance at Church documents. The German Bishops' Conference noted, for example, that "The Church's pronouncements on premarital sex, homosexuality, remarried divorcees and birth control [...] enjoy little acceptance and are, for the most part, explicitly rejected."¹³ Overall, the outcome of the survey shows that many Christians, "including practising Christians, now consider the Church's teachings to be unrealistic and out of touch with everyday life."¹⁴

The social changes in the concept of the family (along with the separation of possible forms of the family from marriage as a necessary prerequisite) go hand in hand with a development in the understanding of marriage in which Paul Michael Zulehner detects three fundamentally different trends. Whereas people with a personal, secular view of marriage see in it an institution which primarily serves the welfare of the partners concerned and is bound to the existence of personal love,¹⁵ others uphold an institutional view of marriage which is rooted in religion and advocates the indissolubility of marriage. There

¹²Stefan Orth, "Bischofssynode: Ergebnisse der Umfrage veröffentlicht," *HK* 68, 3 (2014): 115–117, at 115.

¹³Die Deutschen Bischöfe, "Die pastoralen Herausforderungen der Familie im Kontext der Evangelisierung. Zusammenfassung der Antworten aus den deutschen (Erz-)Diözesen auf die Fragen im Vorbereitungsdokument für die III. Außerordentliche Vollversammlung der Bischofssynode 2014" (Bonn, 2014), 2.

¹⁴Kasper, "Die Zukunft der Familie aus christlicher Sicht," 183.

¹⁵Helmut Schelsky described it as a naive misunderstanding on the part of European late middle-class society that it should "regard its concept of marriage, which has largely forfeited any social function and is reduced to the intimacy of a purely personal relationship in which sexual and erotic needs are the prime motive for choosing a partner and marrying, as the original model of marriage." In this context he points out that marriage and the family were originally intended to ensure care for the progeny and comes to the conclusion that "stability in gender relations thus appears to stem and derive essentially from non-sexual aspects." Helmut Schelsky, "zitiert nach Splett, Jörg, *Ehe als Sakrament*," in *Familie. Auslaufmodell oder Garant unserer Zukunft?*, ed. Augustin/Kirchdörfer, 280–297, at 281.

are also those who represent a combination of both the aforementioned concepts of marriage in that they have a personal, religious notion of marriage which focuses on the love between the partners while accepting in principle that the marriage could fail, but who nonetheless see marriage in a religious context. Typical of advocates of this concept of marriage is the view that God does not oblige people to stick to the promise of marriage they once made, if their love fails.¹⁶ This puts a serious question mark against the Church's understanding of marriage. Ultimately the broadening of this understanding raises questions about how the failure or end of a marriage should be assessed and how the persons concerned should be treated.

Between Challenge and Burden: The Family in the Bible

At first sight, social esteem for the family in Western Europe at the outset of the third millennium would appear to be greater than that accorded to the family in the Old and New Testaments. In particular, there is no trace in the Bible of the image of the family that is cultivated as an idyll in the middle-class circles of Western European societies.¹⁷ Reading the New Testament, it is noteworthy that the Evangelists have very little interest at all in Jesus' family.¹⁸ Moreover in the New Testament, in which the family is seen as being either patrilinear in origin (Lk 2:4) or as a house(hold) (Lk 10:5; 19:9; Acts 10:2, etc.), there are remarkably critical statements about the institution of the family, culminating in the assertion that Jesus had an "anti-family ethos."¹⁹ According to the Synoptics, when Jesus was asked about his family (his mother and siblings) who had come to him, he replied almost brusquely: "Who are my mother and my brothers?" (Mk 3:33; cfr Mt 12:46–50; Lk 8:19–21), by which he meant that in his eyes it was not his related family that counted but the spiritual family. It is in this *familia*

¹⁶See Paul Michael Zulehner, "Differenzierung ist nötig. Was Katholiken über die Ehe denken," *HK* 68, 3 (2014): 129–134, at 131.

¹⁷See Bettina Eltrop, "Zahlreich wie die Sterne... Gedanken zu Ehe/Familie/Beziehungen in der Bibel," *das magazin* 14, 3 (2015): 5–7, at 5.

¹⁸See Gerd Häfner, "Zwischen Vorbehalt und Wertschätzung. Ehe und Familie im Neuen Testament," *Lebendige Seelsorge* 66, 5 (2015): 321–325, at 321.

¹⁹See Thomas Söding, "Gottes Kinder in Gottes Familie. Neutestamentliche Modelle und Impulse," in *Familie. Auslaufmodell oder Garant unserer Zukunft?*, ed. Augustin/Kirchdörfer, 264–279, at 265. Reinhold Bohlen, Stichwort "Familie," in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* vol. 3 (Freiburg–Basel–Rome–Vienna, 1995), 1169.

dei, in which a *koinonia* is achieved, and not in his biological family that Jesus feels at home. A similar logic applies when the Synoptics talk of the serious nature of the discipleship of Christ. Here again, the biological family relationship is subordinated to the spiritual succession when Jesus states that “Anyone who comes to me without hating father, mother, wife, children, brothers and sisters [...] cannot be my disciple.” (Lk 14:26; cfr Mt 10:37–39). Similarly, the narratives of the calling of the disciples make it clear that the discipleship of Jesus is more important than consideration of any family ties. Zebedee, for instance, left his father (Mt 4:22; cfr Mk 1:16–20; Lk 5:1–11; Jn 1:35–51). Elsewhere it is reported that someone first wished to fulfil his familial duties and bury his dead father before following Jesus. Demonstrating precious little sympathy for his adherence to family customs, Jesus replied: “Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their dead.” (Mt 8:22; cfr Lk 9:57–60). Other pericopes can even be interpreted as a call by Jesus to break with one’s own family. St Matthew’s Gospel contains the following words spoken by Jesus: “And everyone who has left houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother, children or land for the sake of my name will receive a hundred times as much, and also inherit eternal life” (Mt 19:29; cfr Mk 10:17–31; Lk 18:18–30). The Evangelist also passes on a logion which does not exactly reinforce the suspicion that he assumes Jesus attached very great importance to his family: “For I have come to set son against father, daughter against mother, daughter-in-law against mother-in-law” (Mt 10:35; cfr Lk 12:53).²⁰

In view of these quotations from the Bible and the almost trivial observation that the status of a *norma normans non normata* is accorded not to the value of the family but to the biblical text or the discipleship of Jesus—and bearing in mind, too, that Pope Francis has repeatedly drawn attention of late to the significance of the hierarchy of truths—the preservation of the family in whatever culturally defined form cannot be rashly interpreted as a primary biblical principle.²¹ In the

²⁰It should not be left unmentioned that the New Testament also has examples of successful marriages and family life: Elisabeth and Zacharias, Mary and Joseph, the Apostles and their wives, Timothy and his family, etc. See Thomas Söding, “Gottes Kinder in Gottes Familie. Neutestamentliche Modelle und Impulse,” in *Familie. Auslaufmodell oder Garant unserer Zukunft?*, ed. Augustin/Kirchdörfer, 264–279.

²¹See also the observation that marriage “does not belong to the order of salvation but to God’s merciful order of creation and preservation” (quoted from Karl Lehmann/Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Lehrverurteilungen—kirchentrennend?,” vol. 1 (Freiburg/Göttingen, 1986), 145.

event of a conflict it is not family ties but the call of the faith that is sacrosanct.²² And it is by no means the middle-class nuclear family that constitutes a biblical ideal. The Bible itself mentions numerous different forms of human cohabitation. It talks of patchwork constellations, siblings living together, illegitimate children, and viable relations between remaining family members as well as arguments, jealousy and the possibility of failure in families.²³

The fact is that the Gospels do not portray any ideal family. On the contrary, they appear almost post-modern in their description of conflicts, break-ups and dissociation.²⁴ This prompts Andreas Püttmann to make the following cutting remarks with regard to the concept of the family upheld in the Church today: "It should be obvious, but it needs stating time and time again: Christianity is neither a family religion nor a fertility cult. It was founded by a childless single and is steered in the Catholic denomination by childless singles."²⁵

Challenge Posed by a Jesuanic Approach to Remarried Divorcees

Given the varying family situations in Germany, on the one hand, and the critical analysis of the esteem accorded the family in the Bible, on the other hand, it is understandable that intense theological discussions are under way on the issue of how to treat Christians who have chosen to lead a family life which is at odds with that pursued by middle-class nuclear families. In Germany special significance attaches to the debate on how the Church should deal with people who, after an abortive first Church marriage, have married a second time.

In view of the Church's understanding of marriage²⁶ and of the pastoral care provided to Catholics who, following a failed marriage,

²²See Thomas Söding, "Gottes Kinder in Gottes Familie. Neutestamentliche Modelle und Impulse," 266.

²³See Breit-Keßler, "Familie heute," 75. Dorothea Sattler, "Ein 'Geschenk des Himmels aber keine Göttliche Stiftung?' Die Replik von Dorothea Sattler auf Susanne Breit-Keßler," *Lebendige Seelsorge* 65, 2 (2014): 88–89.

²⁴See Joachim Kügler, "Wie heilig war die Heilige Familie? Von einem Asylantenkind, das seinen Stiefvater früh verliert und von seiner Mutter nicht verstanden wird...", *Bibel und Kirche* 70, 4 (2015): 211–214, at 214.

²⁵Andreas Püttmann, "Wider das Familienhurra in der Kirche," *Lebendige Seelsorge* 66, 5 (2015): 311–316, at 314.

²⁶This understanding of marriage is greatly influenced by Jesus' ban on divorce (Mt 5:32; 19:19; Mk 10:11f; Lk 16:18), which Paul confirms as stemming from Jesus

marry a second time under civil law, credit must be given to the commitment shown by numerous German bishops, in particular Walter Kasper, who have spent many years working on a new theological and ecclesiastical approach to this issue.²⁷ As far back as 1993 Karl Lehmann, Walter Kasper and Oskar Saier, the three bishops of the Upper Rhine Church province, issued a joint pastoral letter which caused quite a stir. They started with the position formulated in *Familiaris Consortio*, according to which the life of remarried divorcees is objectively at variance with the teachings of the Church and such persons therefore cannot, as a matter of principle (officially), be admitted to the sacraments. They then went to say it was the task of the Church to support divorced Catholics and to ascertain whether any guilt had been occurred in the break-up of the first marriage, whether a return to the first spouse was out of the question, whether compensation was due for any wrong committed, whether obligations to the first spouse and any children from the first marriage were honoured, whether the break-up of the first marriage had caused a public offence, whether the second marriage had become a new moral reality and was conducted on the basis of the Christian faith, and whether there was a wish to celebrate the sacraments.²⁸ The Upper Rhine bishops thus set a very high standard and drew the following conclusion for pastoral practice. If, following this examination, remarried divorcees are convinced that they should be allowed to celebrate the Eucharist, their wish must be respected by the priest. This did not mean official Church authorisation but only “permission.”²⁹ Even though this practice did not fully comply

himself (1 Cor 7:10f). It should be noted in assessing Jesus’ ban on divorce that it must be interpreted in the context of the proclamation of the dawning of God’s eschatological rule. See Markus Knapp, “Glaube–Liebe–Ehe. Ein theologischer Versuch in schwieriger Zeit” (Würzburg, 1999), 45f.

²⁷See Alexander Foitzik, “Wiederverheiratete: Vorstoß von Kardinal Kasper,” *HK* 68, 4 (2014): 169–171. The efforts they have made are all the more necessary in that the Magisterium pointed out in its earlier one-sided but nonetheless unambiguous writings that remarried divorcees were objectively at variance with the Church and could not receive Holy Communion. See, for example, the statements made by John Paul II in *Familiaris Consortio*, 84.

²⁸The faithful in this understanding will not obtain but celebrate the sacraments.

²⁹Taking up this logic, Bertram Stubenrauch has formulated a line of argument concerning the way in which remarried divorcees should be treated. It is process-driven and based on penance (*poenitentia*), healing (*remedium*) and faith (*fides*):

with the regulations of canon law, it could nonetheless be justified by reference to the principle of appropriateness. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in Rome, which was headed at that time by Joseph Ratzinger, responded to the pastoral letter issued by the three German bishops and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith referred in its answer, on the one hand, to the encyclical *Familiaris Consortio* and, on the other hand, to Jesus' logion (Mt 19:6). It came to the conclusion that remarried divorcees should not be admitted to Holy Communion on the basis of their subjective convictions. In the letter sent by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to the bishops of the Catholic Church on 15 October 1994 addressing the matter of communion for remarried divorcees, the Congregation drew attention to the "objective teachings of the Church" as the decisive criterion rather than giving greater official Church recognition and trust to the believers' sincere decision on a matter of conscience.³⁰ It considered that the only way to receive the sacraments was to effect an annulment of the marriage. This was in keeping with the Church policy pursued by Cardinal Ratzinger and John Paul II which emphasised the principle of the indissolubility of marriage.³¹

"Objective guilt in respect of an abused marriage must be admitted by an act of penance and confession. This entails an appropriate period of penance followed by sacramental absolution. Documentary evidence is thus provided that divorcees and remarried Christian men and women who are aware of their guilt and ask for forgiveness do not live separately from God and certainly not in mortal sin." Bertram Stubenrauch, "Wiederverheiratete Geschiedene und die Sakramente. Ein Denkspruch zur dogmatischen Diskussion," *Stimmen der Zeit* 232, 5 (2014): 346f.

³⁰See Michael Böhnke, "Signale der Barmherzigkeit," in *Lebendige Seelsorge* 66, 5 (2015): 382–383.

³¹See Klaus "Lüdicke, Evolution oder Revolution? Der neue kirchliche Eheprozess," *Herder Korrespondenz* 69, 10 (2015): 509–512, at 511f. Ludwig Schick, "Die wiederverheirateten Geschiedenen und das Unbehagen..." in *Fides et ius* (Festschrift G. May), Regensburg, 1991, 178f. With regard to marriage annulment proceedings, the popes had repeatedly stressed in their addresses to the Roman Rota that it was precisely the failure of an attempt to bring about an annulment that established the "truth of marriage." A burden for canons: "Seen from this perspective, the principal task of the ecclesiastical courts was to establish the objective facts with respect to the canonical grounds for invalidity—an almost impossible task in view of the fact that, in the Church's understanding, marriage is the result of an act of volition on the part of the partners and can also be invalid on the grounds of inner reservations." Klaus Lüdicke, "Evolution oder Revolution? Der

In February 2014 Walter Kasper returned to the pastoral letter he had helped to write 21 years earlier in a speech entitled “The Good News of the Family”³² which he gave to the consistory in Rome. He advocated a pastoral approach situated between ecclesial laxism and rigorism which would enable Christians married a second time under civil law after the divorce of their first marriage to celebrate the sacrament of penance and Holy Communion following a period of reorientation.³³ Emulating Joseph Ratzinger’s example, he took up the early Christian tradition of dealing with the “fallen” in such a way that, even though they had already “failed” once in their lives, they were not excluded from the community of the Church or refused the “saving plank” of Holy Communion.³⁴ After his speech to the consistory and the discussion which followed he said:

Many steps need to be taken in order to arrive at what should ideally be a unanimous decision. The first step consists in regaining our speech in matters of sexuality, marriage and the family and in finding a way out of a rigid and resigned silence when confronted with the facts. The question of what is allowed and what is forbidden on its own is not going to take things forward. The issues of marriage and the family, among which the question of remarried divorcees is just one, albeit urgent matter, must be seen in the larger context of how people can find happiness and fulfilment in their lives.³⁵

neue kirchliche Eheprozess,” *Herder Korrespondenz* 69, 10 (2015): 509–512, at 510). By simplifying the marriage annulment proceedings through his *Motu Proprio Mitis Iudex Dominus Iesus* for the Latin Church and his *Motu Proprio Mitis et misericors Iesus* for the Oriental churches Pope Francis has taken an important step, in canon law at least, towards finding a more appropriate canonical and pastoral approach to marriage annulment proceedings. In the run-up to the 2015 Family Synod the principle of a *duplex sententia conformis* (twofold canonical decision) was revoked, which is helpful in speeding up marriage annulment proceedings.

³²Walter Kasper, *Das Evangelium von der Familie. Die Rede vor dem Konsistorium* (Freiburg–Basel–Vienna: Herder 2014).

³³See Walter Kasper, *Das Evangelium von der Familie. Die Rede vor dem Konsistorium* (Freiburg–Basel–Vienna, 2014), 54–67.

³⁴See Joseph Ratzinger, “Zur Frage der Unauflöslichkeit der Ehe. Bemerkungen zum dogmengeschichtlichen Befund und seiner gegenwärtigen Bedeutung,” in *Ehe und Ehescheidung*, Heinrich Fries/Volker Eid (Munich, 1972), 35–56. Franz Dünzl, “Ein Impuls aus der Kirchengeschichte des Altertums zur Umfrage zur Bischofssynode 2014,” *Lebendige Seelsorge* 65, 2 (2014): 126–127.

³⁵Kasper, *Das Evangelium von der Familie*, 86f.

Kasper thus incorporated the issue of how to deal with remarried divorcees into a “hierarchy of values” which approximates very closely to the hierarchy of values set out in canon law when it speaks of the *suprema lex salus animarum*.³⁶

Walter Kasper focuses on the principle of *oikonomia* as a fundamental spiritual attitude in the provision of pastoral care. This principle challenges the community of the Church, in an awareness of its own weakness, to accompany and support those who have demonstrated weakness. *Oikonomia*³⁷ is the opposite of *acribia* (strict obedience to the Gospel) and illustrates a potentially appropriate way for the Church to deal with Christians who have experienced a painful failure in their marriage but have nonetheless preserved their fundamental trust in the value of the institution. After all, the fact that these Christians have married a second time under civil law indicates that, despite the suffering they have endured as a result of the failure of their first marriage, they nonetheless hope to find the happiness they yearn for in a subsequent marriage.³⁸

Rigorous Adherence to the Traditional Understanding of Marriage Casts a Shadow on the Sacramental Character of Marriage

Viewing things from the standpoint of sacramental theology, in particular, one might well ask whether a consistently unhappy marriage is sacramental in character or not and whether adherence to permanently strained marriages does not cast a shadow on the Christian sacrament of marriage.³⁹ The Christian understanding of marriage as a

³⁶Can. 1752

³⁷The *oikonomia* principle of the Orthodox Churches envisages strict adherence to canonical regulations, on the one hand, although it is possible, in line with God’s mercy, to deviate from Church regulations, on the other hand, if this is required for the healing of the individual. A second or even third marriage always takes place in the Orthodox Churches in accordance with the principle of *oikonomia*. See Florian Schuppe, *Die pastorale Herausforderung. Orthodoxes Leben zwischen Akribieira und Oikonomia. Theologische Grundlagen, Praxis und ökumenische Perspektiven* (Würzburg, 2006), 391–406.

³⁸On the question of whether a second marriage under civil law might also be sacramental in character, see Thomas Ruster, “Ehe und Öffentlichkeit. Was bedeutet die Entscheidung zum Sakrament?,” *Lebendige Seelsorge* 65, 2 (2014): 110–115, at 115.

³⁹See Eberhard Schockenhoff, “Die Unauflöslichkeit der Ehe und die zivilen Zweitehen von Getauften,” *Stimmen der Zeit* 234, 2 (2016): 99–114, at 101. In respect

reflection of the relationship between God and the Church has its origins in Old Testament concepts. As far back as the times of the prophet Hosea the idea arose that the relationship between God and His people is, metaphorically speaking, a marriage (Hos 11:1–11).⁴⁰ This analogous concept was taken over and developed in particular by Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and it is likely to have contributed to a drop in the number of divorces among strict Jews.⁴¹ In the New Testament this analogous, metaphorical view of marriage is transferred to the relationship between Christ and the Church. The Epistle to the Ephesians, for example, describes Christian marriage as a communion of love and as a reference to the connection between Christ and the Church, in which it shares.⁴²

Let me draw your attention at this point to two problems concerning the foundation of the Christian understanding of marriage in the Epistle to the Ephesians. Firstly, the metaphorical connection in Ephesians is raised at the same time as the requirement that a wife should subordinate herself to her husband. The introductory passage reads: “Wives should be subject to their husbands as to the Lord, since, as Christ is head of the Church and saves the whole body, so is a husband the head of his wife; and as the Church is subject to Christ, so should wives be to their husbands, in everything” (Eph 5:22–24). Nobody today would regard this requirement formulated in Ephesians as an adequate description of the contemporary understanding of the relationship between husband and wife in the early years of the 21st century. Only recently the Pontifical Biblical Commission pointed out in its document *The Inspiration and Truth of Sacred Scripture*—particularly with respect to

of the indissolubility of marriage other theologians differentiate between a personal reason—that marriage is total devotion (c1057 §2 CIC)—a creation and alliance theology reason (see Mt 19:6), a Christological and ecclesiological reason (see Eph 5:21) and a social or pastoral theology reason, according to which marriage is of fundamental value for society and married people assume responsibility for both their partner and their children.

⁴⁰See Dorothea Sattler, “Die Ehe. Theologische Anliegen in römisch-katholischer Perspektive,” *Theologisch-praktische Quartalsschrift* 163, 4 (2015): 347–351, at 348.

⁴¹See François Reckinger, “Die Gnade der unauflöselichen Ehe,” *Forum Katholische Theologie* 31, 3 (2015): 161–177, at 163.

⁴²See Ingo Broer, Stichwort “Ehe” (im Neuen Testament), in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, vol. 3 (Freiburg, 1995), 470–471. Koch, “Heilige Familie: Urbild und Kraftquelle der christlichen Familie als Hauskirche,” 221.

Chapter 5 of the Epistle to the Ephesians—that contemporary concepts found their way into Scripture. “Some sections of the Bible prompt us to think about [...] what is eternally valid and what needs to be relativised, because it is bound to a culture, a civilisation or the categories of a certain period in time.”⁴³ The Pontifical Biblical Commission explicitly refers to the social status of women and that there is no justification in the Bible for the subordination of a wife to her husband, as expressed at this particular point in the Letter to the Ephesians.⁴⁴ It is obvious that concepts relating to a certain time, context and culture found their way into the New Testament text and that they certainly cannot be treated as being specifically Christian. Such fundamental open-mindedness about the possibility of contemporary notions being incorporated in the text should also apply to the subsequent nine verses of Ephesians, in which an analogy is drawn between Christian marriage as a relationship of love between two people and the relationship between Christ and the Church, to which the sacramental nature of marriage mentioned at the Council of Trent refers:⁴⁵

Husbands should love their wives, just as Christ loved the Church and sacrificed himself for her to make her holy by washing her in cleansing water with a form of words, so that when he took the Church to himself she would be glorious, with no speck or wrinkle or anything like that, but holy and faultless. In the same way, husbands must love their wives as they love their own bodies; for a man to love his wife is for him to love himself. A man never hates his own body, but he feeds it and looks after it; and that is the way Christ treats the Church, because we are parts of his Body. This is why a man leaves his father and mother and becomes attached to his wife, and the two become one flesh. This mystery has great significance, but I am applying it to Christ and the Church. To sum up: you also, each one of you, must love his wife as he loves himself; and let every wife respect her husband (Eph 5:25–33).

As stated in this passage from Ephesians, the love between a man and a woman can be a “foretaste” or “provide an idea” of the loving

⁴³Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Inspiration and Truth of Sacred Scripture. The Word that Comes from God and Speaks of God for the Salvation of the World* (Bonn: The Secretariat of the German Bishops’ Conference, 2014), 132.

⁴⁴See Katrin Brockmüller, “Die Schrift wächst mit den Lesenden. Einblicke in den großen Garten der Bibelpastoral,” *Anzeiger für die Seelsorge* 125, 3 (2016): 6–9, at 7.

⁴⁵See Kasper, “Die Zukunft der Familie aus christlicher Sicht,” 191.

relationship between God, who is love himself (Cfr 1 Jn 4:12), and human beings or between God and his Church.⁴⁶ Since this is analogous language, it is essential to differentiate between the *analogatum primum*, the *analogatum secundum* and the *tertium comparationis* in order to proceed exegetically and not eisegetically, which would raise a number of problems. For the analogous language refers exclusively to the *tertium comparationis*. In the Epistle to the Ephesians the relationship between a man and a woman would be the *analogatum primum* and the relationship between Christ and the Church would be the *analogatum secundum*. These two are connected linguistically by the *tertium comparationis*, which is described in verse 25 as the emotionality of love: “Husbands should love their wives, just as Christ loved the Church.” If this analogy relates to the sacramental nature of marriage, the sacramental dimension would need to refer to the *tertium comparationis*. However, if there is no (longer any) love between the spouses, the analogous statement (which always refers to the *tertium comparationis*) would be deprived of its sense or meaningless in the best sense of the word.

But how can God’s love (as the *analogatum secundum*) be made visible, if the love or marital friendship (as the *analogatum primum*) does not exist (any longer)? If the marriage has perhaps long since deteriorated into a mess of misunderstanding, recriminations, injuries, a hardening of attitudes and animosity? In terms of sacramental theology the point of departure here should not be the marriage as it exists in real terms but the ideal notion of marriage, which is not identical with the practical experience some people have of a marriage that has perhaps failed to live up to the ideal and is falling apart.

Between the Ideal and Reality

There is certainly evidence in the Bible for a differentiation between the awareness of an ideal aspiration, on the one hand, and the approach to real-life situations or practice, on the other. While the Synoptics have handed down the Jesuanic logion of the indissolubility of marriage, St John’s Gospel tells of a humane, non-judgmental practice pursued by Jesus himself. Jesus intervened when the adulteress was about to be

⁴⁶See Hanna-Barbara Gerl-Falkovitz, “Liebe und Ehe im Horizont des Göttlichen. Ein Blick auf Weltreligionen,” in Helmut Schelsky, zitiert nach Jörg Splett, *Ehe als Sakrament*, in *Familie. Auslaufmodell oder Garant unserer Zukunft?*, ed. George Augustin/Rainer Kirchdörfer, 329–346, at 344.

stoned in accordance with the law, put the Pharisees and scribes in their place and reminded those present that failure to live up to an ideal is part and parcel of the human condition. The nuances in biblical tradition thus provide an idea of “how it was possible in these founding documents of the Church to withstand the tension between applicable law and fragile, guilt-laden human existence.”⁴⁷

If the Church is genuinely concerned about questions of sacramentality, an unjesuanic practice which ignores the reality of fragile (and) guilt-laden human existence casts a shadow on its own sacramentality. In the performance of its activities the Church does not allow Jesus Christ, who is above any misanthropic casuistry and judgmental obedience to the law, to appear as the true light of the world. On the contrary, it fails in its own aspiration to be “in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race,” (LG 1) because it clings to its ideal notions and consequently turns them into a fundamentalist “all or nothing” principle, instead of seeing people as they really are and how they live their everyday lives, as Pope Francis advised in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG 233).

But it is possible to take a different approach. Sabine Demel has presented a pastoral perspective rooted in canon law on how to treat people whose marriage has failed and who wish to remarry.⁴⁸ She starts by stating that the principle of the indissolubility of marriage is set out in canon law (c. 1056), while at the same time certain marriages are dissolved by the Church (c. 1141 and 1142–1150). She goes on to point out that in future it is not an (indissoluble) marriage that should be revoked but only the legal effects of marriage. As a result the first marriage (which continues to exist as an important part of the lives of at least two persons) remains in place, but the path to remarriage nonetheless remains open. This requires, firstly, an admission on the part of both spouses that their marriage has irretrievably failed and, secondly, a plausible assurance from the partner entering into a second marriage that he or she has come to terms with the failure of the first marriage. Such a procedure would appear meaningful with regard to

⁴⁷Udo Schmälzle, “Es geht um Heilung. Für eine alternative Pastoral zum Umgang mit wiederverheirateten Geschiedenen,” *Herder Korrespondenz* 68, 7 (2014): 348–353, at 352.

⁴⁸See Demel, “Gott und die Liebe—die Kirche regelt’s,” 361–367.

the building of relationships, for “if personal responsibility and possible guilt are accepted, there are better prospects of finding a new perspective and perhaps of not failing in a new partnership for the previous reasons. Many couples or men and women are very willing to address these questions because there is nothing they would like more than to be successful in their future lives and in a possible second partnership.”⁴⁹

The purpose of such a theological opening is not to call the sacramentality of marriage into question. On the contrary, both sacramental marriage and family life should be strengthened by an approach which rests not on the ideals of bygone eras but on human healing.

The Church must not Excommunicate Itself

The Church in Germany must find suitable ways and means of dealing with the pluralist family situation confronting Christians whose first marriage has failed and who wish to enter into a second long-term partnership and communion of love. Moreover, the Church in Germany must extend its concept of the family beyond the model of the middle-class nuclear family and be open to other forms of family life. I began this talk by saying that the family has assumed diverse forms in Germany’s pluralist society. Consequently, problems arise if the Church narrows the concept of the family to a partnership between a husband and wife and their children. It would seem at first glance that this means the exclusion of those who live in alternative types of family: a patchwork family,⁵⁰ a single-parent family, a (voluntarily or involuntarily) childless family, a rainbow family (LGBTQ family), a non-marital partnership, etc. Ultimately, however, who is actually excluded as a consequence of such a narrow perspective is a matter of perspective. In an age in which society is characterised by a church-oriented religiousness, such a narrow concept of the family will exclude all those in society whose way of living does not conform to this concept of marriage and the family. In a secular age, however, in which large

⁴⁹Handout for the Pastoral Care of People who are Separated, Divorced or have Remarried under Civil Law in the Archdiocese of Freiburg, <http://www.familienseelsorge-freiburg.de/html/wiederheirat452.html>

⁵⁰See Klaus Schmalzl, “Paare in Patchworkfamilien—Herausforderungen und Chancen,” *Lebendige Seelsorge* 66, 5 (2015): 350–354.

parts of society no longer support such a narrow concept of the family, the Church will exclude itself from society if it abides by such a concept. To avoid the Church's self-excommunication from society it is essential to develop a theological understanding of the family which treats present-day pluralism as a source of wealth: "Wherever people put into practice such values as friendship, reliability, mutual solidarity and responsibility they deserve moral recognition."⁵¹

One might argue that by taking a pronounced position, albeit one that is not accepted by a majority in society, the Church does not directly exclude itself but rather dissociates itself. Of course, it is true that the Gospel is culturally compatible, but that is by no means the same as saying it conforms to culture. Yet we have seen from the New Testament, in particular, that no major significance attaches to safeguarding the institution of the family (as it existed at that time). Consequently, there is no need for the Church to anxiously cling to a model of the family which did not emerge until the second half of the 19th century and is now given almost normative status by the Church. The Church can address this wealth of family constellations at the start of the 21st century, acknowledge it and then help to influence it. One important step down that road is to overcome taboos and to engage in an open dialogue on issues that have not been discussed in a transparent manner. This imposition of taboos has led to uncertainties, cover-ups, emotional controversies and reflective congestion associated with ill-thought-out and harmful positions.⁵²

The overcoming of this reflective congestion and the rejection of outdated family concepts will ease the burden on the Church, because an extended concept of the family means it can abandon a position which will become increasingly implausible in a pluralistic society. If, on the other hand, the Church goes on regarding social institutions such as the family (in a specific social form) in their formal guises not as manifestations of a certain culture and time but as determined by God, it will risk its own social excommunication by adhering to outdated notions of the family.

⁵¹Eberhard Schockenhoff, "Liebe auf Abwegen? Zum Verhältnis von Sexualität und Liebe in intimen Beziehungen," *Theoretisch-praktische Quartalsschrift* 163, 4 (2015): 339–346, at 346. Cfr Eberhard Schockenhoff, "Der Auftrag der Versöhnung," *SKZ* 13 (2012): 230–237, at 237.

⁵²Eva-Maria Faber, "Ein ernsthafter Prozess," *Lebendige Seelsorge* 66, 5 (2015): 341–343, at 343.

Accepting Difference in the Universal Church Debate

Discussions on the subject of the family always take place in a specific context or a contextual background.⁵³ This was apparent at both the Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in October 2014 and the XIV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in October 2015, which was attended by 270 bishops selected from all parts of the universal Church. The German theologian, Ute Eberl, an auditor at the Extraordinary Family Synod in 2014, wrote the following about her specific experience of the Synod:

Present, as I was, at the heart of the universal Church it became very clear to me that I listen with very special ears. These are the ears of a woman from an open society with a liberal constitutional order, the ears of a person from a Reformation country, one with a highly professional Catholic welfare organisation, with a social security system in which full-time lay people perform their duties.⁵⁴

Looking back at the Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in 2015, in which he participated as an auditor, Michael Sievernich wrote that “questions take on a different character in an inter-cultural context.” This was illustrated, for instance, by “marriage and family traditions in Africa⁵⁵ and inter-religious marriage traditions in Asia.”⁵⁶ In these contexts the Catholic Church was attempting to

⁵³On what follows, see Klaus Vellguth, “Familie einfach anders leben. Von biblischen Herausforderungen und einer neuen Offenheit für Modelle dauerhaften Zusammenlebens—Gemeinsam unterwegs zu einem Leben in Fülle,” in *Familie. Miteinander leben in Kirche und Welt (Theologie der Einen Welt 10)*, ed. Klaus Krämer/Klaus Vellguth (Freiburg, 2016), 287–341.

⁵⁴Ute Eberl, “Schaut in die Wohnzimmer der Familien, nicht in ihre Schlafzimmer,” in *Lebendige Seelsorge* 66, 5 (2015): 333–340, at 333f.

⁵⁵While some of the comments made before and during the Synods about the African view of marriage and the family seem awkward from a Western European perspective, they may under certain circumstances approximate more closely to the biblical understanding of marriage, since the purpose of marriage—as stated in the Bible and elsewhere—was the birth of children, especially of sons, who were entitled to a major social function in biblical times. Cfr Bettina Eltrop, “Zahlreich wie die Sterne. Gedanken zu Ehe/Familie/Beziehungen in der Bibel,” *Das Magazin* 14, 3 (2015): 5–7, at 6.

⁵⁶Michael Sievernich, “Die Bischofssynode zur Familie,” in *Stimmen der Zeit* 234, 2 (2016): 87–98, at 88.

conceptualise unity in diversity and put it into practice. The two family synods in Rome made it clear that reflections on marriage and the family always depend on a person's individual perspective. Theological considerations must always be seen in conjunction with cultural contexts. Indeed, reflections differ by sheer dint of the fact that they are expressed against a monogamous or polygamous cultural background, in a matrilinear or patrilinear context, from a personal perspective as a single or married Christian or from the specific standpoint of a man or woman.

There was a real clash of cultural worlds when the bishops, as representatives of the universal Church in Rome, came together to discuss family issues. For the participants in the Synod the best approach at this meeting of people from different cultural worlds was not to formulate superior arguments directed at the uncomprehending or to respond to them with the maximum assertiveness (concealing perhaps a hidden cultural arrogance). On the contrary, the best thing was to communicate hermeneutically with the necessary intercultural empathy and, in doing so, to risk one's own arguments being called into question by other, possibly shocking, positions (especially in the sensitive fields of marriage and the family). There was no overlooking of the difficulties in conducting a universal Church dialogue on questions of the family as a model of long-term cohabitation.⁵⁷ But this does not dispense with the need to address this polyphonic discourse, to contribute one's own positions, to register difference and otherness and to benefit from what is unfamiliar. A special challenge consists in accepting the validity of different views and being open-minded towards them without disowning one's own views. Universal Church discussion processes must be developed which can clarify whether the variety of family models can exist alongside each other and how the Church can practise and cultivate different models in different contexts.

Both the Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in 2014 and the Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in 2015 devoted to questions of the family made it clear that it is not Church uniformity but rather an ecclesial polyphony even in key questions of the Christian faith and human coexistence within the Church that must be given expression at the outset of the third

⁵⁷See Alois Buch/Petra Buch, "Weltkirche im synodalen Prozess. Beobachtungen und Notizen zur Familien-Synode," *Forum Weltkirche* 135, 2 (2016): 13–17.

millennium. In all likelihood regional approaches and responses must be developed which can coexist in a certain heterogeneity. In the age of globalisation, it is probably advisable not to be too hasty in formulating canonical regulations on marriage and the family within the universal Church but rather to give regional bishops' conferences the scope of developing suitable solutions relating to canonical dispositions. In this respect it is encouraging that Pope Francis should have emphasized in the introduction to his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* that he is "conscious of the need to promote a sound 'decentralisation.'"⁵⁸ Pope Francis returned to this in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* in pointing out "that not all discussions of doctrinal, moral or pastoral issues need to be settled by interventions of the Magisterium" and then stressing "that this does not preclude various ways of interpreting some aspects of that teaching or drawing certain consequences from it." He went on to emphasise that "Each country or region, moreover, can seek solutions better suited to its culture and sensitive to its traditions and local needs. For cultures are, in fact, quite diverse and every general principle needs to be inculturated if it is to be respected and applied" (AL 3).

Inculturation is not an alien concept, especially in India. After all, it can look back on a long and rich tradition here. This applies not only to the work of the National Biblical, Catechetical and Liturgical Centre (NBCLC) in Bangalore, which deserves every credit for its efforts to inculturate Christianity in India, but also to the theological work of many other educational institutions in India. Pope Francis encourages the development of inculturated perspectives on issues concerning marriage and the family. Needless to say, these will inevitably be different in Germany from those in India and so they should. However, differences do not divide us in the Catholic Church. Quite the opposite, they can bring us together in a unique way. If we tell each other about the experiences we have had with our inculturated solutions and examine them together in the light of the Gospel, the Catholic Church will emerge in its true breadth as a universal Church.

⁵⁸EG 16; See Bernd Jochen Hilberath, "Das Konzil verwirklichen! Papst Franziskus' ekklesiologische Agenda," *Diakonia* 47, 2 (2016): 17–31.

AMORIS LAETITIA AND MARRIAGE AND FAMILY IN THE EAST ASIAN COUNTRIES

Michael Jeong Hun Shin♦

Pope Francis called the synod of bishops on the topic of family in October 2014 and October 2015 respectively, and *Amoris laetitia* (AL) is a post-synodal apostolic exhortation released in March 2016. Expressing the concern of the church for contemporary families which are critically challenged today, the Pope invites all the Christians to reflect on the mission of family. For not a few people, homes are proving difficult to play their proper roles in the rapidly changing social milieu, undergoing drastic changes from traditional society to industrial and then to IT ones. As a basic unit of society, families have been recognized important for their significant roles in society. In modern society, however, they are requested to answer the fundamental questions on their identity and essence as the serious changes in the index related to marriage, childbirth and rearing of the children indicate. Today homes are undergoing crisis, but such crisis also provides a good opportunity to think about the essential roles of homes. First, the Korean situation of plural religions and inter-religious marriage problems will be introduced, and, based on the materials of statistics, the changes in marriage customs due to drastic social changes will be presented. To

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understand these sudden changes, patriarchal views on marriage which are shared in the East Asian countries including Korea will be analysed, and the causes for conflicts in modern society will be examined. Secondly, the core of Christian values on marriage will be presented based on *Amoris laetitia*, and the direction of pastoral task on the family and marriage in East Asian countries including Korea will be suggested.

Religious Situation of Korea and the Reality of Marriage of Catholics

Korea is a society of plural religions. Traditional religions of thousands of years as well as other religions that came to Korea through China to be native have continuously exerted diverse influences on the formation of Korean sentiments as a nation. Together with a brief history each religion will be introduced, and the actual influences which such plural religions exert on the marriage of Christians.

Religious sentiment of Koreans is rooted in shamanism. It is a traditional religion of the ancient Korean people, and a shaman who is a mediator between supernatural and human being is said to directly contact a supernatural being, performing the rituals on social dimension, not to mention on private levels such as foretelling, fortune-telling and disease curing for clients.

For thousands of years until the AD 10th century, shamanism played a leading role as a religion in the ancient Korea, and political leaders had played the role of shamans representing the people. Thereafter, shamanism had been oppressed due to the influence of Buddhism and Confucianism but it had continued to exist among the public. In modern times, however, shamanism is disparaged as a superstition, but shamans and fortune-tellers are still active among the public.¹ Though the role of shamanism is not great as an institutional religion in modern society, the basic structure of shamanism to solve the problems in reality with the mediation of the spiritual power is still found in other native religions of Korea.

Buddhism was introduced to the Korean peninsula through China around the AD 4th century. Between the 7th–9th century Buddhism had become popular enough to represent the culture of Korea. Buddhism

¹Cfr Daegn Lee, *The History of Korean Religions and Thoughts from the Perspectives of Shamanism and Christianity* (Seoul: Catholic Publishing House, 2014), 125–505 (in Korean).

was designated as a national religion during the *Goryeo* Kingdom (918–1392), which was replaced through revolution by the *Joseon* Dynasty (1392–1910). To secure its legitimacy and to weaken the vested rights, the Dynasty conducted a state policy of encouraging Confucianism and oppressing Buddhism. Despite the governmental oppressions to limit the properties of temples or to close them permanently, or to merge the order, it developed as a high-level monastery community. Up until today, Buddhism has played the role of passing on national culture.

In the late 13th century, Confucianism was introduced to Korea, being encouraged to replace Buddhism as a leading social ideology by the *Joseon* Dynasty (1392–1910), and it still exerts great influence in society until modern times. Pursuing self-discipline and harmonious community life, Confucianism has laid a foundation for social order, and partially played the religious role, performing the sacrificial rites for the ancestors. Especially the influence of Confucianism on marriage system and customs has reached deep on the whole sector of society, and even today when the religious function of Confucianism has drastically decreased, Confucian value systems on family and marriage still exert great influence.

In Korea almost all the Christian denominations of the world are established, but based on their identities and actualities, Christians can be roughly divided into Catholics and Protestants. Catholicism reached Korea in 1784, and it went through the period of severe persecution for about 100 years when an estimated 10,000 Catholics testified to the faith through the blood. In 1886, in the end, Catholics were given freedom of religion. Protestantism which had the evangelical characteristics, was introduced to Korea in 1885 by the American missionaries. With an example of the oppression given to Catholicism, Protestantism started to spread to the whole society through the indirect missionary works of education and medical care. In 1945, when the Second World War ended, the number of Catholics comprised 0.72% of the total population, and Protestants, 1.55%. However, after the Korean War (1950–1953) and the process of modernization, Christianity rapidly grew in Korea.

According to the population census in 2015, out of 49 million population of Korea, 27.5 million (56.1%) were non-believers, Protestants were 9.6 million (19.7%); Buddhists, 7.6 million (15.5%); Catholics, 3.9 million (7.9%); others, 360,000 (0.8%). Christianity, in which more than one fourth of the total population believes, is the

religion which has the greatest value in modern Korea. What is remarkable is that even though shamanism and Confucianism have played major roles in the religious history of Korean for a long period of time few people have opted to mark on them, and that Buddhism and Christianity have firmly established themselves as institutional religions. However, it does not necessarily mean that Confucianism and shamanism have lost their influences. In the Korean peninsula diverse religions such as Shamanism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Christianity have played leading roles in society in different periods. In this regard, Korean people are observed to have multi-layered attitude toward religion.² It can be summarised as follows: Christians of Korea follow shamanism in their bellies; Buddhism, in their hearts; Confucianism, in ethics and morals; Christianity, in hands and feet. Those who believe in religion comprise 43.9% of the total population, and those who believe in no religion, 56.1%. However, most of the non-believers have indifferent or favourable attitude towards religion rather than being atheists. In this multi-religion society, the rate of marriage between Catholics and non-Catholics is more than 60%. In the Islamic culture where marriage to a spouse who has a different religion can be regarded as an apostasy, or in the Hindu culture where people of different castes are forbidden to marry, inter-religious marriage could cause big troubles to the faith life of woman spouses in particular. However, in Korea in most cases of inter-religious marriages, Catholic partners prove to have more chances to introduce Catholicism to their non-Christian partners, most of whom show a favourable attitude³ toward Catholicism and not a few people become Catholics through the opportunity of marriage.⁴ Rather, there is a higher possibility of mutual conflicts in the marriage between different denominations of Christianity rather than with a different religion.

As already explained above, difficulties in the life of inter-religious married couples are not relatively big. At present, difficulties that emerge in the marriages of Catholics have totally different dimension.

²Cfr Hans Waldenfels, *Gottes Wort in der Fremde* (Bonn: Borengoesser, 1997), 419–430; Chung HyunKyung, *Schamanin in Bauch—Christin im Kopf: Frauen Asiens im Aufbruch* (Stuttgart: Kreuz, 1997).

³Cfr Mirae Goo, *Lifetime Rituals of Korean Buddhism* [in Korean] (Seoul: Minjocksa, 2012), 139.

⁴Cfr Catholic Research Institute for Faith Life, *Reality of the Religious Life of Korean Catholic Laity* [in Korean] (Seoul: Catholic Research Institute for Faith Life, 1994), 56.

In other words, the number of those who marry rapidly decrease, while the case of marriage nullity increases. In 1997 among the 3.5 million Catholics, 24,000 marriages were performed, out of which 215 marriages proved nullified. In 2017, however, out of 5.8 million Catholics, 15,800 marriages were performed, and the marriage nullity reached as many as 674 cases. During the past twenty years, marriages of Catholics have decreased by 35%, but marriage nullity has increased as much as 213%. This is not the phenomenon of Catholic Church alone, but Korean society on the whole. Drastic changes are taking place in marriage and family life.

Statistics on Family and Marriage

Until the end of the 19th century, official exchanges with foreign countries, except those with China, were hardly conducted in the Korean society, and social change due to the import of foreign civilization and goods were extremely limited. Also, in the early 20th century, Korea was occupied by Japan (1910–1945), which delayed the changes in Korean society as well. Korea had maintained its traditional order for a long period of time, but then it went through drastic changes due to the Korean War and the industrialization which began in the 1960s. Main indexes to show the changes in marriage and family life are presented below.⁵

The population of farming villages comprised 61% in 1960, which, however, drastically dropped to 4.7% in 2017. With the rapid industrialization since 1960, the social structure completely changed from rural-centred to urban-centred one. The average number people per household dropped from 5.2 persons in 1970 to 2.5 persons in 2017. In 1970, those households with 6 members or more marked the top, with the percentage of 43.6%, to be followed by 17.7% of five-member household, 15.5% of four-member household, 13.3% of three-member, 9.7% of two-member, and one-person household was not even recorded at that time. However, in 2017 the six-or-more member households decreased to 1.3%, 5-member to 4.5%, 4-member households slightly increased to 17.7, 3-member to 21.4%, 2-member to 26.1%, and the one-person households to 28.6%, marking the biggest rate, all of which indicates the rapid acceleration of nuclear families.

⁵Cfr <http://www.index.go.kr/main.do> (Accessed, 29 Mar. 2019).

In 1970 marriage cases were 9.2 per 1,000 people, and there were 0.4 divorces per 1000 people; in 2017, however, the number changed to 5.2 and 2.1 respectively. The number of marriages absolutely decreased, while divorces remarkably increased. Unmarried people within the age group of 30–39 was 3.3% in 1985, which rose to 36.3% in 2015,⁶ which indicates the trend of getting married late, or not getting married. Those who maintain that ‘people should marry’ were 73.5% in 1998, whose rate continuously decreased to 67.7% in 2006, and to 48.1% in 2018; meanwhile, those who support the position that ‘man and woman can live together without getting married’ increased to 56.4% in 2018 from 40.5 % in 2010.⁷ It shows the rapid change in the attitude toward marriage. Birth rate of fertile women dropped from 4.53 per capita in 1970 to 1.05 in 2017. According to the Gallup survey of 1983, concerning the reason for having children 98% of respondents indicated continuity of household; 39.6%, contribution to society; 37.5%, stable old age.⁸ Meanwhile, according to the survey conducted in 2018 on fertile women, 81.1% of respondents chose happiness and euphoria of family; 15.6%, psychological satisfaction; 1.2%, continuity of household.⁹ It reveals changes in their attitude towards children. The statistics of 2018 shows that those households that feel the burden of education expenses were as high as 64.4%; and among those who responded that they do not care about having children, 35.4% of them avoided producing children for economic reasons.¹⁰ It could be presumed that an economic

⁶Cfr Statistics Korea, *Results of the 2015 Population and Housing Census* [in Korean], <http://kostat.go.kr/portal/eng/pressReleases/8/1/index.board?bmode=read&bSeq=&aSeq=361325&pageNo=7&rowNum=10&navCount=10&currPg=&sTarget=title&sTxt=>, http://kostat.go.kr/portal/korea/kor_nw/3/index.board?bmode=read&aSeq=359282 (Accessed, 29 Mar. 2019).

⁷Cfr Statistics Korea, *2018 Social Survey (Family, Education, Health, Safety and Environment)*, <http://kostat.go.kr/portal/eng/pressReleases/11/1/index.board?bmode=read&bSeq=&aSeq=372014&pageNo=1&rowNum=10&navCount=10&currPg=&sTarget=title&sTxt=> (29 Mar. 2019).

⁸Cfr Bongjyn Kim, *Pastoral Consideration of the Church in Changing the Concept on Marriage of Koreans* [in Korean], Dissertation for Masters, Daegu Hyosung Catholic University, 1998. Please note that option for multiple answers was given.

⁹Cfr Soyoung Lee et al., *2018 National Survey on the Actual Condition of Fertility, Family Health and Welfare* [in Korean] (Sejong: Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs, 2018), 105, <https://www.kihasa.re.kr/web/publication/research/view.do?division=001&menuId=44&tid=71&bid=12&ano=2396> (29 Mar. 2019).

¹⁰Lee et. al., *2018 National Survey on the Actual Condition of Fertility, Family Health and Welfare*, 106–109.

burden exert great influence on procreation. As some indicators show, during the past five decades, urbanization and nuclear family trends have progressed so rapidly in the Korean society that drastic changes took place in marriage and family life.

Traditional Concept of Family, Its Development and Changes in the East Asia

Drastic changes presented afore are taking place not only in Korea but in the whole East Asian region including China and Japan. Those countries that have low fertility rates are concentrated in the East Asia; even though China and Japan do not yet belong to low fertility groups compared to global rates, the trend in those two countries is towards low fertility.¹¹ The concept of family common to the East Asian countries will be examined here, and that of China, Japan and Korea will be introduced as well, to be followed by the causes for rapid changes.

Chinese, Japanese and Korean people share the common characteristics that they have strong sense of community and an ardent zeal for diligence and good education, which stems from the Confucian family concept which is uniquely East-Asian.¹² In China, Japan and Korea, the etymology of family (*Ga-Giok*) is common. Specifically, the first word '*Ga*' (*Jia* in Chinese; *Ie* in Japanese; *Ga* in Korean) has the meaning of raising pigs in the square space covered with a roof, representing the basic production community in agricultural society. The second word *Giok* means the combat military forces of a clan. According to this etymology, family means a group of people who perform production activities in peacetime, and during the wartime they become united to protect the family against the enemy.¹³

East Asian people share not only the concept of family but the Confucian value of family. In the 5th Century BC, Confucianism set the family as a basic unit to connect an individual with a community.

¹¹Cfr Joshua R. Goldstein et al., *The End of 'Lowest-low' Fertility?*, MPIDR Working Paper WP 2009-029, November 2009, <https://www.demogr.mpg.de/papers/working/wp-2009-029.pdf> (29 Mar. 2019).

¹²Cfr Yong Hyuk Kwon, *Korean Family, Look Philosophically* [in Korean] (Seoul: Ihacksa, 2012), 222-233.

¹³Cfr Xu Jun Xiong, *Ancient Chinese Society* [in Korean], Hee Hong, tr. (Seoul: Dongmoonsun, 2003), 500.

According to the *Book of Rites (Liji)*, which is reported to have been written by Confucius, the purpose of a marriage is to perform the sacrificial rites for family ancestors, and to produce descendants.¹⁴ In this context, marriage was regarded as a family event rather than a personal matter. Children were raised not as individuals but as members of a family community, that is, equipped with functions and duties. It was the most basic duty for children to obey their parents and respect and support parents with filial piety. Such hierarchy of high and low was extended to be applied to society and nation. A state endowed the family with a great deal of autonomy, and positively utilized the family as part of governing organization. Also, the worshipping of ancestors played the religious role of guaranteeing the permanent continuity of family. In the teachings of Confucianism, family is a basic organization to produce population and maintain economic life, as well as to control society in a certain way.¹⁵ The authority of a patriarch who represents a family was supported by the hierarchy of status that parents precede children, and that males dominate over women.

Based on the common ground of the Confucian family system, the concept on family in China, Japan and Korea developed slightly differently according to each regional situation.¹⁶ Family in China was composed of people who were mutually connected by blood and adoption including the direct and collateral lines, who jointly operated property and household. Within the family who positively cooperated for economic life, the head of the family was a chief to make decisions on important matters, assuming the responsibility of property management. Women were supposed to be subject to their fathers prior to marriage; to husbands after marriage; to sons after the husbands' death.¹⁷ To sum up, women had to obey the males throughout their

¹⁴*Book of Rites (Liji)*, 44, *Hunyi*, 1: "The ceremony of marriage was intended to be a bond of love between two (families of different) surnames, with a view, in its retrospective character, to secure the services in the ancestral temple, and in its prospective character, to secure the continuance of the family line": <https://ctext.org/liji/hun-yi> (30 Mar. 2019).

¹⁵Cfr Kwon, *Korean Family, Look Philosophically*, 168.

¹⁶Cfr Kwon, *Korean Family, Look Philosophically*, 222–272.

¹⁷*Book of Rites (Liji)*, 11, *Jiaotesheng*, 35: "The woman follows (and obeys) the man: in her youth, she follows her father and elder brother; when married, she follows her husband; when her husband is dead, she follows her son": <https://ctext.org/liji/jiao-te-sheng> (30 Mar. 2019).

whole lifetime. However, the traditional family concept rapidly changed due to the law of gender equality that the government adopted by force during the 1950s for the industrialization, improvement of productivity, and open trade since the 1980s, and 'the one-child for one household movement' to curb the increase of population.

Japanese people have, in terms of family description, typical expressions like 'those who eat from the same pot' or 'those who live under the same roof,' emphasizing the community of communal meal and cohabiting. Family means direct blood relation, but when necessary, non-blood relation is included as well. The head of the family was succeeded not by the eldest son but by the most capable son; ethics between the head of the family and members was not based on filial piety but loyalty. The understanding of the family as partnership organization was maintained in the succession of the family business or the family-centred corporation. Even today for a corporation or a local community to play the role of a large family has been originated from this tradition. However, in the course of modernization, legislation transformed the prevailing large family system with the head of the family as a leader into the nuclear family system. The *Ie System* which understood the head of the household as the core of the family was abolished in 1947, and thereafter the household of Japan has been defined as husband and wife and their unmarried children.¹⁸

In Korea, Confucianism was prevalent as governing ideology in society since the 15th century, which idealized the patriarchal blood-relation system in terms of a household. The customs of equal inheritance among the children were changed into an exclusive inheritance by the eldest son, and the five-generation family principle of great-great-grandfather, great grandfather, grandfather, father and son was set up to replace the three-generation family of grandfather, father, and son. The ancestral rites, which were conducted by the eldest son as a chief priest, strengthened the familial bond of the patriarchal family system; such systems as adopted sons and concubinage were justified for those couples who had no sons. Individuals understood their birth and death within the bloodline of the family and believed that they lived forever through their descendants. Among the three countries, Korea represented the ideas of Confucianism most strikingly especially in the concept of family. Since the 1960s, however, Korean society

¹⁸Cfr Kwon, *Korean Family, Look Philosophically*, 240–246.

underwent drastic and rapid social changes. The family register law in terms of patriarchal system with the head of the household was abolished in 2007; currently, family is no longer defined as a household with a rigid hierarchical structure and a leader but based on relations in between the individuals.

Traditional family system based on the blood kinship and unity was a community that played the roles of production, childbirth, education, social integration and religion. However, the three countries of China, Japan and Korea had gone through the modernization and industrialization within the short period of the 20th century, and multiple functions which the traditional family system had in the past were transferred to each different sectors of politics, economy, religion, and the educational system. The function of family in modern times was reduced to child nurturing and the provision of emotional stability. In line with this, numerous changes have been made: from group-centredness that values social system to individual-centric family that seeks to realize individual freedom; from normative and hierarchical order to reasonable and equal relationship; from large family system to nuclear family; from father-son relationship to husband-wife relationship; from the fixed gender roles to equality of man and woman.¹⁹ At present, two concepts co-exist: one, traditional family concept that has the characteristics of hierarchical and organic body and the other, the family concept, which has the characteristics of horizontal community that complies with the social changes. However, changes in the family value and concept have failed to catch up with the changes of social reality. In other words, the family concept has changed outside only, creating numerous social problems such as home violence, divorce, youth problems, and conflicts between generations. New phenomena have emerged: voluntary childlessness, commuter marriage ('weekend couples' and 'separated couples'), non-family household, and the social isolation of the elderly people.²⁰ In the course of such rapid changes, interest in marriage itself and childbirth is drastically decreasing, which is the reality of the East Asia including Korea.

¹⁹Cfr Kwon, *Korean Family, Look Philosophically*, 208–221.

²⁰Cfr Jürgen Habermas, *Die Moderne, ein unvollendetes Projekt*, Leipzig: Reclam, 1994. Habermas names the modern age as an unfinished project. The family in East Asia seems to be a typical example of an unfinished project.

Mixed Concepts of Family

The Confucian concept of family revealed its merits in the turmoil of drastic social changes due to modernization and industrialization. People of China, Japan and Korea could meet with the new situation actively and positively, based on familial economic aid relationship formulated within the familism and its extended form of nepotism, and performed remarkable economic development. Homes played the role of good shelter where they could feel secure and safe from the cold and heartless society. In the midst of severe competition, homes became the communal competition unit where several members of one family supported and sacrificed themselves for the success of one member. Parents could maintain their authority through the altruistic acts of sacrificing themselves thoroughly for their children. Children obeyed their parents, recognizing the fact that they could survive in the intense competition not through their own abilities but the wholehearted support of the family.²¹

However, in such a family system, it is likely that success-oriented family egotism or closed groupism might emerge rather than democratic and personality-oriented discussion or decision-making based on the dignity of an individual. Especially in Korea, the side-effects thereof are not a few. The dark sides of grouping familism are suggested in such phenomena as: large corporations like *chaebol* are governed by one family; expenses for private tutoring are excessive; neither family (1.7%), nor friendship (3.8%), but studying (29.6%) and vocations (30%), rank the top troubles for the young generation.²² Also, marriages are used as means to inherit social status of family. That is, for numerous marrying couples, similar social conditions are more valued than love for each other. Trend of nuclear family is in progress in society, but duties of social security like earning a living, nurturing children, and caring for the elderly people and the sick are all entrusted to family. Excessive expectations from and to the family, therefore, put other family members in difficulties, and it is clearly revealed among the young people as a reason to avoid marriage and childbirth. Increasing are self-contradictory situations that people tend to avoid

²¹Cfr Kwon, *Korean Family, Look Philosophically*, 208–221.

²²Statistics Korea, *2018 Social Survey (Family, Education, Health, Safety and Environment)*, http://kostat.go.kr/portal/korea/kor_nw/3/index.board?bmode=read&aSeq=371503 (29 Mar. 2019).

forming a family despite their good understanding that homes are the very resting places in competitive society. The concept of family life is showing the phenomenon of being overloaded in the circumstances where social changes are not successfully mediated. The changes need the traditional value system to be smoothly linked with the new one without trouble.²³

Christian Concept of Family in *Amoris Laetitia*

Is it possible for the Christian concept of family to coexist without any problem with the Confucian one? When Christianity was introduced to Korea, it had no difficulty accepting the Confucian concept of family, which emphasized filial piety and benevolence. Also, as the spread of Christianity was mostly done on the basis of family and relatives, Christianity received not a little help from the Confucian family system. In the course of modernization, western laws on homes and family introduced by the government, and marriage customs had already included the teachings of Christianity; therefore, the Christian concept of marriage did not have any direct conflict with the family-centred concept of marriage in Confucianism. It does not necessarily mean that the Catholic Church unconditionally accepted the Confucian concept on marriage. Despite the persecution, the Catholic Church had already tried to pursue the Christian concept of marriage, with small, but meaningful examples:

In *Joseon* society where Catholicism was introduced, the family concept of Confucianism had not only numerous merits but also negative effects. Marriages at that time had been arranged by the heads of both families rather than by the man and woman affected; rights to divorce were allowed to husbands only; re-marriage of a widow had been banned simply because it was a betrayal of the family of the deceased husband.²⁴ Some pastoral letters issued by the bishops since 1857 opposed the patriarchal system of marriage, and continuously taught to respect the will of those who marry.²⁵ The state law forbade

²³Cfr Kwon, *Korean Family, Look Philosophically*, 208–221.

²⁴Cfr Mijin Lee, *Study on the Family and Marriage Concepts of Female Catholics* [in Korean], Sungshin Woman's University, Dissertation for Masters, 1993, 114–119.

²⁵Cfr Lee, *Study on the Family and Marriage Concepts of Female Catholics*, 106–108; Claude-Charles Dallet, *History of the Catholic Church in Korea 1* [in Korean], Eungyol Ahn, tr. (Seoul: Benedict Press, 1979), 535.

widows to remarry but the Church declared that they could not be forbidden when remarriage was beneficial to them.²⁶ Also those Catholic women who wanted to live unmarried voluntarily lived together since 1801, maintaining life comparable to the monastic community life.²⁷

Like this, the Catholic Church put priority on the will of those who marry and stood against the Confucian concept on marriage which took marriage as the matter between the two households. The Church advocated human rights of gender equality, opposing the customs of forbidding widows to remarry. The Catholic Church also provided the possibility of living a life of virginity for those women who did not want to marry, liberating women from the oppression by the social system of Confucianism. Is the correction of questionable practices originating from the Confucian concept of marriage limited to the times prior to modernization?

It is hopefully believed that the Christian concept of marriage will provide a clue to the shift in thoughts, dealing with the self-contradictory situation of avoiding marriage and childbirth, which the Confucian concept of familism faces in the East Asia including Korea.

For this purpose, *Amoris Laetitia*,²⁸ which was issued by Pope Francis in March 2016, will be examined. This is a recent literature of the Church on marriage and family life. In this exhortation Pope Francis introduces first the reality and challenges modern marriages and families undergo (31–57), presents in summary the teachings of the Church on marriage (58–88), and states the fundamental principle of love in marriage and family life (89–119), conjugal love (120–152), and children who are “love made fruitful” (165–177; 260–290). To be illumined through *Amoris Laetitia* are the essence of marriage in Christianity, the meaning of children, and the essence of children’s education required of family life.

Before he presents the teachings of the Church on marriage, the Pope examines the current reality of marriage and family life. The phenomenon of avoiding marriage, and socio-economic reality which is not favourable to current marriage and family life suggest that marriage

²⁶Cfr Lee, *Study on the Family and Marriage Concepts of Female Catholics*, 114–119.

²⁷Cfr Lee, *Study on the Family and Marriage Concepts of Female Catholics*, 59–100.

²⁸Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia.html (29 Mar. 2019).

is no more to be naturally maintained as a social system but that it requests consideration and reflection:

“Indeed, in many countries where the number of marriages is decreasing, more and more people are choosing to live alone or simply prefer to spend time together without cohabiting” (AL 33).

“At the risk of oversimplifying, we might say that we live in a culture which pressures young people not to start a family, because they lack possibilities for the future... In some countries, many young persons postpone a wedding for economic reasons, work or study” (AL 40).

“There is also a general feeling of powerlessness in the face of socio-cultural realities that often-times end up crushing families... Families often feel abandoned due to a lack of interest and attention on the part of institutions” (AL 43).

While Pope Francis’ diagnosis of reality does not directly address the phenomenon of less marriages and childbirth in East Asia, it cannot be denied that the global phenomenon described by the Pope also includes the East Asian issues. Therefore, *Amoris Laetitia* provides a basis to critically reflect on the reality of marriage in that region. Pope Francis emphasizes that the fundamental principle of marriage is love, and that conjugal love is the starting point of family relationship.

In fact, teachings of the Church on marriage show, through the remarkable changes, the supremacy of love. According to 1917 Code of Canon Law, # 1013, the primary purpose of marriage was the childbirth, and the secondary one was the conjugal love. Also, marriage was principally understood as a contract (*contractus*) which is a social system.

Also, *Gaudium et spes*, the pastoral constitution of the Second Vatican Council, defined husband and wife to have “the intimate partnership of married life and love,” therefore not entering a legal contract (*contractus*), but personal covenant like that between God and humans. Unlike before, conjugal love and procreation of children, which are the two key purposes of marriage, are not to be differentiated against each other; conjugal love received in God’s love have come to find their ground in God (Cfr *Gaudium et spes*, 48).²⁹ Like this, *Gaudium et spes* has

²⁹Cfr Hans Joachim Sander, *Theologischer Kommentar zur Pastoralconstitution über die Kirche in der Welt von heute Gaudium et spes*, Peter Huenermann et al., ed., *Heders*

started to emphasize conjugal love as the essential characteristics of marriage, and *Amoris laetitia* has developed this tendency further. *Amoris laetitia* considers husband and wife as the image or an emblem of God (Cfr AL 11, 121 and 122), and regulates the married couple as a tool of God in the course of maturity to set up their identity (Cfr AL 221). Human love, which is held essential to the endowment of meaning to life (Cfr AL 161), is declared “the highest and most central values of the Gospel” (AL 311). Marriage is “a contract with all its public commitments” (AL 132), and home is a place “to cultivate that strength of love” (AL 119). Like this, marriage is explained in terms of love, which is the core teaching of Christianity.³⁰

What meaning does a child have? *Gaudium et spes* states that children are “the supreme gift of marriage,” who contribute a great deal to the happiness of parents (Cfr *Gaudium et spes* 50). Here children are understood in the context of God’s blessing, “Increase and multiply,” i.e., in terms of procreation of humans. However, in *Amoris laetitia* children are welcomed as “a gift of God ... who are loved even before they arrive” (AL 166). Their independence is emphasized and we are invited to treat them as proper personalities:

“The Gospel goes on to remind us that children are not the property of a family, but have their own lives to lead” (AL 18).

“He or she is not an accessory or a solution to some personal need. A child is a human being of immense worth and may never be used for one’s own benefit. ... For children are a gift. Each one is unique and irreplaceable” (AL 170).

As quoted above, in *Amoris Laetitia* a new child is a gift entrusted by the Lord to a father and a mother, not to the control by parents, nor their ownership (Cfr AL 166). Here we see a reflection of the primacy of the love of God in the family composed of parents and children together. From this it presents the fundamental principle of mutual respect not only between husband and wife but between parents and children, offering the possibility of equal communication within the family.

Also, *Amoris Laetitia* makes a diagnosis that child education is impossible through the means of controlling and ruling them; it stresses

Theologischer Kommentar zum Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil 4 (Freiburg: Herder, 2005), 772–775.

³⁰Cfr Sander, *Theologischer Kommentar zur Pastoralkonstitution über die Kirche in der Welt von heute Gaudium et spes*, 773.

that the essence of the education of children is to cultivate personalities equipped with freedom and responsibility (Cfr AL 261–262, 274, and 279). The most important thing parents should do for their children is “instilling in their children trust and loving respect,” through which an individual’s socialization is done (Cfr AL 263 and 276). This insight by Pope Francis requests many parents to reflect and evaluate how they are bringing up their children.

Conclusion

This article has introduced the unique concept of family in the East Asian region including Korea, and has analysed the outstanding phenomenon of avoiding marriage and childbirth as the characteristic feature which traditional concept of family life has to deal with. The Confucian concept of family which emphasized productivity and survival had shown not a few merits in the drastic change of modernization and industrialization, but at present it undergoes the self-contradicting phenomenon of giving up family as industrial structure and the function of family have changed.

Since the opportunity for self-realization is limited due to the excessive expectations from marriage, numerous people are suffering from the conflict in the family concept. Today the difference in the concept of family between Confucianism and Christianity has become clearer than before.

Here the Christian concept of family sheds light to solve the side effects of collateral familism which is the distortion of hierarchical and organic family of Confucianism. *Amoris Laetitia* presents the principle of love, which deduces precedence of conjugal love, the meaning of children, and the essence of child education. It invites the East Asian people to a new contemplation and reflection, especially on the already increasing small families who suffer under excessive demands. Family is not first of all a unit of human procreation, economy, and social control, but a nest for love. Therefore, marriage and family cannot be used as a means to inherit social status. Love of those who marry should be counted first, not the status of the prospective partner in the society. Also, parents and children are the partners in love entrusted to family members by God; they should not be seen as people only to fulfil certain functions of building up the households. Family members can love each other because they are gifts from God, not because of their abilities or

performances. If husband and wife fail to love each other and maintain bad conjugal relationship only for the sake of children, it could cause children to develop sceptical attitudes towards marriage and family. Finally, the essence of child education is the formation of good humans who have a sense of responsibility and freedom. The technical education for existence is the duty of society. The excessive and burdensome expenditure of private education along with the zeal for good education springs from the success-oriented egotism of familism. The key to child education at home is not to help children avoid social challenges but to nurture inner power to respond to them. To accept such Christian concept of family, trust in God and trust in other family members are required. This concept is not yet another demand given to those who are already suffering from countless expectations. Rather, it could reveal freedom for those who attempt to solve all issues on their own. In this regard, the Christian concept of family is an important opportunity and subject in the Evangelization of the East Asia. Carrying it out requires a concerted effort of the entire Church.

CRISIS IN VALUES OF FAMILY AND MARRIAGE IN INDIA

Inter-Cultural and Interreligious Families at a Crossroad

Kiran Prasad[♦]

The family as a social unit is of critical importance in India's demographic transition as it is among the youngest countries in the world with 75 percent of the population below the age of 35 according to the 2011 Census.¹ The family is the primary site for human development. India with a population of over a billion is marked by wide inter-state and intra-state variations in the human development status. India missed the target of the Millennium Development Goals in 2015 particularly in addressing gender equality issues. The Sustainable Development Goals adopted in September 2015 comprise a set of 17 goals which include ending poverty, achieving health and inclusive learning opportunities, well-being of the girl child and gender equality, and promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development. It is essential to revisit the family system and its core values if there must be progress in sustainable development.

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¹Census of India, Registrar General of India (New Delhi: Government of India, 2011).

Prasad, Kiran. "Crisis in Values of Family and Marriage in India: Inter-cultural and Interreligious Families at a Crossroad." In *Vocation and Mission of the Family: Reflections on Chavarul and Amoris Laetitia*, edited by Shaji George Kochuthara, 347-362. Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2020.

The 2016 Human Development Report² red flags the stark reality that the largest gender disparity in development was in South Asia where the female Human Development Index (HDI) value was 20 percent lower than for males; India accounts for the largest gender disparity in the region. In rural India, where teenage marriages are common, women face insecurity regarding a regular income, food, shelter and access to health care. It is an understatement to say that violence against women is multidimensional; it is structural, brutal and a part of everyday life.³ Indian women marry at a median age of just 17 years and 16 percent of women aged 15–19 have already started bearing children, according to the 2005–2006 National Family Health Survey.⁴ With 212 per 100,000 live births India ranks among the countries with the highest Maternal Mortality Rates (MMR) accounting for one-third of maternal deaths in 2015 worldwide.⁵ It was estimated that every year, 78,000 women die during pregnancy and childbirth even though 75 per cent of these deaths can be prevented by health care.⁶ India is ranked 170 out of 185 countries in the prevalence of anaemia among women (48% women are anaemic) and has the highest rate of malnourished children in the world at 44 per cent and stands at 114/132 in stunted growth of children with 38.7% incidence.⁷ These indicators present formidable challenges for understanding the crisis in the structure, values and outcomes for healthy human relationships and families. A radical revision of the cultural and religious values that ground family and marriage is needed to reshape this stark reality into a more humane, dignified and just social order.

Family and Marriage among Hindus

The idea and structure of family and marriage among Hindus is constantly evolving from the larger unit of a joint or extended family,

²*Human Development Report 2016* (New York: UNDP, 2017).

³Shamika Ravi and Anuradha Sajjanhar, "Beginning a New Conversation on Women," *The Hindu*, 21 June 2014, 9.

⁴International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) and Macro International, *National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3), 2005–06: India: Volume II* (Mumbai: IIPS, 2007), 39.

⁵Registrar General of India, *Maternal Mortality Rates* (New Delhi: Government of India, 2009).

⁶Jisha Krishnan, "Dying to Be a Mother," *The Week*, 12 September 2010, 16–24.

⁷UNFPA, *Global Nutrition Report 2016*, UNFPA 2016.

nuclear family, siblings forming a family, single parent families whether unmarried or separated or divorced, adopted families, live-in relationships or cohabitation legally recognized as a family unit and many other forms of community living. Each one of these forms has found acceptance based on inherent cultural and religious values which can reinforce the bonds of a family. Indian culture has shown an amazing acceptance and assimilation of various forms of families despite some rigidity imposed by misinterpreted religious traditions and extremists who want to exercise power over communities. In this context, it is interesting to note that the former Prime Minister of India, Atal Bihari Vajpayee and the famous writer Ruskin Bond have adopted families. India's international beauty queen and celebrated actor Sushmita Sen though unmarried adopted two daughters. She married very recently. Through the myriad nature of families in Indian culture, it is found that gender inequality pervades marriage and families are rarely grounded in equality, mutual respect and true partnership.

Many Vedic philosophical texts refer to God as Tat, meaning 'It' and that God is beyond gender. There is no sex distinction in Atman (Self)—there is no difference between man and woman, all is Atman. Hindu women enjoyed rights of property from the Vedic Age, took a share in social and religious rites, and were sometimes distinguished by their learning. The idea of equality was most forcibly expressed in the Rig Veda (Book 5, hymn 61, verse 8). The commentator explains this passage thus: "The wife and husband, being the equal halves of one substance, are equal in every respect; therefore both should join and take equal parts in all work, religious and secular."⁸ It is the special injunction of the *Vedas* that no married man shall perform any religious rite, ceremony or sacrifice without being joined in by his wife. The wife is called *Sahadharmini* in Sanskrit and considered an equal partaker and partner in the spiritual life of her husband. This idea still prevails in Hindu religious rites and ceremonies and is the mainstay of family and marriage in India.

The concept of *Ardhanareeshwarar*, where God is depicted as half-man and half-woman, gives a good idea of the simultaneous and equal reverence that Hindus have for the feminine and the masculine aspects of divinity. It is significant to note that Hindus worship God in the form

⁸Swami Vivekananda, *Essentials of Hinduism* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1993), 68.

of the Divine Mother. In Hinduism the deities for knowledge, learning and material wealth are female and not male. In Hinduism, the only words for strength and power are feminine—Shakti means “power” and “strength.” All male power comes from the feminine. Literary evidence suggests that kings and towns were destroyed because a single woman was wronged by the state. For example, Valmiki’s *Ramayana* teaches us that Ravana and his entire clan were wiped out because he abducted Sita. Veda Vyasa’s *Mahabharatha* teaches us that all the Kauravas were killed because they humiliated Draupadi in public. Elango Adigal’s *Sillapathigaram* teaches us Madurai, the capital of the Pandyas, was burnt because Pandyan Nedunchezhiyan mistakenly killed her husband on theft charges. Despite this glorious heritage, Hindu women are grossly discriminated in families and are subject to various forms of torture, ill treatment, persecution, and are driven to suicide or are murdered by their husbands and in-laws for not meeting dowry demands despite constitutional guarantees to protect their rights.⁹

Hinduism stresses some important universally valid moral values: *Dama* (self-control), *Sraddha* (self-respect), *Svadhyaya* (self-effort), *Satya* (truth), *Asteya* (non-stealing), *Vidya* (knowledge), *Dhi* (wisdom), *Brahmacharya* (sexual purity), *Ahimsa* (non-injury), *Sauca* (cleanliness), *Akrodha* (freedom from anger), and *Seva* (service to all beings). All these values are also enshrined and echoed in Saint Chavara’s description of a family in the *Chavarul*:

The only sweet consolation for a person experiencing trials and tribulations in the sorrowful valley of this world is to belong to and live in a family where love, order and peace reign. Likewise, it is most distressing to live in a family where order and peace do not prevail and where no one is concerned about the service of God and their own eternal salvation.¹⁰

The eternal values of love, mutual respect, cooperation, order, peace and harmony that nurtures a family have been eroded over a period of time due to cultural degradation. Many of these important

⁹Kiran Prasad, “Burdened by Shame: Women, Media, Culture and Identity Crises in India,” in *The Walk of Shame*, ed. Mira Moshe and Nicoleta Corbu (New York: Nova Science Publishers, Inc, 2013), 113–130.

¹⁰Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Chavarul: Testament of a Loving Father*, Translated from Malayalam (original 1868) into English by Fr Saju Chackalal (Kochi: Chavara Central Secretariat, 2018), 9.

values are often neglected or misunderstood or distorted due to the negative influence of the political, social and cultural hegemony imposed by the patriarchal order that pervades family life in India. The *Manusmriti* is unequivocal on the inferior status of women and it heralded the final phase in the disenfranchisement of women. Women, regardless of caste, became subject to seclusion, subservience and self-denial especially with some fundamentalist fringe groups supporting regressive attitudes and behaviour towards women. The social inconsistencies and injustices against women did not arise from Hindu scriptures, but from a failure to correctly incorporate the teachings of the scriptures, such as the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gita*, into their social philosophy. The gradual pattern of domination of men in the families were due to a complex entanglement of class, caste and gender.

Hinduism lays down that a householder, married man or woman, has to fulfil the duties of caring for the family before taking up renunciation. But this does not hamper their pursuit of *dharma* which means the right way of life for spiritual fulfilment. But women continue to bear the brunt of violence and many harmful practices in the name of tradition, religious ideals and family honour thus rarely treading the spiritual path of self-realization.¹¹ There are very few families that mirror the image presented in Hindu philosophy or Saint Chavara's vision of an ideal family offering solace from the vicissitudes of life as can be seen in the following discussion on the brutality of the family system which emerges as sites of oppression and exploitation for majority of the women and children in India.

Contemporary Family Life

The family system needs an in-depth study to understand how it has gradually established a pattern of domination of men as a result of a complex entanglement of class, caste and gender. A collaborative study by the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) and the Young Lives India (YLI)¹² revealed that India stood at 11th rank

¹¹Kiran Prasad, "Continuing Discrimination against Hindu Women in India: Walking the Tightrope to Gender Justice," in *Gender Justice in the Church and Society*, ed. Shaji George Kochuthara (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2016), 75–89.

¹²NCPCR and YLI, *Report on Incidence and Intensity of Child Marriages* (Delhi: NCPCR and YLI, 2017).

in the countries worldwide with the highest incidence of child marriages accounting for 47 percent of all children with 39,000 minor girls being married every day in India. The UNICEF further points out that India accounts for one-third of the global total of over 700 million women married as children leading to high levels of depression among them.¹³

The National Crime Records Bureau estimates show that over 20,000 young mothers who are mainly housewives, commit suicide every year, with farmers coming second making them the largest demographic group in India to commit suicide.¹⁴ The reasons for these deaths have been cited as unplanned pregnancies, an abusive or alcoholic husband, pressures to have a male child and hormonal changes among others. The Programme for Improving Mental Health Care (PRIME) in Madhya Pradesh is an intervention programme where all expecting mothers are screened for neo-natal depression related problems.¹⁵ There is hardly any recognition of the pressure and depression of motherhood; many young women are automatically expected to care for their child and their personal health in India. Family life and marriage in India rarely examine these complexities.¹⁶

Saint Chavara in his *Chavarul: Testament of a Loving Father* clearly exhorts both parents to take the responsibility of nurturing and guiding children but in reality, mothers bear a disproportionate reproductive burden including caring for children than fathers. Though men and women are equally responsible for family planning, there is extreme gender bias in sterilisation; the rate of female sterilisation which is complex and involves greater health risk as the method of contraception stood at 36 per cent while the uptake of male sterilisation was negligible at 0.3 per cent.¹⁷

¹³UNICEF, *Ending Child Marriage-Progress and Prospects* (New York: UNICEF, 2014).

¹⁴Amba Batra Bakshi, "Depression after Childbirth—A Silent Killer in India," 12 July 2016 <<http://everylifecounts.ndtv.com/depression-childbirth-silent-killer-india-3673?pfrom=home-environment>> (17 July 2016).

¹⁵Amba Batra Bakshi, "Depression after Childbirth a Silent Killer in India."

¹⁶Kiran Prasad, "Resurrecting the Feminist Genius: Striving for Creativity, Capability and Leadership Everyday," *Journal of Dharma* 41, 2 (April-June 2016): 121–128.

¹⁷International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) and Macro International, *National Family Health Survey-4, 2015–16*, Mumbai, 2017.

The Hindu family prescribes a higher status for men and boys mainly through values and roles imposed on them by culture. In today's Hindu society, boys are highly valued due to strong "son preference" while girl children are often seen as a burden to the family. The sex ratio has been dropping steadily for the past 50 years due to the undue preference for sons among families. In 2011 the sex ratio of females stood at 940 females per 1000 males, the lowest ratio after independence.¹⁸ The Pink Economic Survey in 2018, which is the first national data of its kind, gives estimates based on the sex ratio of the last child (SRLC) which is heavily skewed in favour of males to show that 21 million girls were unwanted by parents in India.¹⁹

Girl children over a period of time may subconsciously and unconsciously imbue several gender unjust roles and values from an early age within the family and social environment that deeply influence the social milieu in their understanding of family and marriage. Women find themselves in a "dichotomizing trap"²⁰ in which researchers and policy analysts envision women as either 'traditional' or 'modern' meaning liberated, educated and independent. These images of women have reinforced simplistic ideas about the nature of society, the interpretation of the status of women, and prescriptions for their future. Though culture demands women become modern, traditional perceptions and expectations of women's roles in society or family remain deep-rooted, which have continued to influence the way society treats women.²¹

There is tremendous pressure exerted on girls by skewed values imposed by culture (such as beauty) that are often unrealistic and unattainable²² almost to an exclusion of all other values such as

¹⁸Census of India, Registrar General of India, 2011.

¹⁹Pink Economic Survey, *Pink Economic Survey* (Niti Aayog: Government of India, 2018).

²⁰David A. Williamson, "The Promise of Change, the Persistence of Inequality: Development, Globalization, Mass Media and Women in Sub-Saharan Africa," in *Women, Globalization and Mass Media: International Facets of Emancipation*, ed. Kiran Prasad (New Delhi: The Women Press, 2006), 183–208.

²¹Kiran Prasad, "Gender Sensitive Communications Policies for Women's Development: Issues and Challenges," in *Minding the Gap: Feminist Interventions in International Communication*, ed. Katharine Sarikakis and Leslie Regan Shade (Lanham City: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008), 74–89.

²²Kiran Prasad, "Young Women and the Modernity Project: Realities and Problems of Media Regulation in India," *Journal of International Communication* 15, 1 (2009): 9–25.

education, economic independence and self-confidence.²³ The Kerala High Court in its recent judgment observed that girls and boys must have equal freedom while striking down the restrictions on women's hostel residents and their freedom to participate in political activity or go to late evening movie shows as no such restrictions were imposed on boys.²⁴ Family must become a site for social transformation and spur a global movement regarding the place, rights and the roles of women in society.

India has the lowest rates of women's labour force participation in Asia. While only 27 percent of the women are in the workforce, they have to contend with a 25 percent pay gap. According to the Gender Diversity Benchmark Survey for 2011 and 2014, Indian companies lose 11 per cent of their female workforce every year as women are haunted by 'daughterly guilt' and maternal guilt that leads them to prioritise caring for parents, children and extended family by leaving their careers.²⁵

While women are the primary care givers it is important to provide social support through initiatives such as day care centres and community recreation centres which can be attached to schools and colleges. The Kudumbashree Mission in Kerala which has a sizeable elderly population launched a network of day care centres called *Pakal Veedu* to help the elderly reconnect with society and reduce their sense of loneliness and isolation.²⁶ This novel initiative has become a solace for the elderly in the context of declining joint family setup, drift towards nuclear families, urbanisation, and mass migration of youngsters for jobs. Such initiatives need to be expanded all over the country to enable women to seek employment and also to relieve the pressures on them from being full-time care givers in the family.

Gender Inequality in the Family

Research has increasingly documented the association between gender inequality within the family and unfavourable demographic

²³Kiran Prasad, "Continuing Discrimination against Hindu Women in India," 75-89.

²⁴*The Hindu*, "Girls and Boys must have Equal Freedom: High Court," *The Hindu*, March 19, 2019.

²⁵K. Bharat Kumar, "'Daughterly Guilt' Haunts Indian Working Women," *The Hindu*, 21 March 2016, 14.

²⁶Mini Muringatheri, "Kudumbashree Helps Senior Citizens Reconnect," *The Hindu*, March 24, 2019.

outcomes such as early marriage, discrimination against daughters in access to food and health care, poor nutritional status of women and their inability to seek health care for themselves. The family has been recognized as the primary site of the oppression of women. Calling for easing the burden of unpaid work by women, Belinda Gates declared, "Mum is no slave... and nobody leaves the kitchen until mom leaves the kitchen" with her children and even her billionaire husband Bill Gates cleaning the dishes. In India, women, whether they are exclusive homemakers or those employed outside also, do almost all the household work with little help from male members. Male family members feel little obligation to help pregnant women, mothers with infants and small children or sick female family members. It is a tragedy of family life that while women care, nurture and nourish their family there is hardly any affection, respect and care given to them when they need it most. This is the painful experience of a vast majority of women in families. Women's powerlessness is reinforced by behavioural norms, which pose a lifelong disadvantage. The most prominent of these are seclusion, subservience and self-denial, which have important implications for women's control over their lives and self-confidence.

Seclusion imposes a variety of restrictions on women: their spatial movement outside the home is restricted; total or partial veiling of the head and face is enforced; a strict code of behaviour governs any interaction with men. The degree of seclusion varies with the social norms prevailing in the region and community and according to the economic status of the household. Social norms even dictate the dress codes for women, which is a much simpler issue in women's autonomy when compared to issues such as choice of higher education, employment, marriage partner and number of children. If women do not have freedom even in matters of dress, it seems quite meaningless to address higher issues of autonomy, which requires greater decision-making on the part of women.²⁷

The context to which seclusion can be practiced is often limited by poverty. Ironically, higher family income has led to withdrawal of women from the labour force as in Kerala, limiting their freedom of movement and making them increasingly dependent on men. On the other hand, the 2011 Census reveals that about 27 million households, constituting 11 per cent of total households in the

²⁷Kiran Prasad, "Resurrecting the Feminist Genius," 121–138.

country, are headed by women, often among the poorest.²⁸ Though many of these women lack formal education and employment skills, their courage to face adversities and steer their families out of poverty goes unrecognized by policy makers and development planners in the country.

What is shocking of the complexity of family life in India is that studies indicate a link between women's employment and domestic violence. National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3) data of 2005–2006, for example, reports that there is much higher prevalence of violence against women who were employed (40 per cent) than women who were not employed (29 per cent).²⁹ Studies give evidence that women who have more education than their husbands, who earn more, or who are the sole earners in their families have a higher likelihood of experiencing intimate partner violence than women who are not employed or who are less educated than their spouse.³⁰ This reality in India contradicts the widely held global perception that better economic status of women lowers their risk to marital violence.

The case of less educated and poor girls and young women is even more strife-ridden despite some government initiatives to enable them to secure education which is most important for their future growth and human development. The Kanyashree scheme launched in 2013 is West Bengal's overarching scheme to combat trafficking of young girls through a conditional cash transfer of Rs. 750 annually that is paid to girls aged 13 to 18 and Rs. 25,000 after 18 provided they are engaged in an academic or occupational pursuit and were unmarried. The National Crime Records Bureau found that despite this scheme, in 2016 out of 8132 cases of missing girls in the country 3579 cases (around 44 per cent) were from West Bengal.³¹ The NHRC in a direction has requested for information on 11,000 women and girls missing till November 2015 who

²⁸Census of India, Registrar General of India, 2011.

²⁹International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) and Macro International, *National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3), 2005–06: India: Volume II* (Mumbai: IIPS, 2007).

³⁰Shagun Sabarwal, K.G. Santhya and Shireen Jejeebhoy, "Women's Autonomy and Experience of Physical Violence within Marriage in Rural India: Evidence from a Prospective Study," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 29, 2 (2013): 332–347.

³¹Shiv Sahay Singh, "Kanyashree Stipends are no Shield against Trafficking," *The Hindu*, March 3, 2019.

had been trafficked to other States.³² It is extremely tragic that India which boasts of a strong family tradition has failed to protect daughters against trafficking and is even instrumental in forcing them into sexual exploitation in the guise of marriage and a secure life in the marital home. Why does the country not take strong action against human traffickers and those who push women into sexual slavery?

India has the ominous position as the world's most dangerous country for women due to the high risk of sexual violence and being forced into slave labour, according to a poll conducted by the Thomson Reuters Foundation survey in 2018 of about 550 global experts on women's issues.³³ Respondents also ranked India the most dangerous country for women in terms of human trafficking, including sex slavery and domestic servitude, and for customary practices such as forced marriage, stoning and female infanticide. It is extremely shameful that the survey considers India along with Libya and Myanmar as the world's most dangerous nations for women exploited by human traffickers in a global crime worth an estimated \$150 billion a year. It is estimated that around 30 per cent of the sex workers in India are below eighteen years and many women have been pushed into sex work.³⁴

A survey of 9589 childcare shelters housing 3,77,649 children across the country by the Ministry of Women and Child Development in 2019 revealed that more than one hundred thousand inmates are from single parent families that are unable to look after them such as those headed by unwed mothers, abandoned wives, widows and in some cases single fathers.³⁵ The statistics for 3,77,649 children in these juvenile homes show the following: 1,20,118 of single parent, 41,370 orphans, 7,677 who were abandoned, 6,791 children who surrendered before the law for any crime, 1575 who were sexually abused, 189 victims of child

³²*The Hindu*, "NHRC Seeks Report from Odisha DGP on Missing Women, Girls," *The Hindu*, March 29, 2019.

³³Reuters, "India Most Dangerous Country for Women, US Ranks Third: Survey," retrieved from <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/india-most-dangerous-country-for-women-with-sexual-violence-rife-poll-1873117?pfrom=home-topscroll>, June 26, 2018.

³⁴Niranjan Saggurti, Shagun Sabarwal, Ravi K. Verma, Shiva S. Halli, and Anrudh K. Jain "Harsh Realities: Reasons for Women's Involvement in Sex Work in India," *Journal of AIDS and HIV Research* 3, 9 (2011): 172–179.

³⁵Jagriti Chandra, "Precarious Family Milieu Forces Children to Homes," *The Hindu*, January 5, 2019.

pornography, 489 of them who were trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation, 469 victims of child marriage, 8573 homeless children, 3,780 runaway/missing, 10,794 mentally challenged and 9,040 physically challenged children. The government and social institutions have clearly failed to recognise the precarious family milieu that has forced our children into insecurity, homelessness and juvenile homes.

The Hindu scriptures and the *Chavarul* clearly state that the father shall teach the children by his example to love and respect the mother as the mother does the same.³⁶ But we have miserably failed to ground gender equality and values that acknowledge childcare as the responsibility of both parents. The government stated in Parliament that since April 2015, 234 one-stop centres have been established across the country for women in distress facing physical, sexual and emotional abuse and almost two crore women (1,90,527) received help at these centres in the past three years.³⁷ Even in a State like Kerala with high levels of education and social awakening it is shocking to hear from news reports that a mother of two children was held captive and starved to death at home³⁸ and many children are sexually and physically abused by fathers and care-givers.³⁹ Could these heinous crimes be averted by gender sensitization and better socialization of boys and young men in family life? Families, educational and religious institutions have an important role in preserving the sanctity of family life and preventing further fragmentation and social disintegration.

The Hindu scriptures teach devotion to parents through the legend of Shravana who carried his parents on his shoulders to fulfil their desire for pilgrimage during their last days. Similarly, the *Chavarul* clearly states that children are bound to respect their parents and to ensure that their minds are not burdened or aggrieved.⁴⁰ Now consider the report on 'Elder Abuse Study' by Helpage India⁴¹ covering 23 cities

³⁶Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Chavarul*, 37.

³⁷*The Hindu*, "One-stop Centres Helps 2 Crore Women," *The Hindu*, December 15, 2018.

³⁸"Starvation Death: Superstition Led to Death of Pooyapally Woman?," *The Hindu*, March 30, 2019.

³⁹"Kerala Child Sex Abuse Case Shows Just how often Victims are Known to Perpetrators," *The News Minute*, July 12, 2015.

⁴⁰Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Chavarul*, 41.

⁴¹*The Hindu*, "Sons are the Foremost Perpetrators of Elder Abuse," *The Hindu*, June 15, 2018.

across India with 5,014 respondents which pointed out that 25 per cent of them said they experienced abuse at the hands of the people closest to them and said that they were seen by their children as a burden to their families. Of these, 52 per cent said that they were abused by their sons while 34 per cent reported that they were abused by their daughters-in-law; the forms of elder abuse were cited as disrespect (56%), verbal abuse (49%), neglect (33%) and even being beaten or slapped (12%). Though 82 per cent of the elderly respondents were well aware of abuse they did not report the abuse to any person or agency. Value-education and family life instruction is urgently needed to regenerate mutual respect and cooperation in the family through role-play, stories and devoting time to activities that help imbibe positive values.

Inter-religious and Inter-cultural marriages

Against this backdrop of family life and marriage in India, it is evident that gender inequality is the root cause for decline in family values and moral upbringing of children. Marriage and family are universal in India with less than 1% of women who have never been married. A report of the United Nations titled “Progress of the World’s Women 2019–2020: Families in a Changing World” reveals that the number of divorcees has doubled over the past two decades; despite increasing rates of divorce, only 1.1% of women are divorced, with those in urban areas making up the largest proportion in India.⁴² Women continue to live in highly abusive and dysfunctional families as they lack the social, economic and legal support to seek their human rights. The report calls on policymakers, activists and people in all walks of life to transform families into places of equality and justice—where women can exercise choice and voice, and where they have physical safety and economic security.⁴³

Nevertheless, inter-religious and inter-cultural marriages may have a beneficial influence or disastrous outcome in society. Such marriages bestow on individuals as parents or children greater resilience in facing

⁴²United Nations, *Progress of the World’s Women 2019–2020: Families in a Changing World* (New York: United Nations, 2019).

⁴³United Nations, *Progress of the World’s Women 2019–2020: Families in a Changing World*.

hostile cultural and religious norms and have a more inclusive and harmonious approach to life. For such families to thrive it is necessary to build the core values discussed earlier in this paper to enable them to overcome the challenges specific to inter-cultural and interreligious marriages.

Inter-cultural and interreligious families are crucial in furthering the process of assimilation and synthesis in society and fostering better social ties, community service, minimizing religious intolerance and ensuring peace in societies. Families with inter-cultural and interreligious mixing can stabilize society by reducing or halting religious conflicts, riots and violence. But in smaller numbers they can be targets of religious hatred and cultural violence. India which is home to several religions and cultures has witnessed some violent internal conflicts that have rendered many such families vulnerable to social oppression.

They may also have to stand the test of religious and cultural hostilities arising out of hegemonic power structures (caste councils, khap panchayats,⁴⁴ religious diktats⁴⁵) due to social and political power struggles. They can also be subject to extreme social stress such as discrimination, social exclusion, isolation and community boycott. There are many inter-faith marriages destroyed by honour killing which receive support even from affluent parents who could support their children to face the social stress resulting from inter-cultural and interreligious marriages.

Inter-cultural and interreligious families subjected to harsh social conditions can suffer from a loss of faith and confusion regarding religious values. They are often abandoned by the communities who could have been their support systems. Many women who have been widowed due to loss of their family members in religious or social conflict face life with great fortitude and have to negotiate cultural values everyday while earning their livelihood for their families and fighting for justice.

⁴⁴Khap panchayat is the union of a clan or a few villages, represented by the elders of the villages, mainly in north India though it exists in similar forms in the rest of the country. They do not have any legal status.

⁴⁵They enjoy social power and clout to pronounce harsh punishments based on age-old customs and traditions, often bordering on regressive measures to modern problems.

The Way Forward

It is necessary to strike at the root cause of gender inequality which creates a crisis in families. Family life education and sex education must receive top priority in general education and the mass media. Programme modules on parenting must be popularized in schools and colleges to promote greater understanding among the youth about their roles and social responsibility as future parents and create a more responsible dialogue between partners to promote concepts of masculinity that include committed fatherhood.

Intense social campaigns involving the family and sensitization of men like the *Beti Padhao Beti Bachao* (Educate and Save the Girl Child), *Bell Bajao* (Ring the Bell for domestic violence), *What Kind Of Man Are You?* (AIDS awareness campaign), the *One Billion Rising* Campaign to highlight the worldwide violence against women and several community initiatives that attempt to resolve the problems faced by women are needed. Positive role modelling through audio-visual communication must be used to break the initial resistance and enable the family and community to participate in empowering women towards health care and improving their status.⁴⁶

An intensive Behaviour Change Communication must be initiated by multi-sectoral agencies to address the masculine norms and behaviour that heighten the risk for both men and women and prevent mutually beneficial relationships and inclusive human development. All health information campaigns must stress the importance of inter-spouse communication to improve the lives of girls and women and encourage equitable sharing of household and care-giving responsibilities throughout the life cycle.⁴⁷ Men must be taught to imbibe filial virtues with proper education, guidance and engagement in personal and social life. The future generation of boys must learn that gender equality is the key to a loving, harmonious and peaceful family life. Only when the sanctity and security of each individual is ensured can the world be a better place for all.

There is a crucial need to revive the eternal values emphasized in the *Gita*; the concept of *lokamsamgraha* (world solidarity) and the lofty

⁴⁶Kiran Prasad, "Communication Policy for Women's Empowerment: Media Strategies and Insights," in *Handbook of Communication for Development and Social Change*, ed. Jan Servaes (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2019), 519–530.

⁴⁷Kiran Prasad, "Communication Policy for Women's Empowerment," 519–530.

Indian ideal of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (all humankind as one family) which encompasses all. This embodies the Soul Family: those that gather around you in your life, not connected by blood or race, but by energy and essence; bring unconditional love and support at the perfect times and understand and share the same mission and purpose. We must strive to treat all beings as members of our soul family and extend our kindness, compassion and healing to all in distress and help each other with love, hope and fortitude to continue our journey for eternal salvation.

GOD IN THE TEMPLE OF RELATIONSHIPS

Interpreting Family Spirituality in the Light of *Amoris Laetitia* and *Chavarul*

Augustine Kallely♦

Many times I have asked the families in Kerala the question, whom do you consider in the category of spiritual people? Often the answer would be priests and religious, because they spend more time in prayer and handle the sacred mysteries. Spirituality has been associated with the prayers that one recites. This understanding has promoted a good practice of Christian pieties within the family. Each family used to recite rosary and other special prayers on every day within the family. In a sense, it was a spirituality of supplications. People seemed to be more spiritual when they were met with certain negative experiences in their lives. This practice is on decrease today. Many have left it due to time constraints and meaninglessness. As people become more affluent, they leave the spirituality of supplications, because they do not find a reason to do so. In this context, we need to have a fresh look at the core of family spirituality and how it can be promoted. We have to remember that family is a network of relationships. There are six important relationships within a Christian family: marital, parental, sibling, social, ecclesial and divine relationships. True family spirituality needs to take into account these relationships. Our enquiry here is how these relationships are reflected in family spirituality or a life in the Spirit.

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How are the family members connected with the transcendent? This paper reviews this question from a Christian perspective in the light of *Amoris Laetitia*¹ and *Chavarul*.² After bringing out the features of spirituality envisaged in AL and *Chavarul*, I will argue that family spirituality is not only that of reciting individual or family or ecclesial prayers, but that of relationships which include commitment, forgiveness, respect, mutuality, care, compassion, justice, intimacy, etc. In this endeavour, I will make use of my experiences with the families whom I serve for more than one decade.

Uniqueness of Family Spirituality

The fact that AL has dedicated a whole chapter for the discussion of family spirituality shows the importance attached to family spirituality. AL argues that family has its own spirituality, which is different from that of the monastic or celibate spirituality. For long time the interior space of the family was dominated by celibate spirituality. Even the vocation to marriage and family was considered secondary to celibacy in realizing the spiritual quest of the human person. This tradition has been struck down by the Second Vatican Council with its declaration that all are called to holiness.³ Further it stated, “This [marital] love the Lord has judged worthy of special gifts, healing, perfecting and exalting gifts of grace and of charity.”⁴ This historical breakthrough has been continued by *Familiaris Consortio* with its statement that marriage is “a sacrament of mutual sanctification and an act of worship.”⁵ This revised tradition is much more developed in AL when it states, “A positive experience of family communion is a true path to daily sanctification and mystical growth, a means for deeper union with God” (AL 316). The reason is that family relationships demand growth in openness of heart which leads to “an ever fuller encounter with the Lord” (AL 316). Love is a means by which God abides in the family (cfr 1 Jn 4:12). AL recognises that family is not an obstacle that detracts people from

¹Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, Carmel International Publishing House, Trivandrum, 2016.

²Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Chavarul: Testament of a Loving Father*, originally published in Malayalam in 1868, trans. by Saju Chackalackal, (Kochi: Chavara Central Secretariat, 2018).

³*Lumen Gentium*, 39–42.

⁴*Gaudium et Spes*, 49.

⁵John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* (1981), 56.

realising their deep spiritual aspirations, but “a path which the Lord is using to lead them to the heights of mystical union” (AL 316).

Spirituality of Family Relationships

AL and *Chavarul* provide clues to a spirituality interwoven with family relationships. Key to family spirituality is that genuine love triggers the connection with the transcendent. As we have noted above, the communion between the members of a family is a path to deeper union with God. Relationships have the capacity to awaken the spirit within the human person in the following ways.

First, according to AL, true spirituality is realized when “couple’s love attains the heights of its freedom and becomes the basis of a healthy autonomy” (AL 320). At this stage they realize that the other is not his or her private property, but belongs to God who is the Master of all. Hence their loving relationship moves them to God. Again, through family relationship a person comes to the realization that no family members, but only God can satisfy his or her needs fully. Family relationship causes in its members certain “disillusionment” (AL 320). One of the remarks by a young wife, whom I met in my pastoral work, was this, “when I focused on my husband for the satisfaction of all my needs, I had only complaints, but when I shifted my focus to God, I began to enjoy my relationship with my husband.” Family relationships have the capacity to open up itself towards the love of God. *Chavarul* asks not to enter into a marital relationship with anyone who does not fear the Lord. If one does not love the Lord, he or she cannot love the other (no. 16). Referring to the Biblical narration of the friendship between Jonathan and David (1 Sam 18), *Chavarul* explains how a relationship will flourish if God is in their midst. Genuine love presumes the love of God.

Second, AL exhorts all the families to experience the care and encouragement for one another as a component of spirituality. A member of the family is “a sign and instrument of the closeness of the Lord” (AL 319) for the other. They reveal God’s love for the other through their acts of love. Family has a special role to help make the good, which God has sown in a person, grow (AL 322). Loving relationship encourages a person to see the other with the eyes of God and to recognise His face in the other. Family members are fully present to the other by self-gift, which has the potentiality to lead them to God

who makes himself present through self-gift. *Chavarul* makes it clear that children are the gift of God.

Children are sacred treasures entrusted to you by God Almighty. You should also remember that these are the souls that Jesus Christ has entrusted in your hands to sanctify them with His most precious blood and to make them His servants and, thus, to offer them back to Him on the Day of Judgment (*Chavarul*, 2:1).

Parenting is a divine vocation. As children are gifts of God, parents will be able to see the shining face of God in them. On the other hand, children experience the love of God through the parental care and protection. Genuine love surpasses the material and embraces the transcendent.

Third, family relationship is never self-contained. Family extends its helping hand beyond its boundaries. “The family lives its spirituality precisely by being at one and the same time a domestic church and vital cell for transforming the world” (AL 323). *Chavarul* notes, “Days on which you have not rendered any good to others will not be reckoned in the book of life” (*Chavarul*, no. 14). Benevolence towards the neighbour is an important feature of family spirituality. Almsgiving is considered even a part of the Sabbath observation.

One should not be complacent with only participation in the Holy Mass on days of obligation; instead, most of the day shall be spent in virtuous acts such as listening to sermons, reading good books, and in performing charitable acts such as visiting and caring for the sick, especially those who are very poor (*Chavarul*, no. 22).

Genuine family relationships have the inner dynamism to reach unto the needs of the neighbour. When the family members see Christ in each other, they cannot but recognize the face of Christ in their neighbours. When John Paul II presents family as an evangelizing community,⁶ this potentiality of family relationships is emphasized.

The above said capacity of family relationships to drive spirituality is explicit when AL identifies the daily chores of family life as components of spirituality. It takes into account the concrete realities and experiences of the people. AL notes that the Lord dwells in “real and concrete families, with all their daily troubles and struggles, joys and hopes” (AL 315). It declares that, “The spirituality of family love is

⁶John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 51.

made up of thousands of small but real gestures” (AL 315). In this perspective sexuality also is a spiritual experience (AL 317). For long time body and sexuality has been regarded as inimical to realise God. But this dualistic thinking has been left out in AL. What Pope John Paul II stated in *Vita Consecrata* about religious life,⁷ has been applied to the family in a unique way. AL notes, “Married couples shape with different daily gestures a “*God-enlightened space* in which to experience the hidden presence of the Risen Lord” (AL 317). According to AL, family in its concreteness participates in the paschal mystery of Christ. The difficulties that a family undergoes remind them of the Lord’s cross. Joys and hopes of the family is a sign of their share in the resurrection of the Lord. *Chavarul* in its introduction states, “A good Christian family is the image of heaven.” It means that family has capacity to represent the heaven on earth. Moreover, it is emphasized that family is a door to heaven. This door is made of family relationships. The text continues, “The *raison d’être* of 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” (*Chavarul*, Introduction). Hence relationships are ways by which family members grow in the life of spirit.

Prayer Centred Spirituality

Both AL and *Chavarul* agree that the prayers and other Christian pieties have a remarkable role in realizing the family as a means to mystical union with God. AL notes that family prayer, Holy Eucharist, etc. are special moments of expressing the share of the family in the paschal mystery of Christ (AL 318). According to *Chavarul*, fear of and devotion to the Lord is the most important treasure of a family, which will result in the divine blessings here and in eternity (*Chavarul*, 19). It further states, “As the children grow up, teach them to devotedly call on the names of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Let the children familiarise and kiss the image of the Holy Family and teach them to honour and venerate them” (*Chavarul*, no. 2:2). The Holy Family is an important image in deepening the spirituality. It is noteworthy that AL concludes with a prayer to the Holy Family. Devotion to the Holy Family has a special place in the life of the family. Again, *Chavarul* is of the opinion

⁷John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, 42.

that prayers like Our Father, Hail Mary, the Angelus, etc. are spiritual nourishments for the souls of the members of the family (*Chavarul*, no. 2:2). Attention to the nourishing of souls through reciting prayers is a component of family spirituality.

Family spirituality has a sacramental dimension. *Chavarul* reminds, "If all members from a family cannot attend daily Mass together, let them take turns, ensuring that one or two attend Mass every day. Confess your sins and receive Holy Communion at least once a month" (*Chavarul*, no. 19). The representation of the family in the Holy Eucharist is a way to link the family with the Paschal mystery of Christ in a special way. It is a channel of grace for the family. Moreover, it emphasizes the link between domestic church and the Church.

Chavarul visualized a daily timetable of spiritual exercises within the family which include morning prayer, Holy Eucharist, Angelus, rosary, and examination of conscience (*Chavarul*, no. 24). Here it seems that the author is following a model of religious communities, which may not be possible as such today. However, special attention should be paid to the emphasis on the individual and communal nature of these exercises. Such kind of prayers and practices are believed to enhance individual life and family relationships and can be special expressions of the spirituality of relationships.

While speaking about parenting, *Chavarul* indicates the need of parents praying for their children. "Parents should offer their children to the Lord repetitively and submit them to the intercession of the Holy Family and pray for them often" (*Chavarul*, no. 2:1). Parents have been given special grace to intercede for their children. Praying for each other within the family are special moments of family spirituality.

Seeking the will of God in everything is part of family spirituality. Distress and difficulties need not necessarily be a sign of lack of spirituality. God might be speaking to the family through them. Hence, they need to be considered moments of revealing the will of God (*Chavarul*, no. 20). Families that undergo great sufferings of sickness, relationship breakdown, etc. need not feel that they are away from the divine grace. They are also part of spiritual experience. Personal prayers, meditation of the Word of God and the participation in sacraments will help the person to discern the will of God. Moreover, these pieties will bring supernatural grace to the family. The Lord's cross will help the family to overcome its difficulties and to transform them into an offering of love.

Individual and communitarian prayers, sacramental participation, meditation of the Word of God, intercessory prayers, etc. are important for the spiritual nourishment of the family. Prayer helps the family to establish a relationship with God in a special way.

Love-Driven Spirituality

From the above discussion it is clear that family has a spirituality of its own. Family is a spiritually significant unit. On the one hand, loving family relationships have enormous potentialities for spiritual awakening. As Thomas Knieps wrote about marital spirituality, “the couple–relationship as such is spiritually significant.”⁸ On the other hand, the practice of Christian pieties and devotions are required for developing the connection with the transcendent. These two dimensions constitute a healthy family spirituality. In order to promote a balance between the two the spirituality can be named “love-driven.” The prayers and sacramental participation can either be expressions of encountering the transcendent in the family relationships or an aid to realize it. Love-driven spirituality indicates a healthy blend of family love and love of God. On the one hand, family love enhances the life in the Spirit. On the other, love of God enriches the family love. It is not individual centred, but communitarian and does not merely consist in the practice of Christian pieties, but in the in-depth experience of love. Here it should be noted that family love is not merely an attitude, but a relation⁹ or a communion. The relational dimension of love is much emphasised in love-driven family spirituality. Communion or “we experience” or sense of oneness in the family is key to this spirituality. It suggests that mere forgiveness in a relationship is not enough, but forgiveness in such a way that it enhances the sense of oneness in the relationship.

The importance given to the devotion towards the Holy Family is an indication of love-driven family spirituality. *Amoris Laetitia* concludes with a prayer to the Holy Family and *Chavarul* asks the parents to train

⁸Thomas Knieps-Port le Roi, “Martial Spirituality: The Emergence of a New Paradigm in the Theology of Marriage and Christian Spirituality,” in *Companion to Marital Spirituality*, edited by Thomas Knieps-Port le Roi and Monica Sandor, (Louvain-Paris-Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2008), 38.

⁹For a detailed discussion, see Adrian Thatcher, *Marriage After Modernity: Christian Marriage in Postmodern Times*, (New York: University Press, 1999), 225.

their children in the devotion to the Holy Family. The Holy Family signifies both the individual and communitarian dimensions of spirituality. Devotion to the Holy Family is an invitation to be reflections of the loving relationships within the Holy Family. Hence family spirituality is linked with the loving relationships of its members.

Loving family relationship itself is spiritual, because God has created human person in his image and likeness. According to AL, the “‘image of God’ here refers to the couple, ‘male and female’” (AL 10). It continues, “The couple that loves and begets life is a true, living icon—not an idol like those of stone or gold prohibited by the Decalogue—capable of revealing God the Creator and Saviour” (AL 11). It is God who united the male and female. God led them to experience each other as bone of bones and flesh of flesh. Family is a chapel where its members meet the living God, who keeps them united and mission oriented.

The Johannine description of God as love is a corner stone in the idea of love-driven spirituality of the family. The statement that “God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them” (1 Jn 4:16) deepens the meaning of love-driven spirituality. Love of neighbour is the way to be with God. One meets God not as a result of loving the neighbour, but within the love. Love carries within itself the sense of the divine. Lord teaches that the greatest divine commandment (Mt 22:37–40) is to love and the door to heaven is love.

The Christian understanding of God as the communion of three persons theologically supports the concept of love-driven family spirituality. As AL makes it clear, “The triune God is a communion of love, and family is its living reflection” (AL 11). In this idea AL follows St John Paul II who stated, “Our God in his deepest mystery is not solitude, but a family, for he has within himself fatherhood, sonship and the essence of the family, which is love. That love, in the divine family, is the Holy Spirit.”¹⁰ The concept of *perichoresis*¹¹ enlightens the

¹⁰John Paul II, Homily at the Eucharistic Celebration in Puebla de Los Angeles (28 January 1979), 2: AAS 71 (1979): 184.

¹¹*Perichoresis* is a theological term to describe “the necessary being-in-one-another or circumincession ... of the three divine Persons of the Trinity because of the single divine essence, the eternal procession of the Son from the Father and of the Spirit from the Father and (through) the Son, and the fact that the three Persons are distinguished solely by the relations of opposition between them.” Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler, *Theological Dictionary*, trans. Richard Strachan (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965; reprint, 1968), 350.

communion aspect of Trinity. The word, *perichoresis* derives from *chorein*, meaning “to make room for another” and from *peri*, meaning “round about.” Hence *perichoresis* is defined as “the dynamic process of making room for another around oneself.”¹² In this process one’s identity is affirmed while recognising the possibility that other persons make her/him who she/he is and she/he helps make other persons what they are. “*Interdependence, interrelation and communion*” are characteristics of the Trinity.¹³ There is equality, giving and receiving, reciprocity between the Persons¹⁴ and “unity-in-difference.”¹⁵ Family shares in this relational nature of God. Family relationships are reflections of the loving relationships of the Persons of the Holy Trinity. The concept of Trinitarian God dwelling in “the temple of marital communion” (AL 314) emphasizes the spirituality of relationships.

The conciliar definition of marriage as an “intimate partnership of life and marital love” (*intima communitas vitae et amoris coniugal*)¹⁶ approves the love-driven family spirituality. In this revised vision, marriage and the family is not merely a contract or an institution, but a vibrant community of love. The sacrament of marriage is a vocation to signify the love of God. The Pauline theology of relating the married couple to the “mystery” of the union of Christ and the Church (cfr Eph 5:21–33) has a great impact on family spirituality. Christian marriage is a sign of how much Christ loved his Church in the covenant sealed on the cross, yet it also makes that love present in the communion of the spouses. The matrix of sacrament of marriage is the mutual love of the man and woman informed by Christian faith.¹⁷

The Catholic teaching that Christian family is the “domestic church”¹⁸ promotes the love-driven family spirituality. Loving family

¹²Thatcher, *Marriage After Modernity*, 231. Michael G. Lawler, “Perichoresis: New Theological Wine in an Old Theological Wineskin,” *Horizons* 22, 1 (1995): 49.

¹³Thatcher, *Liberating Sex: A Christian Sexual Theology* (London: SPCK, 1993), 54. While interpreting an Anglican document, he indicates three “most profound trinitarian categories, of communion, relation and person.” Adrian Thatcher, “Some Issues with ‘Some Issues in Human Sexuality,’” *Theology and Sexuality* 11, 3 (2005): 20.

¹⁴Thatcher, *Liberating Sex*, 54.

¹⁵Thatcher, “Marriage and Love—Too Much of a ‘Breakthrough,’” *Intams Review* 8, 1 (2002): 49–50.

¹⁶*Gaudium et Spes*, 48.

¹⁷Michael G. Lawler, *Marriage and Sacrament: A Theology of Christian Marriage* (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 18.

¹⁸*Lumen Gentium*, 11.

relationships constitute the “domestic church.” AL reminds us that a “family’s living space could turn into a domestic church, a setting for the Eucharist, the presence of Christ seated at its table” (AL 15). This turning is realized through loving relationships. Love-driven family spirituality receives its strength ultimately from the crucified Christ who revealed the love of God in its fullness. As Benedict XVI notes, the love of man and woman is fully illuminated only in the love of the crucified Christ.¹⁹

The challenge of love-driven family spirituality is to develop soul consciousness in the fulfilment of daily chores of life. The family members should be continuously reminded of the spirituality of their relationships. For example, when they have meals together, they should be able to have it as a gift of God. We have to recognize extraordinary moments of the divine in the ordinary moments of family. An example from *Chavarul* clarifies it: “Ensure that all children are at home by the time the Angelus bells ring. Train them to greet and kiss the hands of the elders and parents as soon as the family prayers are over” (*Chavarul*, 2:11). After the family prayer, the spiritual bond is expressed through a kiss. This act of love triggers spiritual living.

Faith in Jesus Christ is central to family spirituality. The family members should be aware of the living presence of Jesus in their family. They take part in a special way in the passion, death and resurrection of Christ, by which he defeated the power of the evil over human person. Being united in Christ, a couple lay foundation for Christian family. The family is built on the rock of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of humankind. Attraction towards Jesus Christ is an inevitable component of family spirituality. It is realized only when the beauty of Jesus Christ is revealed and is personally encountered within the family. The beauty of Jesus consists in the fullness of love he revealed on the cross passionately. When the family members love each other after the model of Jesus, they experience the beauty of the crucified Christ. The absence of this element makes family spirituality very shallow. Love-driven family spirituality combines the personal, prayerful connect with Jesus Christ and the loving relationships of the family.

Love-driven family spirituality promotes a holistic approach towards spirituality. The earlier division of human person into the material and the spiritual resulted in a distorted view of spirituality. Space and time

¹⁹Cfr Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 2.

were divided into sacred and secular. This dualistic approach kept human sexuality and household chores of the family away from the sacred space. Hence families living in a “secular” space have to enter into the “sacred space” of man-made church or to the time of family prayer to experience the spirit. This gap has been overcome by the love-driven family spirituality that does not embrace the division of the sacred and the secular. However, this does not deny the special moments of experiencing God. It would rather mean these special moments are closely linked to the daily life of the person. This approach emphasizes the integral growth of the human person. Holiness does not merely pertain to the spirit, but also to the body and mind. Physical sickness or emotional wounds can affect the spirituality of the person.

Conclusion

The core of family spirituality is the loving relationships between its members. Mere practice of Christian pieties is not enough to be spiritual. Being busy with the daily chores of life does not mean that they are less spiritual. Forgiveness, respect, justice, care for the other, sacrifice, compassion, etc. are spiritual moments. Families need to experience the awakening of the Spirit in and through their relationships. In order to promote family spirituality, we need to focus on building up loving relationships within as well as outside the family. In this endeavour the insights of behavioural sciences should be made use of.²⁰ This approach will cure those who are addicted to prayers to the extent that their family relationships are ignored and broken. This spirituality will bridge the wide gap between everyday life of the family and the life of faith. The uniqueness of family spirituality suggests that the Christian spirituality as a whole has something specific to learn from it. The heaven and the earth meet each other in a special way in the fabric of family relationships. Encountering God in the temple of relationships promises a bright future for the world.

²⁰For such an approach, see Diana L. Villegas, “Marital Spirituality: Living Out the Call to Be a Sign of God’s Self-giving Love,” *Intams Review* 7, 2 (2001) 157–166.

CHALLENGES OF PARENTING AND MORAL FORMATION OF CHILDREN

A Comparative study of *Chavarul* and *Amoris Laetitia*

Scaria Kanniyakonil♦

Moral formation of children is one of the conspicuous and complex themes today. Due to enormous challenges, families face an unprecedented crisis in giving moral formation to their children. There are different types of moral formation, and Christian parenting is distinctively different from a secular understanding of parenting. *Chavarul* and *Amoris Laetitia* (AL) are two documents that present an integrated approach to parenting and the moral formation of children. There are similarities and differences in the teachings of these two documents. This paper makes a comparative study of parenting and moral formation of children in *Chavarul* and *Amoris Laetitia* developing it in two sections. The first part describes the challenges of parenting in *Chavarul* and *Amoris Laetitia*. The second part crafts a comparative study of the moral formation of children in *Chavarul* and *Amoris Laetitia*.

Challenges of Parenting in *Chavarul* and *Amoris Laetitia*

Many people find parenting more challenging today (AL) than it was during the time of *Chavarul*. During the time of St Chavara (1805–1871),

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Kanniyakonil, Scaria. "Challenges in Parenting and the Moral Formation of Children: A Comparative Study of *Chavarul* and *Amoris Laetitia*." In *Vocation and Mission of the Family: Reflections on Chavarul and Amoris Laetitia*, edited by Shaji George Kochuthara, 374–387. Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2020.

families were much larger than they are today. There was a strong bond between parents and the children, and the media could hardly influence them. However, parents had to confront different economic challenges, relationship problems, lack of social concern, and issues concerning the transmission of faith. Moreover, St Chavara observed that many families were ruined due to the lack of faith. In this context St Chavara gave an integral vision of family in the background of its relationship with God, among family members, neighbours, and the need for fostering a virtuous life in the family.

Today parents face innumerable challenges due to technological development, frequent changes, and fast progress, rapidly changing family dynamics, changes in media and educational system. The top ten challenges which new age parents face today are aggression, tantrum throwing, whining, disrespect, not listening, applying effective discipline, sleep, internet, early sexualisation, and resilience of children.¹

AL exhaustively discusses the challenges in parenting, raising the fundamental question, ‘Where are our children?’ (AL 260).² Many a time parents do not know the actual state of the children existentially, specifically concerning their convictions, goals, desires, and dreams. Pope Francis asks the following questions to the parents: “Do we seek to understand ‘where’ our children are in their journey? Do we know where their soul is? Moreover, above all, do we want to know?” This highlights the physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual problems of our children that substantiate the significance of their moral formation.

Moral Formation of Children in AL and *Chavarul*: A Comparison

Children as the gift of God in the hands of parents is one of the underlying themes in *Chavarul* and AL (AL 166).³ St Chavara writes, “Children are sacred treasures entrusted to you by God Almighty” (II Part, no. 1). This speaks of the responsibility of parenting. Chapter 7 of

¹http://www.indiaparenting.com/health/253_6659/top-10-biggest-parenting-challenges.html (accessed 13–11–2018).

²Marcus Mescher, “Families in Crisis and the Need for Mercy,” *The Journal of Moral Theology* 7, 1 (2018): 28–69, 34–37; Susanna Schrobsdorff, “Teen Depression and Anxiety: Why the Kids Are Not Al- right” *Time*, October 27, 2016, time.com/4547322/american-teens-anxious-depressed-overwhelmed (accessed 1–11–2018).

³S. Kanniyakonil, “The Concept of Human Life in *Amoris Laetitia*,” *Asian Horizons* 11, 1 (2017): 75–88.

AL is wholly dedicated to the education of children which describes explicitly the significance of the moral formation of children in freedom, virtue, and conscience. By the moral formation of children, AL means the integral and adequate development of children that includes both spiritual and emotional maturity.

The second part of *Chavarul* (nos. 1–16) concentrates entirely on the upbringing of children. It is obvious that *Chavarul*, Part II, no. 1, and AL 259 discuss the responsibility of parents in imparting moral formation of children.

The following table shows the ideological similarities between *Chavarul* and *Amoris Laetitia* regarding the moral formation of children.

Topics	<i>Chavarul</i> No.	<i>Amoris Laetitia</i> No.
Children—Gift of God	II-1	166
Responsibility in Parenting	II-1	259
Friendship of Children	I-2, 16; II-5-6	260
Integral Approach in Parenting	II-9	261, 264
Parents as Role Models	II-3	288
Virtuous Life	I-1, 5, 14, 17, 20	262, 266, 267
Use of Media	I-21	274, 278
Sex Education	II-3, 4, 5, 7, 12	280, 282
Transmission of Faith	II-2, 11	287, 288, 289
Social Concern	I-18, 22, 23	29
Vocation	II-14	18

Parents influence considerably the moral formation of their children either rightly or wrongly (AL 259) because they are everything for the children. For instance, parents should help their children to overcome aggression, abuse and drug addiction (AL 260). This factor is equivalent to the teachings of St Chavara who asks the parents to check the type of companions they do have (*Chavarul*, I-7, 16, II-5, 6). Moreover, parents have to be aware that obsession obstructs moral education. There are different types of parenting: Authoritarian type of parenting controls all the movements of the children. According to Baumrind D., authoritarian parents have no dialogue with their children and generally ask the children to obey the orders strictly. They form their children through

shaming, not expressing love, and punishing them disproportionately. Besides, they do not clarify the goal for rules.⁴ On the contrary, the indulgent type provides maximum freedom to the children. They are

more responsive than demanding. This means that they are lenient; often letting their children get away with more than most because they want their child to practice self-regulation. This parenting style is characterized by parents who do not require mature behavior, or that avoid confrontation with their child.

It might be concluded from this that they “are simply nondirective, or in other words parents who are uninvolved in the raising of the child.”⁵

AL proposes that good parents help them to grow in freedom, maturity, discipline and real autonomy: “Only in this way will children come to possess the wherewithal needed to fend for themselves and to act intelligently and prudently whenever they meet with difficulties” (AL 261). The integral parenting approach of AL is the same as in *Chavarul*. St Chavara asserts that

too much affection will make them proud, excessive anger and punishment will lead to lack of trust, shamelessness, and intellectual incompetence in them. Before inflecting corporal punishment prudently make the children understand why they are being punished ...Pouring out abuses in the process of correcting the children will not only have any positive effect on them but will only make them repeat the same to their children when they grow up (II-9).

Affective and Ethical Formation: Parents as educators have an important role in the affective and ethical development of their children:

A person’s affective and ethical development is ultimately grounded in a particular experience, namely, that his or her parents can be trusted. This means that parents, as educators, are responsible, by their affection and example, for instilling in their children trust and loving respect. When children no longer feel that, for all their faults, they are important to their parents, or that their parents are sincerely concerned about them,

⁴D. Baumrind, “The Influence of Parenting Style on Adolescent Competence and Substance Use,” *Journal of Early Adolescence* 11, 1 (1991): 56–95, <https://www.parentingscience.com/authoritarian-parenting-style.html> (accessed 12-3-2019).

⁵<https://www.surfnetparents.com/1203/indulgent-parenting-style/> (accessed 5-4-2019); Matthew J. Miller, “Indulgent Parenting: The Impact on Children,” <http://cccrd.publishpath.com/Websites/cccrd/images/IndulgentParenting.pdf> (accessed 5-4-2019).

this causes deep hurt and many difficulties along their path to maturity (AL 263).

The physical or emotional absence of parents harmfully affects the character of the child.

Forming Good Habits: It is the responsibility of the parents to foster good habits and the natural inclination of goodness in their children (AL 262).⁶ It is a general fact that the habits of children influence their character. Even childhood conduct can help to translate crucial interiorized values into sound and regular methods of acting (AL 266).

He/she has to be trained correctly by the parents to form sociability. For instance, AL says that at least children should learn three words and practice them in their daily life, namely, "Please, Thank you, Sorry." AL further elucidates, "the strengthening of the will and the repetition of specific actions are the building blocks of moral conduct; without the conscious, free and valued repetition of certain patterns of good behaviour, moral education does not take place" (AL 266).

The Language of Formation: Appropriate methods and dialogues are necessary for the right formation of the children.⁷ AL 264 explains that moral formation has to always take place with active techniques and a discourse that teaches via sensitivity and by the usage of a language that the kids can easily understand. It might be concluded from this that parents have to follow the inductive approach. Accordingly, they might provide new methods in education (AL 288). For instance, the teaching styles must make use of symbols, actions and stories. Sometimes, children do not find role models in their life. This implies that children need a few role models or testimonies so that it can be very attractive to them so that they get the confidence to overcome many of their teenage problems. *Chavarul* too depicts the parents as role models for their children. St Chavara warns: "Do not engage in unbecoming conversations and gossips in the presence of your children. Do not even wrongly assume that they do not follow what you say" (II-3).

Responsible Use of Freedom: One of the perennial and serious issues is the responsible use of freedom.⁸ Aquinas points out in the first part of

⁶Lawrence J. Walker and Karl H. Henning, "Parenting Style and the Development of Moral Reasoning," *Journal of Moral Education* 28, 3 (1999): 359-374.

⁷Diego Fares, "Educare i figli secondo 'Amoris Laetitia': La pedagogia di Papa Francesco," *La Civiltà Cattolica* (28 maggio 2016): 356-368.

⁸S. Kanniyakonil, "The Freedom of Conscience: The Objective and Subjective Orientation of Conscience in the Catholic Doctrine," *Jeeva Darshana* 5, 1 (2018): 29-45.

Summa Theologiae (ST I, 93), “our freedom of choice is a reflection of the divine image.” That is to say, “as created in the image of God for union with God, our freedom is designed, not for God-independent autonomy, but rather for deeper union with God by action in conformity with the ultimate exemplar of created freedom.”⁹ The Instruction on *Christian Freedom and Liberation* (*Libertatis Conscientia*, 22) states the primary and essential meaning of liberation as a human being is delivered from the fundamental bondage of evil and sin. In this understanding of salvation, human being finds the actual meaning of his/her freedom, because liberation is the rebuilding of freedom. It is also training in freedom, this is to mention, education in the proper use of freedom.¹⁰

AL points out that moral education includes the responsible use of freedom to solve issues (AL 261). In order to have responsible use of freedom, they require good sense and intelligence. Children must know that freedom in itself is an amazing gift (AL 261). AL says:

moral education has to do with cultivating freedom... The virtuous life thus builds, strengthens and shapes freedom, lest we become slaves of dehumanizing and antisocial inclinations. For human dignity itself demands that each of us act out of conscious and free choice, as moved and drawn in a personal way from within (AL 267).

Above all, AL discusses the wise use of freedom (274). T. Radcliffe observes that actual freedom is more than the freedom to decide what to do. It is to fix what the Lord asks of us. Discernment looks to free us from all the ways wherein we will fool ourselves and faux that what I need to do is the voice of God. Slowly we examine to imitate, like Mary, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord.” So, on this process, we need to be accompanied by assisted by people whom we can believe to free us from self-deception. Like the young Samuel, we need the help of the priest Eli to discern when we are listening to the Lord and when we are listening to our egocentric fantasies.¹¹

⁹As quoted in B.J. Shanley, “Beyond Libertarianism and Compatibilism: Thomas Aquinas on Created Freedom,” in *Freedom and the Human Person*, ed. R. Velkley (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 88.

¹⁰http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19860322_freedom-liberation_en.html (accessed 23–4–2010).

¹¹T. Radcliffe, “How can we ‘Make Room for the Consciences of the Faithful’ (AL 37)?,” *INTAMS Conference, KU Leuven, October 25–27, 2016*.

Moral education may help “with cultivating freedom through ideas, incentives, practical applications, stimuli, rewards, examples, models, symbols, reflections, encouragement, dialogue and a constant rethinking of our way of doing things” (AL 267). It should be noted that we study the prudent use of freedom from the family where “certain inclinations develop in childhood and become so deeply rooted that they remain throughout life, either as attractions to a particular value or a natural repugnance to certain ways of acting” (AL_274). According to the Christian perspective, freedom should be executed on the ground of faith, moral law, truth, and justice (*Libertatis Conscientia*, 26).

There is always a tension in the moral decision making of a person with regard to the selection of vices and virtues. Children are tempted to do vices. It is also observed that children should overcome dehumanizing and antisocial behaviour. A virtuous life is an inevitable element for freedom (AL 267). Christianity also presents adequate space for virtues. For instance, J. Keenan has critically evaluated the development of virtue ethics in moral theology. He summarized the different virtue-based approach in the Catholic tradition. In his opinion, “theological ethicists, both older and younger, are finding in the virtues an avenue to grace, religious and communal identity, and a better integration with central religious beliefs in Jesus Christ, the Trinity, and the kingdom of God, while at the same time affording inter-religious and cross-cultural dialogue.”¹² Besides, Christopher P. Vogt notices that virtues like solidarity, compassion, and hospitality form a habit of thinking, feeling, and acting.¹³

Similarly, the virtuous life is vividly presented in *Chavarul*. Virtues like love, humility, charity, justice, fear of God, and patience are well articulated in the first part of *Chavarul* (I-1, 5, 14, 17, 19, 20). For instance, *Chavarul* notices the relevance of loving each other (Jn 13:34) and forgiving the drawbacks and faults of others. A person who practices it is able to get peace in the world and eternal gift (I-1). Besides, we need to exercise humility in our lifestyles. We no longer show off of our wealth. “He/she who shows all his/her wealth is considered to be of lower popularity” (I-5), and we need a gentle

¹²James F. Keenan, “Fundamental Moral Theology: Tradition,” *Theological Studies* 70 (2009): 140–158, 149.

¹³Christopher P. Vogt, “Fostering a Catholic Commitment to the Common Good: An Approach Rooted in virtue Ethics,” *Theological Studies* 68 (2007): 394–417, 398.

manner of talking. For instance, “be frugal in talking and do no longer spend beyond your method in celebrating anniversaries and festivals” (I-6). St Chavara requests people to be industrious in their life. According to him, an industrious person lives fortuitously with a restricted quantity of property (I-11). Besides, he says that one has to do charity. If one did not render any appropriate help to others one would not enter in the book of life (I-14). *Chavarul* speaks of justice and truthfulness. Giving everyone his or her due is adequately emphasized in it. St Chavara is very strict concerning stolen goods. As an instance, he observes, “do not permit to keep stolen goods even for a short period in your private home” (I-17). *Chavarul* also points out that the family has to practice fear of and devotion to the Lord (I-19). Concerning patience, St Chavara says that when we entrust everything to God, we can overcome all the trials and tribulations in our life (I-20).

AL makes a clear distinction between voluntary and free act:

A distinction is not always adequately drawn between “voluntary” and “free” acts. A person may clearly and willingly desire something evil, but do so as the result of an irresistible passion or a poor upbringing. In such cases, while the decision is voluntary since it does not run counter to the inclination of their desire, it is not free, since it is practically impossible for them not to choose that evil (AL 273).

It can be seen in the case of drug addicts. When they like to make the change, they desire it completely. However, they are so much conditioned by it, and no other choice is possible. In this angle their choice is voluntary but now not free (AL 273).

Morally Right Action: Doing right does not necessarily depend on what seems to be the best. Albeit our conscience dictates the right moral decision, it is a fact that other elements that are more appealing and powerful influence conscience. For instance, AL 265 states, “often we prove inconsistent in our convictions, however firm they may be; even when our conscience dictates a clear moral decision, other factors sometimes prove more attractive and powerful.” Moral education might help the individual to do morally good actions.¹⁴

Importance of Correcting Behaviour: As we have already explained, since children sometimes engage in aggressive and antisocial behaviour,

¹⁴Anthony Egan, “Conscience, Spirit, Discernment: The Holy Spirit, the Spiritual Exercises and the Formation of Moral Conscience,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 13, 8 (2010): 57–70.

it is necessary to make them aware that their misbehaviour has a negative effect on others (AL 268). It is essential to teach children to ask pardon and make restitution for the harm made to society and other individuals.

Parents should appreciate and acknowledge the effort of children to do compensation. They may correct them lovingly so that they feel the care (AL 269). AL proposes that

a child who does something wrong must be corrected, but never be treated as an enemy or an object on which to take out one's frustrations. Adults also need to realize that some kinds of misbehavior have to do with the frailty and limitations typical of youth. An attitude constantly prone to punishment would be harmful and not help children to realize that some actions are more serious than others (AL 269).

It is worth to note that discipline must foster the growth of the children and not give them discouragement. A balanced approach may help to avoid the extreme positions:

One would be to try to make everything revolve around the child's desires; such children will grow up with a sense of their rights but not their responsibilities. The other would be to deprive the child of an awareness of his or her dignity, personal identity, and rights; such children end up overwhelmed by their duties and a need to carry out other people's wishes (AL 270).

Patient Realism: Poor parenting is a block for moral formation.¹⁵ According to AL, "ethical formation is at times frowned upon, due to experiences of neglect, disappointment, lack of affection or poor models of parenting" (AL 272). Even parents lack ethical values. In this context, children might get a good model of people who practice values. In training values to children, one has to consider the child's age and abilities. We require open and flexible methods for training. For psychology, behaviour transformation is a gradual process (AL 273).

Family Life as an Educational Setting: One should learn wise use of freedom from family (AL 274). It is a fact that dispositions take place in childhood.¹⁶ Moreover, it can continue throughout life. Children should

¹⁵Marcus Mescher, "Families in Crisis and the Need for Mercy," 33.

¹⁶Daniel Hart, Robert Atkins, Debra Ford, "Family Influences on the Formation of Moral Identity in Adolescence: Longitudinal Analysis," *Journal of Moral Education* 98, 3 (1999): 375–386.

be able to evaluate critically harmful messages sent by different media (AL 274).¹⁷ This is analogous to *Chavarul*'s warning regarding the harmful effects of the print media or books in the character formation of children, namely, "Collecting pagan or heretical books or those containing lewd songs in the house is identical to hiding fire in haystacks." Instead, "Parents shall procure for their children the treasure of books packed with wisdom and philosophical knowledge that enhance piety. As much as possible, you shall buy and build up a collection of such books in your household" (I-21). Further, the education process might help the parents and children to overcome the communication gap. AL acknowledges that, "when well used, these media can be helpful for connecting family members who live apart from one another. Frequent contacts help to overcome difficulties" (AL 278). However, it is observed that these media cannot replace personal and direct dialogue.

The family should give education in hope (AL 275): "This does not mean preventing children from playing with electronic devices, but rather finding ways to help them develop their critical abilities and not to think that digital speed can apply to everything in life."

Children first learn socialization from family. They shall be trained to mingle with others, "to listen and share, to be patient and show respect, to help one another and live as one" (AL 276). This helps them to live in the bigger home of world and society. Again, children are requested to abstain from the greed of consumption and foster caring for the ecosystem. Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* (213) notices that "in the family, we first learn how to show love and respect for life; we are taught the proper use of things, order and cleanliness, respect for the local ecosystem and care for all creatures. In the family, we receive an integral education, which enables us to grow harmoniously in personal maturity." AL 277 emphasises that the family is the fundamental agent which promotes integral ecology. The reason is that it is the main social sphere that has two basic principles of human civilization on earth such as the principle of communion and the precept of fruitfulness.¹⁸

¹⁷Digital culture has created a way of life that undercut integrity and authenticity. Charles Taylor calls it a "buffered self." "The 'buffered self' is a master of one's meanings, in that they are not necessarily guided by religious or social bonds." For details see Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 38.

¹⁸See also Pope Francis, "Catechesis" (30 September 2015), *L'Osservatore Romano*, 1 October 2015, 8.

Importance of Sex Education: Family has to provide positive and prudent sex education for children (AL 280). Sex education may integrate biological, cognitive, psychological, social, moral, and spiritual dimensions. The goal of sex education is love and mutual self-giving. Sex education has to be given according to the age and context of the student. Otherwise, it can deform sexuality (AL 281). Sex education might foster modesty (AL 282): “Without a sense of modesty, affection and sexuality can be reduced to an obsession with genitality and unhealthy behaviours that distort our capacity for love, and with forms of sexual violence that lead to inhuman treatment or cause hurt to others.”

Pope Francis says that sex education is not to be promoted by those who are concerned only with protecting themselves, but by who gave us life.¹⁹ From their life, parents could teach them “sensitivity to different expressions of love, mutual concern, and care, loving respect and deeply meaningful communication” (AL 283). Further, young students should not receive a confusing level of sex education (AL 284). Similarly, sex education might help to respect and appreciate the differences (AL 285). This helps to overcome their self-absorption.

Similarly, the relevance of sex education and chaste life is well expressed in *Chavarul* (II-3, 4, 5, 7, 12). For instance, St Chavara warns parents: “Do not trust servants who are careless with the children; very often these careless servants spoil them” (II-5). He also observes, “do not let your children move around naked even inside the house” (II-3). Similarly, he asks not to allow boys and girls to sleep in the same room; for, the devil will train them what they do not know with the aid of nature (II-4). He advises not to allow children to stay in the houses of relatives, because they may return learning bad habits: “although they leave as angels, many a time, they return as devils” (II-7).

Transmitting Faith: Raising children is ordered towards the transmission of faith (AL 287). However, many factors block transmitting the faith. There are unjust laws, norms and ethical theories that directly or indirectly affect the evangelization process of faith.²⁰ For instance, the radical concept of autonomy, such as a ‘person is free from everything,’ finds no meaning in the practice of faith. Further, the

¹⁹Fares, “Educare i figli secondo ‘Amoris Laetitia,’” 358.

²⁰S. Kanniyakonil, “Year of Faith and Human Life,” *Indian Journal of Family Studies* 14, 2 (2013): 33–42.

utilitarian approach is another challenge to faith. It reduces all faith and moral values to a material calculation with no consideration for spiritual values regarding the calculation of good.²¹ The utilitarian approach does not consider different kinds of relations between God, among friends, children, parents or citizens; the only factor relevant here is the utility.²² Moreover, this approach prevents from recognizing the relevance of faith in God. Apart from those theories, a tension between reason and faith, tension between Christian and non-theistic anthropology, scientific positivism, scientific materialism (Darwinism, Transhumanism, neuroscience, and neuroethics), contractualism, liberalism, pragmatism, and relativism are some other challenges to faith.²³

Parents have to hand on the faith to their children.

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. He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children; that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children (Ps 78:3–6).

Besides, the book of Psalm says, “one generation laud your works to another, and declare your mighty acts” (Ps 144:4). Also, Isaiah says, “Fathers make known to children your faithfulness” (Is 38:19). Pope Francis explains that raising children demands a systematic process of transmitting the faith (AL 287). Further, *Relatio Finalis* states that couples and parents should be properly respected in prompting catechesis. Family catechesis is extremely helpful in forming young parents to be conscious of their goal in evangelizing their own home.²⁴ Above all, children have to get physical maturity, emotional maturity, and spiritual maturity like Jesus Christ who grew in “wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man” (Lk 2:52).

²¹R. Crisp, “Utilitarianism and Accomplishment Revisited,” *Analysis* 61 (2001): 163.

²²R. Noggle, “On the Cross of Mere Utility: Utilitarianism, Sacrifices, and the Value of Persons,” *Utilitas* 12 (2000): 9.

²³George Karakunnel, *The Christian Vision of Man* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1984), 88.

²⁴*Relatio Finalis*, 2015, no. 89. See also V. Guroian, “The Ecclesial Family: John Chrysostom on Parenthood,” *Bunge* (2001): 61–77.

Home should be a place where children study to “appreciate the meaning and beauty of the faith.” Similarly, they have to pray and serve their neighbour (AL 287). This takes place by receiving the sacraments and practicing them.

Parents might teach them the role of prayer in their life (AL 288). Pope Francis asks to stimulate their personal experiences of faith rather than giving them advice.²⁵ Mothers have to regularly pray for their children like St Monica. Likewise, when parents transmit faith in the family, they too participate in the program of the evangelizing mission. AL (289) says that “children who grew up in missionary families often become missionaries themselves; growing up in warm and friendly families, they learn to relate to the world in this way, without giving up their faith or their convictions.”

Correspondingly, in *Chavarul*, transmission of faith is the primary task of parents. Chavara requests parents to teach their children to recite the name of Jesus, Mary and Joseph in the early stages of their life itself (II-2, 11). He advises: “Let the children familiarize and kiss the image of the Holy Family, and teach them to honour and venerate them. As they begin to speak, teach them to recite short prayers such as Our Father, Hail Mary, the Angelus, etc.” (II-2). Besides, Chavara asks to “ensure that all children are at home by the time the Angelus bells ring. Train them to greet and kiss the hands of the elders and parents as soon as the family prayers are over” (II-11).

AL pronounces that family is an instrument of pastoral services:

The family is thus an agent of pastoral activity through its explicit proclamation of the Gospel and its legacy of varied forms of witness, namely solidarity with the poor, openness to a diversity of people, the protection of creation, moral and material solidarity with other families, including those most in need, commitment to the promotion of the common good and the transformation of unjust social structures, beginning in the territory in which the family lives, through the practice of the corporal and spiritual works of mercy (AL 290).

Thus, social concern of the family members is also adequately emphasized in *Chavarul* (I-18, 22, 23) and AL (290). For example, St Chavara warns, “Do not deny or delay just wages to labourers; for, it is a grave sin crying out before the throne of God. Do not humiliate or

²⁵Diego Fares, “Educare i figli secondo ‘*Amoris Laetitia*,’” 358.

trouble the poor; for, God will seek retribution from you on account of their tears” (I-18).

Vocation: Both documents exhort children to choose their vocation as it pertains to the plan of God. According to Chavara, “When they come of age, children should be given full freedom to choose their state of life. For, it is God who resolves on their state of life, and it is the responsibility of the children to make the right choice” (II-14). Likewise, AL asks to be aware that, “children’s life decisions and their Christian vocation may demand a parting for the sake of the Kingdom of God” (AL 18).

Conclusion

This paper is an attempt to compare the teachings of *Chavarul* and AL on the moral formation of children. Moral formation includes forming a good habit, responsible use of freedom, doing morally right acts, the value of correction, sex education, and transmission of faith. Both *Chavarul* and AL emphasise that it is the responsibility of the parents to provide better moral formation for their children. A good environment in the family is necessary for it. There are many similarities between *Chavarul* and AL. Both of them give adequate space for the formation of the children. *Chavarul* presents it clearly, though a detailed description is beyond its scope, whereas AL elaborately discusses it based on scripture and the documents of the Church. There is continuity in the teachings of *Chavarul* and AL. Finally, based on *Chavarul* and AL we have to discuss the questions: Where are our children now? How can we transmit Christian faith and morality to children? How can we merge faith and practical life? Above all, AL and *Chavarul* remind parents to give moral education to their children which is their fundamental responsibility and the need of the time.

PASTORAL CARE OF HOMOSEXUAL AND LESBIAN PERSONS

Johnson Pradeep Ruben & Christopher Vimalraj Hiruthya♦

Homosexuality is not a new issue but has been found in our society historically. It is not unique to any culture, or race; acceptance or rejection of homosexuality is culturally variant. The prevalence of homosexuality for both the genders is around 2% to 7%, 2 to 9% for lesbians and 0.5% to 15% for homosexual men.¹ The American Psychiatric Association (APA) listed homosexuality in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM)-I in 1952, and in 1973, APA removed homosexuality from its DSM due to improved understandings of research findings.² Societal perceptions on homosexuality, underpinned by religious morality, have forced lesbian women and homosexual men to hide their identities from their families, friends, colleagues, and in public to avoid the risk of being harassed, discriminated against, assaulted or even lynched.

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¹J. Balthazart, *The Biology of Homosexuality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

²J. Drescher, "Out of DSM: Depathologizing Homosexuality," *Behavioral Sciences* 5, 4 (2015): 565–75.

Various studies have been attempted to understand the phenomenon of homosexuality. This article highlights some important studies including family studies, biological studies, psychosocial studies, ethical evaluation, theological perspectives and pastoral approaches.

Family Studies

The earliest twin study was conducted by Ernest Kallman and he reported a 100% concordance between monozygotic (MZ) (or identical) twins, and only a 12% concordance for dizygotic (DZ) (or fraternal) twins.³ This study had artifacts and hence led to other genetic studies. Michael Bailey and Richard Pillard (1991) found that the concordance rate for monozygotic twins was 52%, for dizygotic (DZ) twins was 22%, and for adoptive brothers was 11%. Based on these findings they concluded that childhood gender nonconformity does not seem to be an indicator for "genetic loading for homosexuality."⁴ It also emphasized that the more closely a person is genetically linked to a pair, the more likely that they both exhibit gay or straight tendencies. Another study by Whitam et al. found a concordance rate of 65.8% for MZ twins and 30.4% for DZ twins.⁵ A meta-analysis by Hershberger in eight twin studies concluded that MZ twins had a significantly higher concordance rate for homosexuality than did the DZ twins in six of the studies. These data suggest that there is a genetic factor that influences homosexuality.⁶ In a study by Kendler et al., they used a random sample of 3,000 people and found a concordance rate of 32% for non-heterosexual (bisexual or homosexual) orientation in MZ twins of males. While for DZ twins of the same sex, the chance of the second twin being homosexual or bisexual fell to 13%. They found a

³F.S. Kallman, "Comparative Twin Studies of the Genetic Aspects of Male Homosexuality," *Journal of Nervous and Mental Diseases* 115 (1952): 283-298.

⁴Michael J. Bailey and Richard C. Pillard, "A Genetic Study of Male Sexual Orientation," *Archives of General Psychiatry* 48 (December 1991): 1089-1096.

⁵Frederick L. Whitam, Milton Diamond and James Martin, "Homosexual Orientation in Twins: A Report on 61 Pairs and Three Triplet Sets," *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 22, 3 (1993): 187-206.

⁶Scott L. Hershberger, "Biological Factors in the Development of Sexual Orientation," in *Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Identities and Youth: Psychological Perspectives*, ed. Anthony R. D'Augelli and Charlotte J. Patterson (Oxford University Press, New York, 2001), 27-51.

heritability estimates of male sexual orientation between 0.28 and 0.65.⁷ Also, it was found that there is a higher frequency of homosexual brothers, cousins, and uncles in the gay probands (predominantly in the maternal line). In fact, similar findings were made regarding lesbians. It was found that increased rates of lesbianism were found in sisters, daughters, nieces, and female cousins through a paternal uncle in female relatives of lesbian.⁸ Current evidence suggests that there is an increased incidence of homosexuality in all females of lesbian probands in both the relatives.⁹ Even though there are a lot of studies convincing about the higher concordance rates in the MZ twins, there is still lack of a 100% concordance rate between the monozygotic twins. That is, these studies suggest that homosexuality is not solely based on biological factors. Hence, other forms of studies on the genetics of homosexuality should be conducted, for example, newer techniques such as DNA linkage analysis.

Hamer proposed that homosexuality could be an X-linked trait, and through DNA analysis in homosexual men he found a significant concordance for 5 genetic markers on the X-Chromosome site called Xq28.¹⁰ He hypothesized that in each subject's mother's side, there were markedly larger numbers of homosexual men, all stemming through the maternal lineages based on the family tree. He also suggested that there was 99.5% certainty that there is a gene, or several genes, on the X chromosome that causes a predisposition for heterosexuality. This led to the findings of the "gay gene study." This finding of a gay gene posits that Heterozygotes (one homosexual gene and one heterosexual gene) are capable of passing the gene to the next generation by mothers (as the Y-chromosome is incapable of heterozygosity), this again associates homosexuality to X-linkage.

⁷K.S. Kendler, L.M. Thornton, S.E. Gilman & R.C. Kessler, "Sexual Orientation in a US National Sample of Twin and Nontwin Sibling Pairs," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 157 (2000): 1843–6.

⁸A.M.L. Pattatucci, D.H. Hamer, "Development and Familiality of Sexual Orientation in Females," *Behaviour Genetics* 25 (1995): 407–419.

⁹A. Camperio Ciani, U. Battaglia, "Implicit Measurements of Sexual Preference in Self-Declared Heterosexual Men: A Pilot Study on the Rate of Androphilia in Italy," *Journal of Sexual Medicine* 11, 9 (September 2014): doi: 10.1111/jsm.12565

¹⁰Dean H. Hamer, Stella Hu, Victoria L. Magnuson, Nan Hu, and Angela M.L. Pattatucci (1993), "A Linkage Between DNA Markers on the X Chromosome and Male Sexual Orientation," *Science* 261 (16 July 1993): 321–327.

In an ongoing Australian Twin Study, Bailey et al. found that women had slight-to-moderate degrees of homosexual attraction, while, for men it was a higher degree of homosexual attraction. They also found that familial factors were important for all traits, but were less successful in distinguishing genetic from shared environmental influences and only childhood gender nonconformity was significantly heritable for both men and women.¹¹

Anatomy Studies

In 1990, Swaab¹² first documented physiological differences in the anatomy of a gay man's brain. He found two important findings (1) a portion of the hypothalamus was structurally different in homosexual men compared to heterosexual male and (2) the suprachiasmatic nucleus, was found to be twice the size of its heterosexual counterpart. Laura S. Allen during the same period found that the anterior commissure of the hypothalamus was also significantly larger in the homosexual subjects than that of the heterosexuals.¹³ Even though Swaab's and Allen's results became an important evidence for the biological argument on homosexuality, many critics argued that just the size or shape differences will not determine the sexuality of a person. In 1991, Simon LeVay reported that within the hypothalamus, the third interstitial notch of the anterior hypothalamus (INAH3) was more than twice as large in the heterosexual men as in the women and more than twice as large in the heterosexual men as in the homosexual men. This finding indicated that INAH is dimorphic with sexual orientation [i.e., shows a difference in structure between homosexuals and heterosexuals], at least in men, and suggests that sexual orientation has a biological substrate. He suggested that even though the difference in anatomy was no product of upbringing or environment, but rather prenatal cerebral development and structural differentiation.

¹¹J.M. Bailey, M.P. Dunne, N.G. Martin, "Genetic and Environmental Influences on Sexual Orientation and its Correlates in an Australian Twin Sample," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 78, 3 (March 2000): 524.

¹²D.F. Swaab, M.A. Hofman, An Enlarged Suprachiasmatic Nucleus in Homosexual Men, *Brain Research* 537 (1990): 141-8.

¹³L.S. Allen, R.A. Gorski, "Sexual Orientation and the Size of the Anterior Commissure in the Human Brain," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences USA* 89 (1992): 7199-202.

Sometimes, it may not be possible to get direct evidence from brain studies or biological studies, other lines of evidence include animal studies and neuroendocrine studies. They purported that the sexual orientation is determined by the prenatal levels of androgen on relevant neural structures. If there are elevated levels of androgen exposure to the foetus, the foetus will become masculinized, or attracted to females. This research was conducted on rats at Stanford. Studies of mammalian sexual behaviour led to the hypothesis that a prenatal androgen deficit results in male homosexuality and excess of prenatal androgen resulted in lesbianism. Also, they highlight the role of prenatal sex-steroid hormones that may influence sexual orientation leading to homosexuality in later life. In humans and many other mammals, prenatal sex-steroid hormones influence prepubertal nonsexual behaviour, including rough-and-tumble play. This raises the question whether a childhood predilection for or aversion to rough-and-tumble activities could be related to differences in prenatal androgen secretion.

Psychosocial Studies

Many authors are not convinced and propose an opposing view suggesting that homosexuality is the result of environmental factors and not due to biological factors. They suggest that childhood developmental factors could play a vital role in the formation of homosexuality. The evidence for the role of social factors for homosexuality dates to the ancient Greeks.¹⁴ Aristophanes, in his *Symposium* investigates homosexuality, although not termed as such, as a desire by men to share a long-term fulfilment of the soul. He believed that two souls are longing to be together, and the sexual desire alone is not strong enough to create homosexuality, but that the cultural environment allows or forbids the relationship to occur. In ancient Greece, it is well known that many men were engaged in same-sex relationships called Pederasty. This was a socially acknowledged romantic relationship between an adult male (the erastes) and a younger male (the eromenos). However, they were not relationships on an equal footing, older men in positions of authority had relationships with young boys who were going through a transition to adulthood. In some tribes in New Guinea, young boys aged 8–15 had sexual relationship

¹⁴John Thorp, "The Social Construction of Homosexuality," 8 April 2003, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/med/thorp.html>

daily by the young male warriors. These two instances are the evidence where the culture is a causative agent of homosexual expression, and homosexuality is accepted or rather it is also forced, rather than a natural expression of human sexuality.

Most psychoanalytic theories, however, stress the role of parental and family dynamics, not the society as a whole. Bieber's research using psychoanalysis found a family constellation of the mother being close-binding intimate (CBI), seductive, inhibiting and over-controlling.¹⁵ Fathers of homosexuals tend to be detached, hostile, minimising and openly rejecting towards the potentially homosexual son. The combination of a close-binding, intimate and dominant mother and a hostile detached father is especially important for the development of homosexuality. Bene used a projective test, the Family Relations Test, in 83 male homosexuals and compared to 84 married men. They found a negative, more hostile and affectionless relation of the homosexual with the father, but he also had a less hostile relationship with the mother.¹⁶ O'Connor found that the homosexuals were more attached to mother than to father than the neurotics; more frequently had a poor relationship with their father; and the father was away from home for a prolonged period during childhood and adolescence, more for the homosexual group than the neurotics.¹⁷ These findings of family psychological constellation seems relevant to the development of male homosexuality.

Behaviourist groups believe that some sexual and gender identification differences result from roles imposed by family and friends upon children, such as the masculine and the feminine stereotypes. However, there is no evidence, social or biological, to support that homosexual children were raised differently than the heterosexual children. There are also other theories which play a significant role such as the 'Parental Manipulation theory.' Here, one or both parents can remove or negate the child's gender linguistically and control offspring to promote their (the parents') evolutionary fitness,

¹⁵Irving Bieber and Toby B. Bieber, "Male Homosexuality," *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry* 24, 5 (1979): 409–421.

¹⁶Eva Bene, "On the Genesis of Male Homosexuality: An Attempt at Clarifying the Role of the Parents," *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 111, 478 (1965): 803–813.

¹⁷P.J. O'Connor, "Aetiological Factors in Homosexuality as Seen in Royal Air Force Psychiatric Practice," *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 110, 466 (1964): 381–391.

ensuring the passage of genes into the next generation. This, by selecting only heterosexual practices as acceptable, the parents are attempting to promote their passage of genes.¹⁸ However, the 'Kin-Selection theory' states that it doesn't matter how the genes are passed to the next generation, as long as they are passed along.¹⁹ For example, regardless of a homosexual outcome, the very similar genetic makeup of siblings will still allow for the passage of the family genetics along to the next generation.

David Halperin and Jean Foucault who were two important social theorists on homosexuality had a contrasting idea on the environmental contributions to the formation of an individual's homosexuality. Halperin suggested a 'Planophysical theory' which believes that homosexuality is a freak of nature and an error.²⁰ His theory follows the tradition of psychological theory on this subject projecting a Freudian idea that homosexuality is derived from a failure to resolve Oedipal issues. Although Halperin has a large following from interest groups such as Christian coalitions, his theory is largely disrespected by the psychological community at large, as it provides only a result, not a cause, thus not scientifically acceptable. He postulates that a weak father and strong mother, with an unresolved Oedipus complex will lead to a weak, and then homosexual, son, because the mother has too strong of an image, compared to the weak state of the father. Psychologists argue that this same arrangement would also possibly lead to a stronger son, striving for compensation of his father's weakness. Jean Foucault argues that, "...homosexuality became because we made it so."²¹ He reports that the category of homosexuality itself was only created a mere one hundred years ago, which was given a name twenty years later.

There are significant criticisms of most of the psychosocial theories. The cultural theories about the practice of Pederasty and sexual intercourse are forced and are practiced in only few communities. How do we explain them in culture, where it is not practised? The

¹⁸Hoback Wyatt, "Lecture 21. Sociality," 11 April 2003, <http://www.unk.edu/acad/biology/hoback/2002bio470/470lecture21.htm>.

¹⁹Thompson and Devine, "Homosexuality: Biologically or Environmentally Constructed?" 8 April 2003, <http://jrscience.wcp.muohio.edu/Research/HNatureProposalsArticles/Homosexuality.biologicall.html>

²⁰John Thorp, "The Social Construction of Homosexuality."

²¹Tim Taylor, "Current Theories on the Genesis of Homosexuality," 11 April 2003, http://www.dai.ed.ac.uk/homes/timt/papers/twin_studies/theories.html.

psychoanalytic and sociologically based studies which investigated the Oedipal issues, roles of individual choice and decision-making, identity development, societal hierarchies, gender role stereotypes, role expectations and conformity in the aetiology of homosexuality are often not amenable to scientific testing. Even though, so many psychosocial theories have been proposed, none of them have won the unanimous support of the scientific community.

Ethical and Theological Perspectives

Despite such evidenced based research, and the opinion of a vast majority of psychiatrists pointing in the direction that homosexual orientation is a normal variant of human sexuality, yet sections of society and groups within religious communities do not accept such professional opinion. Traditional and cultural biases prevail among the majority, albeit false, prejudiced and without scientific evidence. The Church is not bereft of such prejudices; it is common knowledge that there are deep theological and ideological divisions on this subject. Some Christians are even averse to accepting persons with homosexual orientation in the community. There are many in the Church who believe that Pope Francis has softened the approach to the LGBT community with the comment, “Who am I to judge?”²² from the perceived Catholic hard-line “objectively disordered” approach. The Church certainly does not reject those with homosexual orientation. On the contrary, the teaching authority of the Church differentiates between homosexual orientation and sexual actions between persons of the same sex. The ethical approach to homosexuality has been vexatious and often caused polarisation among Christians, and theologians have taken up opposing positions. The Holy See has acknowledged the same in a letter to the bishops of the Catholic Church.²³ In addition, the Holy See concedes that there are a number of people even within the Church who bring enormous pressure on the Church to accept homosexual condition as a normal

²²Joshua J. McElwee, “Francis Explains ‘who Am I to Judge?’” *National Catholic Reporter*, January 10, 2016, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/vatican/francis-explains-who-am-i-judge>.

²³Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*, no. 1. October 1986, sec. 16, AAS 79 (1987): 543–554.

variant of human sexuality, and consequently condone sexual actions among same sex partners.²⁴

The Church has clearly espoused the inadmissibility of homosexual acts as morally licit or acceptable. Since the teaching of the Church holds the position that all sexual actions are licit only between husband and wife within the bond of marriage, any sexual activity outside the marital bond is seen as sinful. Even so, moral teaching of the Church calls for a differentiation between homosexual acts and homosexual tendencies or orientation. There is nothing sinful in a person whose sexual preference is for the same sex, although such preference may be described as disordered. The voices within the Church calling for a discernment and dialogue on this subject are growing bigger and louder. In the light of the scientific evidence, there is an urgent need to be more supportive to those especially excluded and relegated to the margins, even if we are not able to accept homosexual actions as acceptable or normative.

Pastoral Approach

The Church clearly refuses to accept the fundamental identity of a person only on the basis of a person's sexual orientation as 'homosexual' or 'heterosexual.'²⁵ The words gay and lesbian are not used to define persons who experience same-sex attractions, in the Church's official teaching. The person's identity is irreducible to their sexual preferences; such expressions do not fully describe the richness and wholeness of a human person bearing the *imago Dei*. Every human person, regardless of their sexual preferences, is a unique and irreplaceable gift of God; created in the image and likeness of God and redeemed by the blood of Christ. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* has clearly enunciated that a homosexual person "must be accepted, with respect, compassion and sensitivity."²⁶ However, the Church does not accept that the genesis of homosexuality is clearly understood or explained; neither does the Church accept that a homosexual person lacks freedom of choice.²⁷ Beyond the application of laws and principles, Pope Francis has called on members of the Church, not to become "harsh judges," but "to offer everyone the life of Christ." He clearly warns

²⁴Cfr CDF, *Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*, 8.

²⁵CDF, *Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*, 16.

²⁶*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2358.

²⁷CDF, *Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*, 11.

Christians not to be concerned with being at the centre and then being “caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures.”²⁸ He cautions the Church that our consciences ought to be disturbed by the fact that so many of our fellow human beings are “living without the strength, light and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ, without a community of faith to support them, without meaning and a goal in life.”²⁹ More than by fear of going astray, the hope is that we will be moved by the fear of remaining shut up within structures which give us a false sense of security, within rules which make us harsh judges, within habits which make us feel safe, while at our door people are starving and Jesus does not tire of saying to us, “Give them something to eat.” This pastoral approach does not exclude persons with homosexual orientation. Pope Francis reiterates that the “missionary impulse” of the Church should exclude no one. In fact, this “missionary impulse” is to reach first of all those “who are usually despised and overlooked.”³⁰

Many homosexual persons still face discrimination, rejection and sometimes violence. The Church is not free from such unjust exclusion of homosexual persons. A scientific understanding may eliminate some of the misunderstandings and bigotry. A homosexual person is understood as a person who feels erotic and emotional attraction, which is predominant towards the person of the same sex. The study and recognition of the aetiology of homosexuality in the scientific world is divided. If homosexuality were a trait determined entirely by a person’s genes, one would expect hundred per cent of monozygotic twins with a homosexual genotype to be homosexuals. Byne and Parsons state that there are a large proportion of monozygotic twins who are discordant for homosexuality despite sharing not only their genes but also their prenatal and familial environments. They conclude, The large proportion of discordant pairs underscores our ignorance of the factors that are involved, and the manner in which they interact, in the emergence of sexual orientation.³¹ Miron Baron argues that there are

²⁸Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium: On the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World*. Apostolic Exhortation (24 November 2013) AAS 12 (2013): 49.

²⁹Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 49.

³⁰Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 48.

³¹William Byne and Bruce Parsons, “Human Sexual Orientation: The Biologic Theories Reappraised,” *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 50 (March 1993): 235.

unresolved questions in the twin studies and that homosexuality is caused by environmental factors.³² Furthermore, George Rice, et al., argue against the linkage to a genetic inheritance, since inheritance of a behavioural trait is not a simple Mendelian trait like the colour of hair or eyes.³³ Besides, the study in 1999 has failed to duplicate the results in 52 gay men who had the alleles identified as gay at position Xq28.

Scientific opinion is converging towards an indirect role of biological factors which may increase the likelihood that certain individuals will experience same-sex attractions. So, does a person make a choice about one's sexual orientation? Byne and Parsons disagree,

Conspicuously absent from most theorizing on the origins of sexual orientation is an active role of the individual in constructing his or her identity. This is not meant to imply that one consciously decides one's sexual orientation. Instead, sexual orientation is assumed to be shaped and reshaped by a cascade of choices made in the context of changing circumstances in one's life and enormous social and cultural pressures.³⁴

These findings are influencing the landscape of the perceptions on homosexuality. These changing perspectives are marked by the shift in the understanding of homosexuality from sin, pathology and crime to a variant of human sexuality at least among a vast majority of psychiatrists.

Some people argue that there is a political agenda in promoting the idea of gay gene so as to make homosexual lifestyles a norm. The Church is clearly against such an ideology. CDF states,

It has been argued that the homosexual orientation in certain cases is not the result of deliberate choice; and so the homosexual person would then have no choice but to behave in a homosexual fashion. Lacking freedom, such a person, even if engaged in homosexual activity, would not be culpable. What is at all costs to be avoided is the unfounded and demeaning assumption that the sexual behaviour of homosexual persons is always and totally compulsive and therefore inculpable. What is essential is that the fundamental liberty which characterizes the

³²Miron Baron, "Genetic Linkage and Male Homosexual Orientation," *British Medical Journal* 307 (7 August 1993): 337.

³³George Rice, Carol Anderson, Neil Risch, and George Ebers, "Male Homosexuality: Absence of Linkage to Microsatellite Markers at Xq28," *Science* 284 (April 1999): 666.

³⁴Byne and Parsons, "Human Sexual Orientation," 235.

human person and gives him/her his(her) dignity be recognized as belonging to the homosexual person as well. As in every conversion from evil, the abandonment of homosexual activity will require a profound collaboration of the individual with God's liberating grace.³⁵

Although, the scientific evidence clearly shows that persons with homosexual orientation do not make a choice of their orientation, nonetheless the individual decisions to engage in a sexual act is not devoid of moral content. Despite evidence that an authentic homosexual does not choose his or her orientation, there are many within the Church who are judgemental of homosexual person and relegate them outside the margins as lepers of the post-modern era. This could also be a result of ignorance about the facts concerning homosexuality and the cultural and religious conditioning of morally acceptable behaviour. The unjust discrimination and victimisation, and marginalizing them from mainstream parish life is to be vehemently opposed and criticised by Church leaders. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* has acknowledged that the number of persons who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies is not negligible.³⁶ Furthermore the Catechism clearly invites us to accept the homosexual persons with respect, compassion and sensitivity.³⁷ Therefore, bishops, priests, deacons, lay leaders and catechists should commit themselves to evangelise a Christian culture that is homophobic and particularly be attentive to the needs of adolescents and young persons who may be struggling with their sexual orientation. Christians must also be attentive to the use of the language and attitudes that may betray an unwelcoming message. The parish community must stand in solidarity with parents of children who experience same-sex attraction. The Church must express more clearly its stance against violence and discrimination of homosexual persons.

Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara asks a pertinent question, "Should you voluntarily create more woes and difficulties that what our great father Adam has bequeathed already?"³⁸ Evidently, homosexuality was not a debated issue at the time *Chavarul* was written. However, it may offer insights for our attitudes and approaches in pastoral care. At a

³⁵CDF, *The Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*, 11.

³⁶*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2358.

³⁷*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2358.

³⁸Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Chavarul: Testament of Loving Father* (Kochi: Chavara Central Secretariat, 2018), no. 1.

personal level every Christian is to be invited to make an examination of conscience to uncover one's own disposition towards people with same-sex attraction. It is those who hold a bias against homosexual persons who are in need of conversion and grace to embrace the authentic teaching of the Church. We have to overcome doubts about the teaching of the Church on homosexuals and overcome our feelings of hatred and anger towards gay and lesbian persons. The *Chavarul* clearly espouses that the ability to overlook faults in others and to forgive them is possible only for those who are really strong, prudent, and honourable.

Conclusion

There is a need to understand homosexuality as a phenomenon, rather than a pathological symptom. It would require lot more research to study homosexuality as a phenomenon and the need to identify its aetiology. Catholics ought to be exemplary in treating persons with homosexual inclinations first and foremost as human beings created by God and worthy of respect. We must make them feel welcome to our churches, encourage them to a full and active role in the Parish life and thus insert them into the community as members of the body of Christ. The Church's teaching is clear,

It is deplorable that homosexual persons have been and are the object of violent malice in speech or in action. Such treatment deserves condemnation from the Church's pastors wherever it occurs. It reveals a kind of disregard for others which endangers the most fundamental principles of a healthy society. The intrinsic dignity of each person must always be respected in word, in action and in law.³⁹

The *Chavarul*, speaking on the desire for justice, warns against those who humiliate and trouble others.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the clearest teaching that captures the Lord's mandate to love all people emerges from the *Chavarul*, "Be desirous of other's love and respect than they becoming fearful of you."⁴¹

On chastity, we must remember that chastity is not a call exclusively to homosexual persons, but is an invitation to all. We must all be realistic about the circumstances in contemporary society and

³⁹CDF, *Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*, 10.

⁴⁰*Chavarul*, no. 18.

⁴¹*Chavarul*, no. 14.

continually seek God's grace to overcome temptations. The Scriptures invite us to be vigilant. In the Sacraments the visible sign of God's grace and the active presence of God in our lives strengthen us. We should never discourage anyone to return to the Lord, even frequently, for forgiveness. The Eucharist sustains us on our journey to holiness which is a long and hard task.

A pastoral approach that can be recommended is one that encourages friendships for those who experience homosexual orientation. Friendship is a beautiful gift from God. Friendships also help individuals to meet their innermost intimacy needs. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches us that the virtue of chastity blossoms in friendship. It shows the disciple how to follow and imitate him who has chosen us as his friends, who has given himself totally to us and allows us to participate in his divine estate. Chastity is expressed notably in friendships with one another. Whether it develops between persons of the same or opposite sex, friendships represent a great good for all. It leads to spiritual communion.⁴²

⁴²*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 237.

THE CHALLENGE OF PRE-MARITAL SEX AND COHABITATION

Thomas Knieps-Port le Roi♦

Premarital sex and cohabitation outside wedlock have been a phenomenon of all times in human history. However, it is only since the 1980's in western, late-modern societies that, as a consequence of broader socio-cultural processes of individualization, pluralization and de-institutionalization, unmarried cohabitation has seen an exponential increase; has in the following decades received broad societal acceptance; and is now depicted by sociologists as the fastest-growing family type.

Statistical and Sociological Evidence

Phenomenon: Sociologists (mainly in the USA) have carried out extensive research on the new phenomenon of unmarried cohabitation over the last decades. They describe its emergence and development in four stages: in a first stage, cohabitation is a deviant and avant-garde phenomenon which is only practiced by a small minority which opposes the dominant “culture of marriage.” In a second stage, couples increasingly live together in a probationary period before or as a

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prelude to marriage; they remain childless until they transform their relationship into marriage. In the third stage cohabitation becomes socially accepted as an alternative to marriage and becoming a parent is no longer restricted to marriage. In the fourth and final stage, cohabitation and marriage are equivalent forms of living together to the point of being indistinguishable, with children being born and reared within both.¹

Types: Sociologists classify cohabiting couples into two main types.² The first group views cohabitation as a stage in the marriage process (*premarital type*). Within this group several subtypes may be distinguished, e.g. those who view their union as a *prelude to marriage*; others are testing their relationship and thus view their union as a *trial marriage*. A second group views their union as an alternative to marriage (*non-marital type*). Within this second group, some opt for cohabitation out of a refusal of marriage as they do not have marriage plans and consider marriage an outdated institution while others view marriage as being irrelevant.

Motives: The motives for cohabitation are various. They range from family reasons (move out from parental home) over pragmatic (convenience, economic rationality, financial necessity) to relationship-driven (next step in relationship, being together, testing the relationship) motives.³

Occurrence: On average across OECD countries around 60% of individuals aged 20 or older are living with partner. Most of them are married or in a civil or registered partnership, but a substantial proportion (almost 10%) are living as a part of a cohabiting couple. The proportion of people living in a cohabiting couple relationship is largest at almost 20% in Sweden, but is also considerable (at around or above 15%) in countries like Denmark, Norway and France. Cohabiting is comparatively rare in several Southern and Eastern European OECD countries, particularly Poland and Greece where only around 2% of

¹K. Kiernan, "Cohabitation in Western Europe. Trends, Issues, and Implications," in *Just Living Together. Implications of cohabitation on Families, Children and Social Policy*, ed. A. Booth and A. Crouter (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2002).

²N. Hiekel, *The Different Meanings of Cohabitation across Europe. How Cohabitors View Their Unions and Differ in Their Plans and Behaviors*. Dissertation Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2014 (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014).

³S. Sassler & Amanda J. Miller, *Cohabitation Nation. Gender, Class and the Remaking of Relationships* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017), 42–55.

people aged 20 or older are living in a cohabiting couple relationship. In almost all OECD countries, cohabitation is more common among young adults (20–34 year olds) than it is among the general adult population (20+ year-olds). On average across the OECD about 17% of people aged 20–34 are living in a cohabiting couple relationship, with rates reaching as high as 29% in Denmark, France and Sweden.⁴ Statistics for all of the EU-28 Member States state that 15% of those aged 20 to 29 live in a consensual union, compared with 12.6% of those aged 30 to 49 and 3.8% of those aged 50 and over.⁵ These statistics show that cohabitation is predominantly practiced by young adults and is in general “short-lived”: while a majority marries after some time, a smaller majority separates and only a small minority remains in cohabitation (non-marital type).

In several OECD countries cohabiting couple households are roughly as likely to contain children as married or registered partnership couple households. In Belgium, the Czech Republic and Italy, for example, the proportion of cohabiting couple households that contain children is approximately equal to the proportion of married- or registered-partnership couple households that contain children, while in Estonia, Iceland, Norway and Slovenia cohabiting couple households are far more likely to contain children than married- or registered-partnership couple households. Only in Greece, Switzerland and to some extent Ireland is the likelihood of a cohabiting couple household containing a child considerably lower than the likelihood that a married or registered partnership couple household contains a child.⁶

The German Bishops’ Conference, in the summary of the responses to the questionnaire for the 2104 Bishops’ Synod, maintains that “pre-marital unions’ are not only a relevant pastoral reality, but one which is almost universal. Almost all couples who wish to marry in Church have already been living together, frequently for several years (estimates are

⁴OECD Family Database (2016), available at https://www.oecd.org/els/family/SF_3-3-Cohabitation-forms-partnership.pdf.

⁵Eurostat, *Marriage and birth statistics - new ways of living together in the EU* (2015), https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Marriage_and_birth_statistics_-_new_ways_of_living_together_in_the_EU#cite_note-3.

⁶OECD Family Database (2016), https://www.oecd.org/els/family/SF_3-3-Cohabitation-forms-partnership.pdf.

between 90% and 100%).”⁷ They add that according to recent polls “Catholics in Germany accept unmarried couples living together without any major reservations. Only three percent adopt a strictly negative position in this regard.”⁸

Effects: Counter-intuitively to what many (cohabitators) may expect, sociologists have since long shown that cohabitation is associated with a heightened risk of future marital divorce and reportedly lower marital satisfaction (“cohabitation effect”).⁹ These findings have been refined more recently in the sense that having definite marriage plans or being engaged with the person one later marries with, does not only give a higher chance of making it to marriage but also eliminates the negative cohabitation effects, giving these partners equal chances of marital stability and quality similar to those who marry directly.¹⁰ In other words, the level of personal commitment to the partner, not the cohabiting relationship as such, is a decisive factor for later marital (in)stability and (dis)satisfaction.

Traditional Church Teaching

The Catholic Church’s central traditional argument against premarital sex and unmarried cohabitation is one of sexual morality and runs as follows: “The sexual act must take place exclusively within marriage. Outside of marriage it always constitutes a grave sin and excludes one from sacramental communion” (CCC 2390).

This argument has received a theological-anthropological foundation in the “Theology of the Body” by John Paul II:

⁷German Bishops’ Conference, *Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelisation. Summary of the Responses from the German Dioceses and Archdioceses to the Questions Contained in the Preparatory Document for the III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops 2014*, 4a, http://www.dbk.de/fileadmin/redaktion/diverse_downloads/presse_2014/2014-012b-ENG-Fragebogen-Die-patoralen-Herausforderungen-der-Familie.pdf.

⁸German Bishops’ Conference, *Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelisation. Summary of the Responses...*2014, 4b.

⁹R. Schoen, “First Unions and the Stability of First Marriages,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 54 (1992): 281–284.

¹⁰S.M. Scott, G.H. Kline & H.J. Markman, *The Inertia Hypothesis. Sliding vs. Deciding in the Development of Risk for Couples in Marriage*, 2005, <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.121.4098&rep=rep1&type=pdf>.

The total physical self-giving would be a lie if it were not the sign and fruit of a total personal self-giving, in which the whole person, including the temporal dimension, is present: if the person were to withhold something or reserve the possibility of deciding otherwise in the future, by this very fact he or she would not be giving totally" (FC 11).

From here, the magisterium disqualifies in a harsh and undifferentiated manner all intimate relationships that are not bound together by legal marriage:

In a so-called free union, a man and a woman refuse to give juridical and public form to a liaison involving sexual intimacy. The expression "free union" is fallacious: what can "union" mean when the partners make no commitment to one another, each exhibiting a lack of trust in the other, in himself, or in the future? (CCC 2390).

According to the church's teaching, this is also true for those couples who intend to marry at a later stage:

Some today claim a "right to a trial marriage" where there is an intention of getting married later. However firm the purpose of those who engage in premature sexual relations may be, "the fact is that such liaisons can scarcely ensure mutual sincerity and fidelity in a relationship between a man and a woman, nor, especially, can they protect it from inconstancy of desires or whim." (PH 7) ... Human love does not tolerate "trial marriages." It demands a total and definitive gift of persons to one another (FC 80), (CCC 2391).

Since FC, the church teaching differentiates between different forms of (cfr FC 80–82: trial marriages, de facto free unions, only civilly married persons) and motives for cohabitation (cfr AL 294: mentioned are here, next to "prejudice or resistance to a sacramental union," an anti-institutional attitude and anxiety of definitive commitment, contextual factors such as high costs related to marriage) but is adamant, although with varying emphasis (see below regarding AL), that these relationships have to be transformed into marriage.

Since ample evidence suggests that cohabitation is here to stay and will continue to be the preferred form of living together for young adults, including those (Catholics) who intend to marry at some point, the question arises of how the church's teaching and practice are going to deal with it. Unless one demands that, as some US bishops have suggested, ministers should refuse to marry couples who have been

cohabiting, more constructive theological and pastoral solutions have to be looked for.

Theological and Pastoral Responses

So far, two major proposals have been offered. The first one is a pastoral solution provided by Pope Francis in his post-synodal exhortation *Amoris laetitia* (2016). In AL 292 Francis distinguishes between a marriage that is “fully realized” and forms of unions that “radically contradict this ideal, while others realize it in at least a partial and analogous way.” This opens a way to recognize some forms of (pre-marital!) cohabitation as partial and analogous realizations of, or otherwise as on their way to, full marriage. As criteria for a positive evaluation, Francis suggests particular stability of the union, deep affection of the partners, responsibility for the offspring, partners’ ability to overcome trials (in other terms, faithfulness) (AL 293). On the negative side, “distrust of marriage,” “putting off indefinitely the commitment of marriage” and lack of faithfulness are mentioned (AL 293). Calling upon the church and its ministers “not [to] disregard the constructive elements in those situations which do not yet...correspond to her teaching on marriage” (AL 292), the pope suggests a pastoral discernment towards, among others, people “simply living together” that helps them “understand the divine pedagogy of grace in their lives and offer[s...] them assistance so they can reach the fullness of God’s plan for them” (AL 297). Reference is made here to the principle of gradualness (cfr AL 295), according to which, “without detracting from the evangelical ideal, there is a need to accompany with mercy and patience the eventual stages of personal growth as these progressively appear” (AL 308). Although less explicitly than in FC, also Francis recommends that cohabiting couples should get married at some point.

Similar to AL, but systematically more elaborated, is a theological rationale that has been developed to adjust the traditional theology of marriage in view of contemporary patterns of relational life. According to these theologians,¹¹ the massive practice of premarital cohabitation provides a clear indication that the way of entering into marriage has

¹¹A. Thatcher, *Living Together and Christian Ethics. New Studies in Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); T.A. Salzman & M.G. Lawler, *The Sexual Person. Toward a Renewed Catholic Anthropology* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2008), 192–213.

fundamentally changed in late-modern societies. Marriage does no longer mark the entry into a committed, lifelong relationship as it used to be in the past but rather comes as a point of culmination in a dynamic process that starts with infatuation and then develops through different stages into a stable and lasting love. By contrast, the traditional theology conceives of marriage from a merely institutional perspective, focussing exclusively on the instantaneous event of the unconditional promise (expressed as legal consent in a sacramental celebration) which establishes the marital union, as it were, *ex nihilo*, without any relevant previous history. Such an approach does certainly not account for the developmental process which interpersonal, loving relationships pass through. Also, theologically therefore marriage has to be reconfigured as “marriage in process” (*matrimonium in fieri*) with cohabitation as a substantial phase and potential prelude to marriage. Since, and to the extent that, sexual intimacy is an expression of mutual commitment in a loving relationship, premarital sex can be regarded as an integral component of a relationship on its way to marriage.

From a historical perspective, these authors argue that the way marriages are entered into today is not unlike the practice of betrothal in premodern times: engaged lovers were held to be husband and wife and lived (and had sex) together immediately after the betrothal ceremony while the wedding took place at a later moment. It is only with the introduction of the canonical form at the council of Trent in the sixteenth century (which was meant to put an end to clandestine marriages and required for valid marriage to be contracted before a priest and two witnesses), that this sequence of entering into marriage fell into oblivion and the present practice took over. Recalling this history, it has been suggested that the contemporary practice of cohabitation could be marked by some kind of ritual, analogous to premodern betrothal, and pastorally accompanied by a marriage catechumenate.

This piece of theological scholarship demonstrates that what at first sight may seem as a practice that deviates from Catholic sexual morality, turns out to challenge that morality in a critical and constructive way. Premarital cohabitation reflects a widespread and, if placed in context, plausible behavioural pattern in late modern societies that can neither be held up nor ignored by the church and its ministers. On the contrary, it urges theology and pastoral practice to rethink its

traditional concepts and approaches to the point of retrieving the sense of the mystery of marriage which cannot be found in any fixed doctrinal or juridical formula but only in the lived reality of partners and spouses in the specific historical and social situation they are in. If there is a lesson to learn from the discussion about premarital sex and cohabitation, then it is that the church “has the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel” (GS 4).

CHALLENGES TO THE FAMILY TODAY: INTERRELIGIOUS MARRIAGE

Astrid Lobo Gajiwala♦

As a woman who has been in an interfaith marriage for over two decades, and has been advocating for the rights of Catholics in interfaith marriages for as long, I am almost jealous of the attention divorced and remarried Catholics have received in the recent synods on the family and the Pope's post synodal letter, *Amoris Laetitia*.

Love on the Margins

Strangely, no parallels have been drawn between Catholics in interfaith marriages and divorced and remarried Catholics. I refer here not to those interfaith families who are a triumph for the Church with their baptized children, and sometimes partners, but to the Catholic partners in interfaith marriages, mostly women, who stand on the margins of their faith communities with their legal, but canonically invalid (CIC, Canon 1086, 1), non-sacramental marriages, and their unbaptized children.¹

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¹Astrid Lobo Gajiwala, "What Catholics in Interfaith Marriages Share with the Divorced and Remarried," *America*, July 10, 2017, <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2017/06/20/what-catholics-interfaith-marriages-share-divorced-and-remarried>.

Lobo Gajiwala, Astrid. "Challenges to the Family Today: Interreligious Marriage." In *Vocation and Mission of the Family: Reflections on Chavarul and Amoris Laetitia*, edited by Shaji George Kochuthara, 410–421. Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2020.

Their stories are of humiliation and pain, of exclusion and longing, and of stealth. It was only literally at the Eucharistic table, during a celebration of the Eucharist at home, that my houseworker who went for Mass every Sunday, shamefacedly revealed to me that her parish priest in her village had told her she cannot receive communion because she and her Hindu husband were not married in Church. A colleague in a similar predicament wisely took matters in her own hands, and receives the sacraments in a Church where she is unknown.

Recently, a scholastic who happened to be at a seminary where I had gone for a meeting sought me out because he had read my articles. He confided that his Hindu stepfather who had married his widowed mother decades ago, was keen to “regularize” the marriage, to spare his wife embarrassment at her son’s ordination.

What pained me the most however, was to discover at the funeral of my “Muslim” neighbour of many years, that she was in fact a lapsed Catholic. Laid out in the boarding school of her youth, with the nuns all around praying, and her Muslim family part of the circle of love, she seemed finally at rest. It was a poignant goodbye made possible by the sensitivity of her husband and children, and the nuns. I do not know if her birth family was present. I do not know if she was finally buried as a Muslim or Catholic. What I do know is that my heart burned within me as I recalled her jokingly saying that she was “half-Catholic” because she was brought up in a Catholic boarding school. She probably thought I would censure her if I knew the truth, because she perceived me as a “good” Catholic, active in parish life. Little did she know that although my children went regularly to Church and Sunday school, they were not baptized. I can empathize with her reluctance to share her truth because I often found myself in a similar predicament. Our secrets may have been different, but our fear of the censure of the community was the same.

Sadly, given our patriarchal society, it is usually women who bear the brunt of this alienation, since they are expected to adopt the religion of their husband. Men either continue to follow their own religion or are comfortable not following any religion. Further, it is women who struggle more with the exclusion. For women, going to church and participating in community life matter, as religion is often central to their identity, and religious spaces are among the few socially sanctioned public spaces that they have access to. For men, who function through multiple identities and whose community

building occurs in other public spaces like a bar or a club, acceptance by the faith community matters less.

Consequently, it is mostly women (like the ones I have mentioned) who are seen to be “living in sin” by an unforgiving community, something they share in common with the divorced and remarried. For most Catholics, the Church is a club, and to belong one must follow the rules. Consequently, these women are judged, found wanting and ostracized. Bishops consider them a problem, anomalies that are better prevented.² None of these baptized have the courage to protest their exclusion and challenge the unrealistic expectation on which it is based, namely, a promise to baptize their children. Ironically, parish priests apply pressure to enforce this “rule” which is no longer required by Canon Law (CIC, Canon 1125, 1), while they conveniently ignore one that is, namely the right of baptised Catholics to receive “spiritual help to fulfil their obligations” and “foster the unity of conjugal and family life” (CIC, Canon 1128). Unfortunately, the baptized themselves feel so criticised, guilty and unwelcome, that they frequently cut themselves off from the community and do not dare to claim this right. Alternatively, they are afraid that the demands of the Church may create barriers in their inter-religious living and jeopardize their marriage, and so they stay away.

Who will speak for these Catholics? The Indian bishops in the course of reflecting on *Amoris Laetitia*, have recognized inter-religious families as those requiring special care, and have pledged “to support and accompany these families in whatever way possible.”³ Yet in November this year, the presence of a retired bishop, at a wedding in Ernakulum, of a Catholic woman known to him, and a Muslim man, created an uproar and provoked an investigation into the occurrence, by Cardinal Mar George Alencherry and the Kerala Catholic Bishops’ Council.⁴ This, despite the fact that the wedding had been solemnised in accordance with the requirements of the Code of Canon Law. After the controversy

²Astrid Lobo Gajiwala, “Inter-Religious Marriage in Asia,” Part I, *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 81, 2 (February 2017) 132-149 & Part II, 81, 3 (March 2017) 204-218.

³“Promoting the Joy of Love In Our Families,” Message of the 29th CCBI Plenary Assembly to the Church in India, 31st January to 8th February 2017. <https://ccbi.in/29-plenary-assembly-of-ccbi-promoting-joy-of-love-in-families/>

⁴“After Controversy, Kerala Church to Issue Rules on Protocols for Interfaith Marriages,” by the Wire staff, 23 November 2020, <https://thewire.in/rights/kerala-church-interfaith-marriage>

the bishop expressed regret for attending the “mixed marriage.” Subsequently some priests from the Kerala Church have demanded that the bishops issue “strict guidelines” to priests on conducting ‘disparity of cult’ marriages.

Given this context, reaching out to those who do not get married in Church seems a herculean task, as the estrangement stems from the inability to meet the demands of Canon Law (CIC, Canon 1125, 1126), and the fear of censure of the family’s chosen path. Is it possible to include in the fold, Catholics with invalid marriages who yearn for the sacraments but are unwilling or unable, to “regularize” their marriages for fear of endangering their marital relationship? Can religious authorities allow Catholics in inter-religious marriages to live by their own “rules”? Can the institution permit such “scandals” in the faith community?

Evangelii Gaudium points to a possible way. It calls the whole Church to be “out on the streets” (EV 49); to forget about “obsessions and procedures,” and harsh rules, and to go forth to “those who are usually despised and overlooked” (EV 48). It further points out that “if something should rightly disturb us and trouble our consciences, it is the fact that so many of our brothers and sisters are living without the strength, light and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ, without a community of faith to support them” (EV 49). Catholics in interfaith marriages who could not get married in Church but who would still like to receive the sacraments could well be included among these. How can we deny them the bread of life, when Jesus himself does not tire of saying to us: “Give them something to eat” (Mk 6:37) (EV 49)?

Baptism of the Offspring

For the Church however, more important than the spiritual nourishment of the Catholic partner is the religious upbringing of children in inter-religious families. Thus, while *Amoris Laetitia* recognises interfaith marriages as a “privileged place for interreligious dialogue in everyday life,” and admits to the urgency for a “differentiated pastoral care according to various social and cultural contexts,” the ultimate goal of this care seems to be the Christian faith of the offspring (AL 248). This, despite the assertion that respect for the religious freedom of all is a necessity (AL 248). It would appear that this dictum applies only when the Christian spouse is being made to convert to another religion, and not to the Church’s pressure to baptise the children. There is little sensitivity to the rights of the spouse of another

religion with regard to the upbringing of children who “are a living reflection of love, a permanent sign of conjugal unity, and a living and inseparable synthesis of their being a father and mother” (AL 165).

This approach causes the greatest grief to Catholics in inter-religious marriages. It threatens the very marriage, and because of the resentment it causes in the spouse it even jeopardizes the practice of the Catholic partner’s faith. At times it alienates generations. It can even irrevocably split the family.

Prior to the 1983 Code of Canon Law, inability to make such a promise to baptize one’s children resulted in painful ostracism from the Church and often, the Catholic extended family. It also meant denial of the sacraments. In 2014, in preparation for the Synod on the family I called together a group of eight women in interfaith families to share stories of their joys, triumphs, pain and challenges of their journeys into communion across religious divides.⁵ Two of the women in this group were victims of the earlier Code. One was married to a Hindu, a military officer who refused to make a promise he could not keep because he was a man of honour. She spoke of how traumatic the exclusion from the community was for her, and of the “deep scars” it left on her and her children. The other woman, a religious sister, spoke of her experience as a child of a devout Muslim father, also a man of honour, who made the promise and kept it. She and her four siblings were baptised, and ultimately returned to the bosom of her mother’s initially estranged Catholic family. Her father however, died without ever being reconciled with his Muslim family who had disowned him. As a result, she does not know her father’s side of the family. To quote her, “The Church’s insistence on a promise to baptise children is a sword dividing the family.” There were tears in our eyes as we listened to their pain that was so fresh even after so many decades.

⁵The women included a woman religious who was an offspring of a Catholic-Muslim union, one woman married to a Muslim, another to a Parsee, and five to Hindus, including myself. All the married women were in stable, committed marriages ranging from 20 to 46 years. I also invited two Jesuits, one a theologian, to join us. While the women shared their spiritual insights and their struggles with the institutional Church over two decades and more, the Jesuits provided theological inputs that led to concrete recommendations, which were submitted for the synod of bishops’ consideration. See Astrid Lobo Gajiwala & Errol D’Lima, “Report of Meeting of Women in Interfaith Families,” *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 78, 12 (December 2014): 20-39.

In my own case my unbaptised children were a constant source of gossip, and are still used as a yardstick to judge my commitment to Christ and the Church. At one point, thanks to a directive issued by my then Archbishop, I was marginalized in the Church.⁶ I was forbidden from teaching in the seminary, excluded from the synod for the laity despite being nominated by more than one Commission, prohibited from writing in the Archdiocesan newsweekly and subtly excluded from parish activities. My service on church bodies was also questioned. It reached a point that I seriously considered leaving the Church. Fortunately, there were still many priests, bishops and religious whom I could count as friends, and thanks to their good counsel, I stayed. Today, two of my children are baptized and I am covertly reinstated in the “flock,” but I have paid a heavy price. The openness to the revelation of the Divine in different religious traditions that we enjoyed in the family is lost, because my husband resents the “victory” of the Church even though it has zero control over our children. Two of our three children now bear the “Catholic” label which he opposed strongly before we got married.⁷

The 1983 Code now requires a Catholic entering into an inter-faith marriage only “to make a sincere promise *to do all in his or her power* so that all offsprings are baptized and brought up in the Catholic Church” (CIC, Canon 1125, 1). However, women are sometimes deliberately misguided by some parish priests, and made to believe that baptism of the children is a mandatory requirement of the Church. When I got married in 1988, five years after the Code was revised, I was told that I had to baptise my children to get married in Church as this was the policy laid down by the bishops of India in the hope that it would dissuade Catholics from entering into interfaith marriages. Of course, I refused to make this promise and cited the revised law, but fifteen years later in 2003, when my niece married a Hindu, nothing had changed.

Looking back, I still feel anger at the way we were manipulated without any respect for our autonomy, our rights as parents, our unity as a couple, or our marriage. But in the end life forced its own choices. Among the eight women in my group, only the woman I mentioned earlier came from an interfaith family where all the children were

⁶Astrid Lobo Gajiwala, “Keeping the Law,” *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 63, 12 (December 1999) 900-906.

⁷Gajiwala, “Inter-Religious Marriage in Asia,” Part 1& Part II.

baptised to the total exclusion of the “other” faith member. The result as I have mentioned, was an estranged extended family and a hurting marital relationship, but a deep Catholic faith.

All the other inter-religious families represented had variations of “double belonging.” The way the couple handled the coexistence of two religions in the family had much to do with the choices the children made. Some children abandoned religion altogether, possibly torn between two dissenting parents and two religions. When the parents themselves reconciled their differences and learnt to live in harmony and develop an inclusive spirituality, their children were more likely to own their “double belonging” comfortably with openness to both traditions.

Thus, even when the children were not baptised, more than one woman talked of teaching their children Christian prayers, and taking them for Sunday Mass and feast celebrations. One woman shared that her daughters got baptised as adults even though they were married to Hindus.⁸ My own children though not baptised attended catechism class in school and Sunday school in the parish. I remember once when I was away on a weekend my husband sent the children for Sunday Mass, and the understanding was that they would stay on for Sunday school. The children decided to play truant. On their way back however, they met our close friend, a Hindu father taking his Catholic daughter to Sunday school because *his* wife was away. He caught on to my three and bundled them off for Sunday school. Two Hindu husbands ensuring that their children fulfil their Christian obligations in the absence of their Catholic wives. Later when he recounted the story I laughed and observed, “the power of inter-religious dialogue.” The men laughed harder and retorted, “the power of wives!” It was a joke at the wives’ expense of course, but hidden in it was a truth that the policymakers in the church need to heed: the key to evangelisation is loving relationship. If we want the inter-faith family to be a medium for evangelisation, we have to learn like St Paul to put on love above all else (1 Cor 13:1–3).

Sadly, in today’s India where religion has become a divisive factor like never before, the personal has become political. One woman and her spouse were of the view that, given the climate of growing intolerant religious politics, it may be safer to be registered as “Hindus”

⁸Gajiwala, “Inter-Religious Marriage in Asia,” Part I & Part II.

in the Census, even if the children are baptised. Another said that her husband would prefer all Indians to be called 'Hindus from Hindustan.' On the flip side, some couples opt to baptise their children merely to get the Christian label, which will enable them to get admission into coveted Christian institutions of education.

A Choice for Unity

For the women in the group whose children were not baptised what was clear was that their decision not to baptise their children was not indicative of indifference towards the Christian faith or the Church, or rejection of them. They did not *chose* not to baptise their children; they chose to love and respect their spouse, and this would not have been possible if they had excluded him from the religious upbringing of his children or alienated his children from him by giving them a different religious identity. Thus their decision was not *against* baptism but *for* the unity of their marriage and family.

Reflecting Christ

While *Amoris Laetitia* has little to say about inter-religious families, the *Lineamenta* for the 2015 Ordinary General Assembly while acknowledging that there are "inherent difficulties in terms of jurisprudence, such as baptism and the upbringing of children; the mutual respect with regards to difference in faith"; and the "danger of relativism or indifference," also recognises "the possibility of fostering the spirit of ecumenism and interreligious dialogue in a living together of diverse communities in the same place" (6).

This is one point on which all the women in the group mentioned above were unanimous, that they were "chosen to be in interfaith marriages... (which gave them) unique opportunities to spread the love of Christ... (so that by their) example people accept Christ." They were ever conscious of being the face of Christ in their interfaith families. This is particularly true with regard to the in-laws on both sides who, unlike the spouses who had made a decision to love despite religious differences, were forced to accept the "other" due to circumstances. The women spoke of how family gatherings and celebrations of festivals not only helped to break down prejudices but also fostered human bonding with its inherent respect for each other's religion, culture and customs. They shared too about moments of vulnerability—illnesses and death—

when caring relationships transcended religious divides. One woman's mother, for instance called her Hindu son-in-law her son, and on her deathbed gifted him her rosary, which he still treasures. My own mother who refused my husband entry in her house in the first year of our marriage, was tenderly looked after by him in her last, bedridden weeks. He is a surgeon, and she wanted only him.

Dialogue

Interestingly, some of the women in the group felt that their own faith had been enhanced by their inter-faith marriage either because they were compelled to learn more to be able to answer their families' questions or because they were exposed to a reading of Christ that came from outside the Christian framework, or because they were challenged by the "Christian" living of their unbaptised family members.

This is one of the fruits of the intimate dialogue of life that characterizes inter-religious marriages. However, for true dialogue to occur there must be respect for the other and openness to the other's Truth without any attitude of superiority. Meaningful dialogue can only occur between equals. Thus, influenced by the witness value provided by the Christian partner the Hindu/Muslim/other faith family members frequently join in the celebration of Christian festivals and in common prayer. This experience offers them occasions to know at first hand the Christian way of life and to be positively disposed towards Christ / Church.

Such openness, however, is only possible if it is matched with a similar openness on the part of the Christian partner towards her partner's religious tradition. This calls for a working knowledge of his faith and practices so that one can honestly show reverence for his religious practices. In this process of learning, a person comes to appreciate the religious faith of others rather than demonize them, and also searches for common ground. Approaches that are theocentric for instance, can make for more inclusiveness than those that are narrowly Christocentric. However, while for Hindus, accepting Christ as an *avatar* of the Divine is never a problem, for Catholics brought up to honour the 10 Commandments (Ex 20:3, 4) and to shun "syncretism," reconciling with the different images of God in Hinduism can be a challenge.

Wedding Liturgy

The rules concerning the celebration of the marriage were another area of discussion in the group. The general view was that both partners had a right to celebrate the marriage according to their individual rites and since such celebrations are also a fundamental part of bringing together two families they should not, be done away with easily. While the teaching magisterium sees only the religious aspect of these celebrations and has become increasingly inclined to “other” these celebrations, if we are to truly embrace the gospel imperative to love, there is need to recognise these celebrations as an essential part of building community. Laws and regulations must therefore be framed considering the interfaith couple as a unit, one that God has brought together. The interests of the Catholic partner or the institutional Church cannot be seen in isolation. Further, in today’s climate of divisive and antagonistic politics such an inclusive approach is much needed.

The Way Forward

Reflection on Current theology and Pastoral Practice

What is urgently required is some soul searching with regard to inter-religious marriages, and a good starting point is the questionnaire that was circulated as part of the preparatory document for the 2014 Synod of bishops.⁹ Most of the questions pertaining to divorced and remarried Catholics could well be applied to Catholics in invalid, interfaith marriages (Nos 4 & 6). For example: What questions do these Catholics pose to the Church concerning the Sacraments of the Eucharist and of Reconciliation? Do they feel marginalized or suffer from the impossibility of receiving the sacraments? Does a ministry exist to attend to these cases? How is God’s mercy proclaimed to them and how does the Church put into practice her support for them in their journey of faith? What is the sacramental practice in these cases: preparation, administration of the sacrament and the accompaniment? How do the particular Churches attempt to meet the needs of the parents of these

⁹“Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelization,” Preparatory Document, Extraordinary General Assembly (Vatican City, 2013), http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20131105_iii-assemblea-sinodo-vescovi_en.html.

children to provide them with a Christian education? Could a change of canonical law regarding marriage to a person of another faith provide a positive contribution to solving the problems of the persons involved?

Recognition of Inter-faith Marriages as a Sign of the Times

Honest answers can only be found if there is a paradigm shift in the way inter-religious marriages are perceived by the Church. They must first be recognised as a sign of the times. Whether we like it or not, these marriages are on the increase. In Asian countries it is because Catholics are a small minority and the pool for desirable spouses within the community is limited. In Europe and USA the mobility of people coming in search of jobs and education creates socially and religiously mixed environments that facilitate inter-religious unions. The European Union has brought its own breaking of walls which is compounded by the refugee crisis, and these have resulted in changing demographics. Added to this reality is the new place that cyberspace has found among youth. Parents and religious authorities no longer have the same influence and control that they had in the past, and young people are making their own choices across religious boundaries, using social media and dating apps. It is time therefore for the church to wake up and stop dismissing these marriages as accidents or aberrations that need to be prevented. Instead, recognise them as the sign of the times that they are, and search for their place in God's plan of salvation.¹⁰

Respect for the Rights and Dignity of Inter-faith Families

The next step is to acknowledge our responsibility to these alienated Catholics to provide "spiritual help to fulfill their obligations" and "foster the unity of conjugal and family life" (Canon 1128). They have rights, and Church authorities have duties towards them. We cannot withhold pastoral care and the sacraments from them because they cannot follow a Church rule to baptise their children. They are baptised individuals and as long as they express the desire to belong to the church they must be welcomed without conditions. There was a time when Catholics had to send their children to catholic schools so that they could get an education in the faith. Today, this no longer applies. If baptised couples can be trusted to do what is best for their children, why is the same trust not

¹⁰Gajiwala, "Inter-Religious Marriage in Asia," Part I & Part II.

extended to Catholics who are married to partners of other faiths? It is time we respected their decision-making power with regard to the baptism of their offspring, accepted that frequently their inability to baptise children is not a choice *against* the Christian faith but a choice *for* a “vocation of love” (XIV Ordinary General Assembly, *Lineamenta*, no. 19) and moved the emphasis from baptism by water to baptism by desire.

Support for Catholic Partners in Inter-faith Marriages

At a broader level we have to stop viewing Catholics in interfaith marriages as “lost sheep” and look instead on their decision to live out an inter-religious marriage as a call to a special vocation that goes beyond the baptised to the “community of all peoples” (*Nostra Aetate*, 1), to find unity in the “hidden power which hovers over the course of things and over the events of human history” (*Nostra Aetate*, 2). We have to affirm these Catholic partners as facilitators of grace who make Christ present outside the walls of the Church. We have to keep the doors of the Church open to them so that they in turn can be a door for their non-baptized loved ones to come there looking for God (EV 47).

In *Amoris Laetitia* Pope Francis stresses the need to provide special pastoral care for those in interfaith marriages and recognizes these unions as a “privileged place for interreligious dialogue in everyday life.” But the Church could go further by applying much of what the Pope’s letter advocates with regard to the divorced and remarried to Catholics in interfaith marriages. Asian churches in particular, where such marriages are on the rise, need to remember that even if these couples are not married in the church, “they are not excommunicated and should not be treated as such.” Pastoral care should allow them “not only to realize that they belong to the church as the body of Christ, but also to know that they can have a joyful and fruitful experience in it.”¹¹

Trust in the Spirit

Finally, we need to humbly let go in the Spirit who blows where She wills. She alone can see the fullness of the Divine Plan (Jn 1:1–4).

¹¹Gajiwala, “What Catholics in Interfaith Marriages Share with the Divorced and Remarried.”

IMPACT OF MEDIA AND SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES ON FAMILIES

Reflections on *Chavarul* and *Amoris Laetitia*

Boby George♦

This paper proposes to discuss the many ways in which various media and social networking sites impact our lives as an individual and as a member of the family as well as society. We shall discuss this with particular reference to two documents, namely, *Amoris Laetitia*¹ (AL) by Pope Francis and *Chavarul*² by St Chavara. Milan Kundera has said, “We can never know what to want, because, living only one life, we can neither compare it with our previous lives nor perfect it in our lives to come.” In fact, the fate of this generation is almost similar to this. Amidst the overarching presence of the media and social networking— something which none of us have experienced so far— we don’t know exactly what we want. We don’t know how it is affecting our days and behaviour. We certainly don’t know where we are heading. In his landmark book titled *Sapiens: A Brief History of*

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¹Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation.

²Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Chavarul: Testament of a Loving Father* (Kochi: Chavara Central Secretariate, 2018). It was written in the form of a testament addressed to the parishioners of Kainakary.

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*Humankind*³ Israeli historian Yuval Noah Harari makes an interesting point. According to him, the most important factor which enabled the Homo sapiens, a relatively smaller ape, to outwit all other species and conquer this world was language. Language helped human beings to cooperate with each other, plan things and conquer together. No other species possessed such a complex language which enabled him to communicate complex information and knowledge and store the same. In other words, the history of humanity is the history of the many ways in which mankind communicated with each other.

The Arrival of the Explosive Media

We are aware of the revolution brought out by the advent of print media. The possibility to store and spread information was an epochal event. Even now we can say that a book remains the most important tool invented by humans. Television which came after books built its impact on the solid foundation laid by print media. It entered every home and decided everyone's opinion, schedules and tastes. It generated new desires and humankind was never the same. Perhaps one of the best books which analyses the impact of television in our lives was the one by Niel Postman, titled *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in an Age of Show Business*.⁴ Television images were more attractive than printed words. If written word compelled people to think coherently and logically before arriving at an opinion, Television did away with that requirement to a great extent. There it was more glamour, more sensation and eyeballs. Entertainment was the buzzword and everything including tragedies were presented as entertainments. Anyone studying the impact of television on families has to encounter the reality of how evenings of every family were hijacked by television and how television became a member in the family. As hardly any effort was required, watching endless television was a mouth-watering

³A popular history book by Yuval Noah Harari which traced the history of humankind from evolution of archaic human species from stone age to 21st century. Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (London: Harvill Secker, 2014).

⁴A 1985 book by Niel Postman which attempted a penetrating analysis on the modern media with major focus on visual media. Neil Postman, *Amusing ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (Penguin Books, 2005 [20th Anniversary Edition]).

proposition for all. The growth of television is also the story of the growth of advertisement industry. For the first time in history, perhaps television determined what people consume and how much. The phenomenal growth of consumerism is also linked to the reach of visual media in every home. Visual media made it possible that everyone could see how the other person lives. It therefore raised the aspiration levels and corporates tapped into this. Media created markets out of human settlements. In other words, entertainment and consumption moved hand in hand. The twin pair of entertainment and consumerism attained almost a cult status.

With the rise of internet, we have entered another era and a decisive phase of media explosion. It was unlike all other media. In 1960 a professor who perhaps thought about media more than anyone else predicted the rise of internet. According to Marshal McLuhan, technology was soon to become an extension of human body and we find its fulfilment in Internet. He said, "I think of technologies as extensions of our own bodies, of our own faculties, whether they be clothing, housing, or familiar kinds of technologies like wheels, stirrups that extend the function of the body." Also, regarding the use of technology, he was more of agnostic. He said, "If you are literate and use it well, it's leverage; if you don't, then it controls you." At this moment the question is, are we literate enough to control the media or are they controlling us? Compared to print media and television, the impact of internet and social media on human lives was much more far-reaching and complex. As we have seen at the beginning, at the peak of technological advancements we are really clueless on how the internet explosion is altering our society. There is almost no area which is immune from the influence of the internet. It is affecting the way we study, interact, do business, spend time and in short, live our lives every minute. But before we begin an analysis of the way internet and social media are influencing our families, we need to understand its nature little more carefully.

Age of Attention

Once upon a time we felt we had plenty of time for everything. We were not much in a hurry to do anything. That was also a time when information was scarce, and we chased it in all possible ways. Any bit of information from any source was considered sacred and we assumed

that it improved our quality of life. It was also a time of less distractions in life. The more information, the more power was the mantra. Information helped people to make wiser decision and in all probability the control on the use and spread of information was on people. In other words, we still retained the reigns, and we were not under siege at any time. Spread of information also followed certain norms and editorial control. It was not very easy for anyone to publish anything he wanted. It passed through multiple filters and that ensured a certain level of sanity. Why we discuss these things is to show the different world we inhabit now. The advent of internet has altered the way we deal with our time. It makes sense to call this age as an age of attention. Let us see that a bit more in detail.

Imagine a typical day in our life. Right from checking our emails to Facebook updates and twitter feeds to WhatsApp messages, what we find is that there is a host of applications which are vying for our time. Attention being our most valuable asset, everyone wants to steal that. We get a feeling that we get news, we communicate or we purchase, etc. but what happens in the whole process is that in exchange of certain free services we pawn our attention to the companies which wants to sell a product or an idea. We are constantly bombarded with persuasive advertisements. When we share our preferences, intentions and likings the machine takes these data without our knowledge and it becomes the most powerful medium to advertise and sell products. In other words what the companies capture is our attention. In the words of Tim Wu, who wrote a marvellous book on this phenomenon, "it is capturing people's attention in exchange of a little fun and then resell to the firms that sponsor this amusement."⁵ Unlike in the past when information was in scarce quantity, today what we have in plenty is information and what is in limited supply is our attention.

Individual in the Age of Internet

More than 2300 years back Greek philosopher Aristotle told, "Man is Social Animal and he who lives without society is either a beast or God." It was the power of interaction and thereby society which gave humans their immense power to rule over everything else. The ideas of family or religion or nation states were built on the foundation of social

⁵Tim Wu, *The Attention Merchants* (London: Atlantic Books , 2016), 341.

behaviour of the human. Often what attracted the human to these things was that she/he desired a company. "It is not good that man should be alone. I will make him a helper comparable to him" (Gen 2:18). This thirst for company kept families alive for thousands of years. In *Amoris Laetitia* (AL) where Pope Francis takes us once again to the joy of families, we realise that perhaps new technologies have paved the way for a new individual who is content and complete with himself. Our challenge is to reconcile this individual to the family, which, according to the *Chavarul* of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara, "is a place where love, order, and peace reign" and the only sweet consolation for a person experiencing trials and tribulations in the sorrowful valley of this world (*Chavarul*, Introduction). Any discussion on the impact of media and social networking sites on families has to begin with the birth of the empowered individual. If print and television were passive media, internet and its offshoot social networking sites offered a new interactive platform for everyone. Here also we have two trends visible. One is the possibility to connect with more and more bypassing the limitations of space and time. Second is the possibility to create one's own world and live there without anyone's company. In the first instance we see a new flourishing of friendship everywhere. People are increasingly getting connected to each other. In many cases, social media help people to establish contact with their old friends. Social media groups facilitate close interaction thereafter.

Social media opened numerous avenues for every individual to indulge oneself. One can create a world for oneself and live in it. This has also led to what is called extreme narcissistic tendencies among human beings. In what ways the social media encouraged Narcissistic tendencies? Stephen Marche comments in his essay in *The Atlantic* that "In fact, it could be argued that Facebook specifically gratifies the narcissistic individual's need to engage in self-promoting and superficial behaviour."⁶ The key word of social networking is 'like' and one of the major measures of one's self-respect becomes the number of 'likes' one receives. Social networking sites allow someone to indulge in them without making any real interactions. This is actually adding to the loneliness which people face. Observe a drastic decline in the use of a phone to make a call. Instead of making a call, people prefer to text.

⁶Stephen Marche, "Is Face book Making Us Lonely?," <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/05/is-facebook-making-us-lonely/308930/>, May 2012.

This has a flipside. When we text, we avoid a direct interaction with another individual and we do it at our own time and pace. You need not listen to anyone's problems or needs. I remember a few friends who were shocked once I called them instead of typing a happy birthday. On the other hand, when we talk about the connections we make, we see a definite pattern. That is the disappearance of the neighbour for us. Wherever we are, the person next to us is not very important and we are in constant communication with someone faraway. Look at a bus or a train. People hardly talk to the one sitting next them but will be continuously texting a remote friend. In other words, across the world a trend is definitely visible. More and more young people spend a lot of time online preferably with their phones and many are more likely to be lonely, unhappy and addicted very dangerously. Most youngsters find less charm in going out with friends.

Family as Foundation of Society

The pivotal role of families in ensuring social stability is an undisputed fact. Look at what Second Vatican Council says: "The family is a kind of school of deeper humanity" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 52). As one preacher put it some time back, one can be born without leg or hand or eyes. But none is born without a family. There are people who consider Bible as a collection of the stories of families. Accordingly, the wellbeing and welfare of the family was always a prime concern for the church. How many homilies have fondly reminded us that the first miracle of Jesus was performed at a wedding, the event which inaugurates a family on earth! We have other instances too when Jesus underlined the sacredness of marriage and thereby the family life. Everyone understands the important role played by families in ensuring the healthy bringing up of children and caring the aged. This is precisely the reason why nations as well as religions accord the highest importance to the healthy existence of families in society. Various church documents have underlined the supreme significance of family in the church. In the introduction to *Chavarul*, St Chavara wrote in 1868 that a "good Christian family is the image of heaven" (*Chavarul*, Introduction). What St Chavara gave in his *Chavarul* were simple tips to each and every member of families to convert their houses into homes which are guided by love and bonded by mutual respect. We can very well observe that families bonded in love create the perfect ambience for

blossoming of healthy and mature citizens. It is the first place where any child receives its preliminary education in becoming a responsible human being. However, such an education does not occur in families which have ceased to operate on the basis of love. As the title says, the emphasis of the apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* is on the love in the family. The question today is which factors prevent our families from realising the full potential of love and thereby peace and order. How isolation and selfishness vitiate the family ambience and in what way media or social media contribute to this collapse? Another area of interesting study will be how an entire generation might have already started thinking on the possibility of living outside families, or in other words, shedding the very idea of starting a family of their own. In the new age, family, society and other institutions lose their grip over the individual. The individual thinks that everything is subservient to him/her and it is his/her interests which are above other institutions. But what we have in mind is not a master–slave relationship between the individual and family but on the other hand it is the family which helps the individual to flourish and realise his/her full potential and help him/her find meaning to his life. “Since the human person has an inherent social dimension and ‘the first and basic expression of that social dimension of the person is the married couple and the family’” (AL 316).

When Social Media Enter Families

The impact of media and social media networks on families need to be looked at many levels. First and foremost, how it affects the love and bonding in families? Secondly, how individuals compromise their commitment to families on account of their excessive social media use? Family bonds can grow only by effort and mutual love. Anais Nin will say, “Love never dies a natural death. It dies because we don’t know how to replenish its source. It dies of blindness and errors and betrayals. It dies of illness and wounds; it dies of weariness, of witherings, of tarnishings.” The Pope says, “On the other hand, ‘equal consideration needs to be given to the growing danger represented by an extreme individualism which weakens family bonds and ends up considering each member of the family as an isolated unit...’” (AL 33). The point here is that in families we need to listen to each other. It is not only necessary that we provide everything, but we have to also spend time

for others. Spouses need to listen to each other. Most of the time, what aged parents need is someone with whom they can share their agonies, and they need children the most as they age. Pope continues: "Often the other spouse does not need a solution to his or her problems, but simply to be heard, to feel that someone has acknowledged their pain, their disappointment, their fear, their anger, their hopes and their dreams. How often we hear complaints like: "He does not listen to me" (AL 137). Here social media enters in a peculiar way. In case of many couples, social media contacts give an alternative to bonding in families. Spouses often are tempted to compensate the loss of real contacts with their spouses with multiple relationships they come across in social media. For many people these relationships offer more comfort and confidence as it does not cost much for both except an emotional investment.

Here how we spend our time is crucial. When people spend more and more of their time online, what becomes a casualty is their availability for family and society. When the duration of each day remains the same, when we spend a disproportionate amount of time online, we are definitely sacrificing something and that is usually the time for intimacy with family. The family prayer and family meal may be the immediate casualty. We interact less physically, and we sleep less amidst the battle for attention. Imagine a typical day in the family of a working couple. Often the couple come back home tired and in the midst of constant distraction from their phones and television what is compromised is their quality time with children. Having a common meal at least once a day is also a rarity in many homes. *Chavarul* discusses the importance of a daily routine in families. A certain amount of discipline in family is a must so that children grow up in a healthy ambience. St Chavara even outlines the importance to have a clear time for food, prayer and holy mass for every family. As we routinely find the disruption of family prayer, St Chavara exhorts us that family prayer should not be disturbed even if some important guests or visitors turn up (*Chavarul*, no. 30). For him, it is the call of the God which is a priority."

When we focus on the time for togetherness or attention to each other the ultimate point is that the communication among family members should remain smooth and healthy, because the collapse of communication is the beginning of collapse of any relationship. Bonds in a family is something which gets reinforced through constant interaction and dialogue. As the Pope says, it is not a relationship which

creates winners or losers but two winners (AL 220). Family is the place where each member learns closeness and sharing which in turn enable one to live in the society. Each family member has to accept and acknowledge each other. Social network needs to become something which fosters increased communication among family members too rather than becoming an alternative to it. However, there are occasions when, social networking opens the possibility for numerous friendships to enter bedrooms at the cost of intimacy between the couple.

Children and the New Media

Bringing up children in an age of extreme social media is a challenge. Children remain highly vulnerable to the many challenges posed by the social media. As *Chavarul* reminds us, "Children are sacred treasure entrusted to us by God almighty" (*Chavarul*, Part 2, no. 1). The addiction of children to smartphone is a hard reality which the society is waking up to. There are numerous benefits which internet has brought for the benefit of children. As we have already seen, internet has opened infinite possibilities in learning for children. In the case of social media too, the temptation for children is really high. The point is how to strike a balance and how we can ensure that internet or social media do not wreak havoc in their lives. Schools often complain of the lack of attention displayed by children with their over-exposure to the electronic devices. Many countries are devising ways to ban their usage in school hours and taking concrete steps to wean them away from addiction to gadgets. As Pope reminds us, parents need to know "who is providing entrainment to children and who are entering their bedrooms through television and other electronic devices? With whom they are spending their free time?" (AL 260). It will be pertinent to remember here what St Chavara remind parents. During his time if he advised them to procure for their children the treasure of books packed with wisdom and philosophical knowledge that enhance piety (*Chavarul* Part 1, No. 21), in this age of Internet, parents have the enormous responsibility of helping their children to choose the best from the world of Web to escape its myriad traps.

Social media is a very convenient platform where children gather friends. However, one question we need to ask is, how many such friendships are real ones? Do our children cultivate enduring friendships these days? There are situations when the social media users

claim thousands of friends across Facebook but when a situation demands, hardly anyone will be available. This can frustrate people. It will be pertinent to reflect on what St Chavara told about cultivating friends: "You don't require many friends but choose one carefully from among a thousand" (*Chavarul*, no. 16). Caution of this sort is what is lacking in the age of social media. It is not uncommon that often children become victims of abuse in social media on account of the many flimsy friendships they develop there, and this is now a major area of concern for parents and teachers.

Challenges before Society

In the preceding paragraphs we have seen how media and social networking sites engage with our families and individuals. If we extend it further, we can see how it is affecting the society at large. Society and nation states are waging their own battles and negotiating their own deals as far as new media is concerned. Perhaps the two most important words which come to our mind immediately is post-truth and fake news. I feel that we don't need to explain these much discussed words here. The difference between lie and truth is getting more blurred. As Aldous Huxley predicted in *Brave New World*, what is happening is that truth is getting drowned in a sea of irrelevance. We are slowly entering a phase where a few individuals can cleverly manipulate things including mandates in democracies.

No discussion of impact of media is complete without a mention about the consumerist society we have become. Media fuel consumption and promotes a use and throw culture. Shelf life of everything is limited. Even relationships are not spared. Pope says,

We treat affective relationships the way we treat material objects and the environment: everything is disposable; everyone uses and throws away, takes and breaks, exploits and squeezes to the last drop. Then, goodbye. Narcissism makes people incapable of looking beyond themselves, beyond their own desires and needs (AL 39).

Our desires and wants are not entirely in our control. In fact, it won't be an exaggeration to tell that the consumer culture is perhaps emerging as the new religion. Though it was imagined that technology may create free time for us, what is happening is just the opposite. We are ever more finding a shortage of time as new desires fill our free time.

The commodification of body is also an item we may have to deeply worry about. Look at the easy and widespread availability of pornography in internet. There is practically no censorship anywhere. None to edit and none to control. Anyone can express and anything can be broadcast by anyone. It will be pertinent to remember what Thomas Jefferson told us long back that—“eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.” The question we need to ask is how vigilant we are.

Promises and Precautions

When we discuss the impact of media and social networking sites, our basic thrust was the areas we need to be vigilant about. However, the discussion also calls for a peek into the beautiful things brought by the new media and social networking. Though most of these things are known to all, let me reiterate a few of them here once again for deriving a complete picture. American writer Annie Dillard wrote, “anything you do not give freely and abundantly becomes lost to you. You open your safe and find ashes.”⁷ I always feel that the biggest positive impact of social media is this immense possibility for sharing. There is no incentive for hoarding. The world has become more connected and everyone has the chance to know how the other lives. When rightly used, social media connects all cutting across space and time. We also find a great convergence of media. Not to forget the revolutionary ways in which entertainment, education, people to people contact are getting redefined. We can perhaps say we have arrived at the Global Village which was dreamt by Marshal McLuhan. Our boundaries are less significant, and the media is empowering every individual with more and more tools. In an ideal scenario, internet offers the most democratic platform and democracies can’t ask for more.

The pace of changes in media and social networking can be mind boggling for the common man. The basic truth is that technology and huge possibilities of media are here to stay. The challenge before mankind is to stay balanced. The basic question as far as technology is concerned is this: Is technology in control of the human or the human in control of technology? How far we are chasing the real as against the illusory things? As the saying goes, we all build castles in the air. But the problem comes when we want to live there. If media is ready to

⁷Annie Dillard, *The Abundance: Narrative Essays Old and New* (New York: Harper Collins, 2016), 115.

distract us, are we ready for getting distracted? As Alice Gregory says in one of her essays, “Do we understand the distinction between Reading and Seeing? Are we being demoted from the category of thinking, caring human to a sort of rat that doesn’t know why he needs to tap that button, just that he does?” The approach towards media and social networking calls for a new discipline towards the way we spent our time. Life cannot be what happens in between chats. It calls for a new understanding in media literacy and social media discipline.

FORMATION OF CONSCIENCE AND DISCERNMENT

Emmanuel Agius♦

Formation of moral conscience and discernment in Christian moral life are central to Pope Francis' Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (AL). This article follows the line of thought underpinning the holistic pastoral approach that Pope Francis charts in his first reference to conscience and discernment in chapter two of AL. To those who are engaged in the pastoral ministry of couples and families, Pope Francis insists:

We have long thought that simply by stressing doctrinal, bioethical and moral issues, without encouraging openness to grace, we were providing sufficient support to families, strengthening the marriage bond and giving meaning to marital life. We find it difficult to present marriage more as a dynamic path to personal development and fulfilment than as a lifelong burden. We also find it hard to make room for the consciences of the faithful, who very often respond as best they can to the Gospel amid their limitations, and are capable of carrying out their own

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discernment in complex situations. We have been called to form consciences, not to replace them (AL 37).

With this exhortation and the abundance of other references to the notion of conscience and discernment in AL, Pope Francis gives a more robust recognition of the moral conscience of laypeople. At the same time, he insists that the pastors' maturity of conscience is a necessary condition to confront the existential predicament of couples and to accompany them in their moral journey.¹ Pope Francis' appeal to the rehabilitation of the notion of moral conscience conveys a double message. First, he points out unequivocally that those engaged in pastoral ministry have the role of forming the moral conscience of the faithful, not to replace it. The role of the pastor is not to disempower but empower the moral conscience of the faithful and to foster personal discernment so that the discerners can perceive what "for now" can be the most generous response to God's call (AL 303). Secondly, he reaffirms the long-standing tradition on the primacy of conscience, which has a central place and space in one's moral life.

One's conscience cannot be adequately formed unless due importance is given to both sides of the same coin. Pastoral ministers cannot form the conscience of their faithful by simply referring to the Church's doctrine in every detail. Pope Francis raises some important cautions about this type of pastoral approach. Conscience-based moral decisions and discernment need to be contextualised in concrete existential experiences encountered by the couples in their continuous efforts to respond generously to God's call to love and to serve others. The faithful's response to God commences in the depth of their conscience, which is the fundamental capacity for discerning and taking decisions, amid limitations, in the light of the moral truth.

Chavarul and AL

Chavarul (Testament of a Loving Father), bequeathed by Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara as a moral, spiritual and educational legacy for families, though written 150 years ago, contains many theological and pastoral insights on the formation of conscience and discernment at

¹Roberto Dell'Oro, "Discerning the Complexities of Moral Life," in *Pope Francis on the Joy of Love. Theological and Pastoral Reflections on Amoris Laetitia*, ed. Thomas P. Rausch and Roberto Dell'Oro, (Paulist Press, 2018), 81.

various stages of life that reflect AL's perspective. If we translate the holistic and practical insights of St Chavara into contemporary idioms and make them respond to the challenge faced by modern day families, we note that his appeal to Christian families to become "an image of heaven" resonates Pope Francis' call to contemporary families "to keep striving towards something greater than ourselves and our families" (AL 325). With his visionary outlook about the ideal family where love, fidelity, order, commitment, moral virtues and peace reign, St Chavara was anxious not to let 'the joys of the family life' be lost through the negligence of moral values and virtues by the members of the family and by irresponsible parenting. Similarly, Pope Francis' conviction that the family is an opportunity rather than a problem (AL 7) encourages pastors to accompany couples and families to continue to experience 'the joy of love.'

Both St Chavara in his Testament on the integral wellbeing of children in the family and Pope Francis in chapter seven of AL on the education of children retain that children are precious gifts from God and nurturing them properly is the greatest challenge to a family. For this reason, both include in their insightful and down-to-earth documents a set of practical, spiritual and pastoral directions to families for conscience formation and discernment of both parents and children. Since children have to be brought up on a sound moral foundation, St Chavara guided the conscience of parents to foster, through ongoing discernment, good practices on the protection of their children and on their monitoring during work and play. Moreover, parents are encouraged to respect the autonomy and integrity of children's conscience in choices with regard to their vocation.

Rehabilitating the Theology of Grace in Family Ministry

AL makes the first remark on moral conscience in the second chapter that deals with the current experiences and challenges of the family. Pope Francis is not pleading for a paradigm shift in family ministry in a vacuum. Today's couples and families face complex and messy situations that are singularly different from those of the past. This changing landscape of the family requires a fresh approach in pastoral ministry that is holistically rooted in scripture, tradition and human experience. Pope Francis pleads for a radical change or conversion (*metanoia*) of pastoral outlook and attitudes. The biblical notion of

metanoia involves a change of mind and heart, a sense of regret for past failures and contrition of heart.

AL's renewed notion of conscience formation and discernment needs to be contextualised in Pope Francis' appeal to openness to God's grace. The model of family ministry outlined in AL calls for a radical change or conversion (*metanoia*) in three doctrinal areas related to the theology of grace.

The Divine Pedagogy of Grace in Human Imperfections

Pope Francis observes that the theology of grace has taken a secondary importance in the Church's pastoral ministry with couples and families. Since in the past too much emphasis was placed on the doctrinal, bioethical and moral issues (AL 37) than on God's grace, AL calls pastoral ministers to open their eyes to the divine pedagogy of grace and to deepen their commitment to respect God's grace in marital life, particularly in the process of conscience-based discernment. Pope Francis strongly believes that the family is such a privileged place for God's self-revelation that nothing can stand in the way of God's grace. The presupposition must always be that whenever there is a family striving to live together and to love one another, God's Spirit is already present: "The grace of the sacrament is intended before all else 'to perfect the couple's love'" (AL 89). The work of love involves "an intuition that can enable us to hear without sounds and to see the unseen" (AL 255). The task of those who minister to families, then, is to open their eyes to see God's grace and to help them discern where God is calling them. The conscience of both the pastor and the faithful must remain vigilant and open to the movement of the Spirit.

AL underlines that not only "perfect" families, who meet the Church's marital ideals, reveal the presence and action of God's grace. In contrast to those who prefer a rigorous pastoral approach, Pope Francis sincerely believes, quoting EG 4, "that Jesus wants a Church attentive to the goodness which the Holy Spirit sows in the midst of human weakness" (AL 308) and that "each person's situation before God and their life in grace are mysteries which no one can fully know from without" (EG 172). The couples' imperfect attempts to love and to be compassionate, which permeate ordinary life (AL 57, 113), can also reveal Christ's action since the "Lord's presence dwells in real and concrete families, with their entire daily troubles and struggles, joys and

hopes” (AL 315). When pastoral ministers are prejudiced in thinking that everything is black and white, they “close off the way of grace and of growth, and discourage paths of sanctification which give glory to God. Pope Francis believes that “a small step, in the midst of great human limitations, can be more pleasing to God than a life which appears outwardly in order, but moves through the day without confronting great difficulties” (AL 305).

God’s love and grace are traceable in a “true natural marriage” and in “the forms of marriage found in other religious traditions, even if at times obscurely” (AL 77). Moreover, God’s grace may be present also in those couples involved in second marriages: “... it can no longer simply be said that all those in any ‘irregular’ situation are living in a state of mortal sin and are deprived of sanctifying grace” (AL 301). With discernment and God’s grace, imperfections can turn out to be opportunities (AL 294).

Pope Francis’ claim on discerning God’s grace in human imperfections echoes Thomas Aquinas’ theology of grace as influenced by Peter of Poitiers’ notion “*virtus quod est gratia*.”² In Aristotelian moral philosophy living creatures act out of their forms for their goals, and so natures reveal themselves in actions. When Aquinas articulated the theology of shared divine life in Aristotelian philosophy, grace becomes a principle of various activities and potentialities for action. Grace therefore is an intrinsic, fundamental source of action and not just an extrinsic force.³ According to Aquinas,

It is not suitable that God would provide more for creatures being led to a natural good by divine love than for those creatures to whom that love offers a supernatural good. For natural creatures God provides generously ... forms and powers which are principle of acts so that they are inclined to activity through their own beings. ... Even more for those moved to reach an eternal supernatural good he infuses certain forms or qualities of the supernatural order according to which easily and enthusiastically they are moved by God to attain that good that is eternal. And so the gift of grace is a kind of quality.⁴

²Petrus v. Piotiers, *Sententiarum libri V*, PL 211, 783–1279 as quoted by O. Lottin, *Psychologie et Morale aux XII et XIII Siècles*, Louvain-Gembloux 1949, III/1: 102.

³Thomas F. O’Meara, “Virtues in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas,” *Theological Studies* 58 (1997): 260.

⁴*Summa Theologiae*, 1-2, q. 110, a. 2.

'Quality' in this citation describes grace as a stable source of activity. Grace, the new "nature," brings with it co-infused habits and activities (virtues and gifts) that meet and interact with a personality and its acquired virtues. The language of moral achievements turns automatically in a Christian perspective to the language of grace. What is grace according to Aquinas? Because grace is a divine presence, Aquinas is reserved in his language and uses a number of admittedly limited terms. Grace is a participation in deeper levels of God's life (1, q. 43, a. 3), but also a "supernatural principle moving one interiorly" (2-2, q. 6, a. 1). Grace is a created "quasi-form" of the uncreated,⁵ "a kind of supernatural reality in the human being coming from God" (1-2, q. 110, a. 1), a "kind of quality" (1-2, q. 110, a. 2). This understanding of grace primarily as a form of life distinguishes Aquinas from many theologies of grace from Trent to Vatican II where grace meant transitory actual graces.

In line with the Thomistic theology of grace, Pope Francis exhorts pastoral ministers to discern the "seeds of the Word" even in imperfect situations since God's grace is not absent. "It ... can no longer simply be said that all those in any 'irregular' situation are living in a state of mortal sin and are deprived of sanctifying grace" (AL 301). Since those who are living in irregular marital relationships "are baptized; they are brothers and sisters; the Holy Spirit pours into their hearts gifts and talents for the good of all" (AL 299). All those who sincerely ask for God's grace can "experience ... an 'unmerited, unconditional and gratuitous' mercy. No one can be condemned for ever, because this is not the logic of the Gospel" (AL 297). This theological insight is important in Christian moral life since the gift of grace is more important than moral obligations.

AL in no way diminishes the importance of the doctrinal, bioethical and moral issues. However, the post-synodal apostolic exhortation reminds us that behind these issues there are human persons who many times struggle to resolve their complex problems and who sincerely wish to continue to respond generously the best they possibly could to God's call. AL resonates what the Synod Fathers stated, namely, that "there is a need 'to avoid judgements which do not take into account the complexity of various situations' and 'to be attentive, by necessity, to

⁵*De Veritate*, q. 27, a. 1.

how people experience distress because of their condition' (AL 296).⁶ Pastoral care is more than just assisting married couples to resolving their moral issues. It is rather an accompaniment "with compassion and closeness to the frailty of individuals like the Samaritan woman or the woman caught in adultery" (AL 38) to continue their moral journey the best they could in their complex situations with the assistance of God's grace.

In *Familiaris Consortio* (FC) marriage is defined as a sign of Christ's love for the Church and as "a dynamic process ..., one which advances gradually with the progressive integration of the gifts of God" (FC 9). AL throws more light on the meaning of the "dynamic process" of marriage and the couple's "progressive integration of the gifts of God" through its presentation of marriage not only as a precious sign of God's love for us (AL 121) but also as an imperfect analogy (AL 122) of the union between Christ and the Church. The post-synodal apostolic exhortation differentiates the various complex situations not to confuse the different levels of this precious sign: "Some forms of union radically contradict this ideal, while others realize it in at least a partial and analogous way" (AL 293). It exhorts pastoral ministers not to close their eyes to the reality of those situations in which the fullness of the sacrament of marriage is not yet realised. Yet, in these situations, "respect can be shown for those signs of love which in some way reflect God's own love" (AL 294). Consequently, "there is no need to lay upon two limited persons the tremendous burden of having to reproduce perfectly the union existing between Christ and his Church, for marriage as a sign entails 'a dynamic process..., one which advances gradually with the progressive integration of the gifts of God'" (AL 122). The excessive idealism, especially when the Church failed to inspire trust in God's grace, has not helped to make marriage more desirable and attractive, but quite the contrary.

FC 84 limits itself on how persons living in irregular situations are to be integrated in the life of the church: in their action, they are invited to ask for God's grace on them. On the contrary, AL departs from the grace that operates in their life. The Holy Spirit bestows the gifts and charisms to all. Such affirmation refers also to persons living in irregular situations or 'hardship situations' (AL 291) and to the divorced and remarried (AL 299):

⁶AL 296, *Relatio finalis* (2015) 51.

Illumined by the gaze of Jesus Christ, “she turns with love to those who participate in her life in an incomplete manner, recognizing that the grace of God works also in their lives by giving them the courage to do good, to care for one another in love and to be of service to the community in which they live and work” (AL 291).⁷

Accordingly, couples living in irregular relationships are not automatically excluded from God’s grace. “Because of forms of conditioning and mitigating factors, it is possible that in an objective situation of sin—which may not be subjectively culpable, or fully such—a person can be living in God’s grace, can love and can also grow in the life of grace and charity, while receiving the Church’s help to this end” (AL 305). All these factors inspire a positive and welcoming pastoral approach capable of helping couples to grow in appreciation of the demands of the Gospel (AL 38). Even in these complex and difficult cases, which do not objectively embody the Church’s understanding of marriage, conscience and discernment have an important role (AL 303). Pope Francis exhorts pastoral ministers to do every effort “to encourage the development of an enlightened conscience, formed and guided by the responsible and serious discernment ..., and to encourage an ever greater trust in God’s grace” (AL 303).

The Relationship between Grace and Law

AL sheds light on the relationship between grace and the law. The criticism of the canon lawyers and moral theologians who put rules ahead of people and the power of God’s grace is conspicuous in AL. If the relationship between law and grace is a reality that is manifested in the particular life experiences of individuals, it is a great mistake to present marriage as a burden or simply as an institution that imposes a set of obligations on the married couple. AL presents the interface between the law of marriage and God’s grace as follows:

... the law is itself a gift of God which points out the way, a gift for everyone without exception; it can be followed with the help of grace, even though each human being “advances gradually with the progressive integration of the gifts of God and the demands of God’s definitive and absolute love in his or her entire personal and social life.” (AL 295)

⁷*Relatio Synodi* 2014, 24.

This citation denotes the pedagogical aspect of the moral law and presents marriage primarily as a journey through which the couple's relationship grows and matures. God instructs (*instruit*) us through the moral law. Law is not only the measurement of human action but also the direction, namely, the ideal that one should seek for moral and spiritual maturity. The sense of duty inherent in God's will and law finds its true moral meaning when it is perceived as an invitation to be heeded to when seeking one's own good and the good of others. God resembles more a teacher than a legislator, police officer or judge. God is like a benevolent teacher who knows students thoroughly and who wants their good. Respect for one's conscience is not only based on the dignity of the human person but also on the belief in a God who like a teacher knows not only what we need for our own good and self-fulfilment but also how to lead us gently taking into account our own potentialities and limitations embedded in particular situations. Moral law is accompanied with grace that assists (*iuvat*) us in our moral journey. It is through grace that God relates to us. Whereas the moral law points out how far we are from the ideal, divine mercy reveals how the merciful God continuously lures us to make a small step forward with the assistance of his grace⁸ (AL 292).

In AL Pope Francis questions why pastoral ministers "find it difficult to present marriage more as a dynamic path to personal development and fulfilment than as a lifelong burden" (AL 37). Distrust in God's grace keeps pastoral ministers focusing primarily on the moral law with the result that they fail to strive continuously to sustain the couple's marital journey through pastoral initiatives that foster their mutual support and fidelity. Belief in God's grace should inspire pastors to assist couples to commit themselves to each other and to engage themselves in new initiatives to rebuild, through God's grace, their personal life and their marital relationship, which sometimes faces the challenge of rebuilding it prudently anew, particularly when in their hands nothing remains than the wreckage of their relationship.

Inspired by the fundamental imperative that *salus animarum suprema lex*, Pope Francis is critical to those who want to "solve everything by applying general rules or deriving undue conclusions from particular theological considerations" (AL 2). The moral law is not like stones to throw at people's lives (AL 305). He dismisses "the

⁸Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et penitentia*, 14, 19.

closed heart of ... [those] hiding behind the Church's teachings, 'sitting on the chair of Moses and judging at times with superiority and superficiality difficult cases and wounded families'" (AL 305). It is reductive to judge an individual's actions or decisions simply by their conformity to a general law or rule, because that is not enough to discern and ensure full fidelity to God in the concrete life of a human being (AL 304).

Pope Francis is critical to "those who prefer a more rigorous pastoral care which leaves no room for confusions" (AL 308) since the overemphasis on the moral law without its relationship to the theology of grace stifles moral and spiritual growth. Since marriage is "wonderfully complicated" (AL 308) we cannot think that everything is black and white. When the moral law obscures the reality of God's grace, we run the risk of closing

off the way of grace and of growth, and discourage paths of sanctification which give glory to God. Let us remember that 'a small step, in the midst of great human limitations, can be more pleasing to God than a life which appears outwardly in order, but moves through the day without confronting great difficulties.' The practical pastoral care of ministers and of communities must not fail to embrace this reality (AL 305).

From Obedience to Law to the Cultivation of Moral Virtues by God's Grace

It is within the context of the previous two theological reflections that AL pleads for another change of mind in pastoral ministry. The third aspect concerns what Pope Francis believes to be a difficult task for pastoral ministers. It is a challenging task because it touches the mindset and pastoral attitude adopted by the Church for many centuries. Many pastoral ministers believed for many centuries that their role was only to teach what is good and bad, what are the ethical principles and moral norms that married couples should follow to respond to God's call. No effort was done to explore and discern, together with married couples, both those who are in a regular situation (according to traditional moral and canonical norms) and with those who are in a difficult and complicated situation (not according to canon law), how they could respond generously to God's presence in their life. This pastoral approach reflects a model of Christian marriage as a static and juridical institution rather than as a dynamic reality and interpersonal relationship. It also mirrors a narrow perspective of Christian moral life

reduced to a number of duties in a way that the sense of obligation is divorced from dispositions, attitudes or virtues that married couples need to cultivate in order to build their relationships as a community of life and love.

AL mirrors a methodological shift that is emerging in Catholic theological ethics, a shift from the focus on law to a focus on virtue. The proper formation of conscience should not refer only to the moral law and use moral wisdom to answer the practical moral question, “What ought I to do?” but also the prior moral question, “What sort of person ought I become?” The proper formation of conscience should not simply aim to inquire about the right thing to do in view of the demands of the moral law. It should also include considerations on how the moral decision impinges on one’s moral character: one’s attitudes, motives, intentions, affections and perspectives. The moral life is a matter of how we choose as well as who we are. Chapter one of AL, which focuses on families and marriages in the Bible, indicates from its onset Pope Francis’ transformational priorities. The chapter on the biblical perspective of marriage and the family does not focus on what the rules are, but instead concentrates on how couples live, how they cultivate virtues, how they love one another. Rules paint an ideal picture of marriage and the family rather than providing guidance for helping people live in the hardship situations or in complex and hard relationships. What we need is to help people to open their heart to God’s grace to practice virtues such as love, compassion, tenderness, mercy, kindness, generosity, forgiveness, commitment, strength, sharing and dialogue in complex relationships. AL offers ways to serve others and avoid such dark habits as jealousy, boasting, rudeness, irritability, and resentment for the sake of making complex relationships work.

The Task of the ‘Law of Graduality’ in the Formation of Conscience

In AL Pope Francis alludes to what is called ‘gradualism’ or the ‘law of graduality’ which is an essential pastoral tool in the formation of conscience and the accompaniment of one’s journey to moral maturity. It provides a path for the formation of conscience, that is, for a journey of moral growth. Growing into maturity (spiritual, moral, cognitive, emotional, social, etc.) takes time and continuous effort. People are *en route*, making moral evaluations and decisions prudently in accordance with what they understand and are capable of putting into practice, at

each moment—and it is possible that this may not fully coincide with the objective demands of the law that is a gift of God for everyone without exception. Thus, what is known as the “law of gradualness,” or step-by-step advancement in moral life with the help of God’s grace, should not be confused with the “gradualness of the law” as if there were different degrees or forms of precepts in God’s law for different individuals and situations.

The ‘law of graduality’ respects both the objectivity of the moral law and the equal objectivity of a person’s actual situation, which may prevent immediate and complete change. It is for this reason that Pope Francis, in EG 44, pleads for compassion and mercy. The ‘law of graduality,’ when exercised with discernment, helps the faithful to conform to what God wants, not in the abstract, but in the concrete and often somewhat chaotic situation. For, through conscientious discernment, one recognised what ‘for now’ God is asking for (AL 303).

According to John Paul II there is no ‘graduality of the law.’ The law of graduality is a pastoral response to concrete people experiencing limitations and complex problems, not a softening of the law. There is no change in teaching, but in how individuals are pastorally cared for. Under these circumstances, could not a person in a less-than-perfect relationship decide in conscience to receive Communion as long as one is struggling to live the best possible life that one can? As Pope Francis remarks, communion is not a reward for the perfect, but medicine for the sick (EG 47).

Formation of Conscience

Pope Francis exhorts pastoral ministers to form the conscience of the faithful rather than to replace it. However, he equally calls pastoral ministers to form their own conscience “to avoid judgements that do not take into account the complexity of various situations and they are to be attentive, by necessity, to how people experience and endure distress because of their condition” (AL 79).⁹

Formation of conscience is not pastoral assistance to the faithful to apply the norm to their concrete situations. Rather, it is an empowerment to the “examination of conscience through moments of reflection” (AL 300) to perceive the concrete possible good, or the good

⁹*Relatio Finalis* 2015, 53–54.

which is possible in the situation. The “possible good” is not always identical to the fullest realisation of the ideal (AL 303). Formation of conscience of the faithful implies respect for their moral space, the cultivation of moral virtues, education for responsibility, a pastoral attitude of integration rather than exclusion from the community, and the practice of pastoral discernment. All these elements are necessary for a proper formation of conscience.

Respect for Moral Space

Moral space refers to one’s freedom to take conscientious decisions without external or internal coercion. The term does not refer to a geographical location but rather, metaphorically, to one’s moral empowerment to make free moral judgements in accordance with a well-informed conscience.

According to the personalist model of conscience, safeguarding one’s moral space means respecting one’s prudential moral judgement in conscience when interpreting the generic moral law to concrete existential situations. The moral norm is important both as a guide and as a standard for human actions and decisions. However, in particular circumstances, when the generic moral norms do not remain binding due to their lack of concern for all the details and complexities implied in the concrete situations, one is morally called to interpret in conscience the abstract moral norms to concrete personal circumstances. This particular competence of conscience is not new in Catholic moral theology since Thomas Aquinas has already referred to it in his writings (AL 304).

The Cultivation of Virtues

Moral virtues are resources pastoral ministers should turn to when they accompany the faithful in their formation of conscience. There is no real education of the moral conscience without the role of virtues. Cultivating *virtues* is another aspect of conscience formation. Human virtues are firm attitudes, stable dispositions and habitual perfections of the intellect and will that govern our actions, order our passions, and guide our conduct according to reason and faith. The cultivation of virtues leads to a process of liberation of conscience. The more virtuous one becomes, the freer is one’s will to follow conscience in order to live responsibly the good life. The higher the moral qualities of one’s

character, the more virtuous are one's decisions in conscience because the good character cannot be separated from habits, actions, decisions, choices and emotions which are all united and directed towards the moral good. Not only do decisions and actions reflect the goodness or badness of one's character, one's actions also change one's character. It is for this reason that the cultivation of good character traits is indispensable in conscience formation. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* highlights the importance of the education of moral character under the section on the formation of conscience (CCC 1784). Virtues shape the moral agent to take free and responsible decisions in conscience. The moral space of the moral agent acquires its freedom from internal and external influences through the cultivation of good moral traits.

In classical theology, we find an important theological insight related to the formation of conscience and moral virtues. Since conscience is a practical judgement that comes at the end of a deliberative process, the cultivation of the virtue of prudence is central to a renewed theology of conscience formation and its task to apply right reason to action. Aquinas argues that prudence discerns the first principles of morality, applies them to particular situations, and enables conscience to make practical judgements that are the right thing to do on a particular occasion and with a specific good intention. Prudence is a cardinal virtue around which all other virtues pivot, integrating agents and their actions. Aquinas holds that no moral virtue can be possessed without prudence.¹⁰ Without the possession, refinement and exercise of prudence, none of the other virtues, such as wisdom, courage and temperance, can be realised and brought to fulfilment.

The virtuous character of a person is not manifested by a complete disposition to follow blindly the orders of a superior and by following the letter of the law. Obedience remains a virtue as long as it retains its original meaning, namely the disposition to examine carefully all the factors in a particular situation. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says, "prudence is the virtue that disposes practical reason to discern our true good in every circumstance" and which "immediately guides the judgment of conscience. With the help of this virtue we apply moral principles to particular cases without error and overcome doubts about

¹⁰Todd A. Salzmann and Michael G. Lawler "Amoris Laetitia: Has anything Changed?" *Asian Horizons* 11, 1 (March 2017): 64.

the good to achieve and the evil to avoid” (CCC 1806). The prudential discernment of conscience that seeks, judges, and chooses what appears proper and right in a given situation ultimately depends on the moral character.

The Ecclesial Community and Integration

One might mistakenly get the impression that the moral conscience is formed when one is alone secluded in one’s own moral space. Though conscience is at the very centre and core of the person, it is neither private nor individualistic. The etymology of the word conscience is *cum* and *scientia* and accordingly it refers to the knowledge one gets from others. It is a process of “knowing together with” and “growing together.” Though conscience has its own space to decide, it needs to listen to other voices. The human person is a network of relationships and some of these relationships constitute its identity. As B. Häring observes, conscience has an essential element of reciprocity.¹¹ Moral knowledge is social. No one can ever identify moral truth entirely on one’s own. For the Christian believer, the voice of conscience is authentic as far as it includes also the voice of God, the voice of others, the voice of those who have authority in the Church to teach, and finally the voice of the circumstances in order to discover the best possible action that is fitting in a particular circumstance.

AL calls the Christian community to be a formative environment for the conscience of the faithful. One of greatest contribution of AL on conscience is its exhortation to the ecclesial community to create a moral space that empowers the faithful to exercise their freedom of conscience. The nurturing of an empowering environment in the ecclesial community requires a pastoral approach that integrates rather than excludes, “while avoiding the risk of scandal” (AL 299). As Pope Francis stated in his homily on 15th February 2015:

There are two ways of thinking which recur throughout the Church’s history: casting off and reinstating. The Church’s way, from the time of the Council of Jerusalem, has always been the way of Jesus, the way of mercy and reinstatement... The way of the Church is not to condemn anyone forever; it is to pour out the balm of God’s mercy on all those

¹¹B. Haring, *Free and Faithful in Christ*, Vol I (Middle Green, Slough: St Paul Publication, 1978), 265–282.

who ask for it with a sincere heart ... For true charity is always unmerited, unconditional and gratuitous.¹²

The Church's logic in pastoral ministry is the *via caritatis* (AL 306) so that no one feels excommunicated from the Church but rather feels a living member (AL 299). This logic of integration corresponds to the logic of "mercy and reinstatement" (AL 296) which is the mercy of the Church and of the Lord Jesus, and is very different from the other logic that runs through the history of the Church, namely, the logic of marginalisation. Mercy and integration call pastoral ministers to rethink the *doctrinal* and *moral* dimensions of Christian faith. It is true that what distinguishes the Christian community from other communities is its faith. However, it is also true that the Christian community, which is in a continuous process of integrating its members, is called to recognise that doctrine and morals are not tools of exclusion. Those who do not profess the whole truth and are not living the moral norm in its perfection should never be excluded from the Christian community.

Pastoral and Personal Discernment

The formation of conscience entails discernment which can be *pastoral* when carried out specifically by the subjects of pastoral action (pastors) and *personal* when carried out by the individual (the believer with his/her conscience).¹³ On the one hand, pastoral ministers have the moral responsivity to accompany the faithful to empower them to judge wisely and to be able to choose carefully among many choices. According to Pope Francis,

... the Church's pastors are not only responsible for promoting Christian marriage, but also the "pastoral discernment of the situations of a great many who no longer live this reality. Entering into pastoral dialogue with these persons is needed to distinguish elements in their lives that can lead to a greater openness to the Gospel of marriage in its fullness." In this pastoral discernment, there is a need "to identify elements that can foster evangelization and human and spiritual growth (AL 293).¹⁴

¹²AL 296 (*Homily at Mass Celebrated with the New Cardinals* (15 February 2015): AAS 107 (2015): 257.

¹³Basilio Petra', "From *Familiaris Consortio* to *Amoris Laetitia*: Continuity of the Pastoral Attitude and a Step Forward," *INTAMS Review* 22 (2016): 204–207.

¹⁴Referring to *Relatio Synodi* 2014, 24.

On the other hand, in their personal discernment, the faithful are called to take into account of the objective moral truth as well as the complexity of personal situations in order to reach a prudential decision on the morally fitting action in every concrete situation. The process of both pastoral and personal discernment has to be “done in the presence of the Lord, looking at the signs, listening to the things that happen, the feeling of the people, especially the poor.”¹⁵ Decisions taken in conscience after a process of personal discernment are binding because, according to the tradition of moral theology, the conscience is the ultimate subjective norm of action and no one can take its place.

AL refers simultaneously and conjointly to the pastor’s discernment and the personal discernment that belongs to the believer and establishes a strong link between these two modalities of discernment. When Pope Francis in AL remarks that “[w]e have been called to form consciences, not to replace them” (AL 37), he is insisting that neither the magisterium nor pastors should substitute the role of the individual’s conscientious discernment. The teaching Church is called, like all good teachers, to step back to respect the moral space of the faithful to do their own discernment. AL is quite direct and clear on the role of conscientious discernment:

If we consider the immense variety of concrete situations ..., it is understandable that neither the Synod nor this Exhortation could be expected to provide a new set of general rules, canonical in nature and applicable to all cases. What is possible is simply a renewed encouragement to undertake a responsible personal and pastoral discernment of particular cases... (AL 300).

For this reason, “not all discussions of doctrinal, moral or pastoral issues need to be settled by interventions of the magisterium” (AL 3).

The process of personal discernment involves more than just intellectual knowledge. Though a proper openness to the sources of wisdom (Scripture, other people’s wisdom, prayer, the Church’s teaching) and a willingness to transform one’s thinking and acting are required, the “complexity of various situations” and “how people experience and endure distress because of their condition” (AL 79) are

¹⁵A. Spadaro, “A Big Heart Open to God: An Interview with Pope Francis,” September 2013, <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2013/09/30/big-heart-open-god-interview-pope-francis>

equally important considerations in discernment. In other words, discernment is not a straightforward application of general norms without regard to concrete situations (AL 304).

AL calls for careful attention and sensitivity to complex and messy concrete situations so that the faithful would “not be pigeonholed or fit into overly rigid classifications leaving no room for suitable personal and pastoral discernment” (AL 298, FC 84). The virtues of attentiveness, empathy and love and a feel for the action of the Holy Spirit in human experiences, also when complex and confused, are integral to the process of discernment. Even in the midst of limitations, one can find through discernment possible ways of responding to God and growing in moral and spiritual life. By thinking that everything is black and white, one closes off the way of grace and of growth and discourage the paths of sanctification (AL 305). This is why the discernment process must be extremely careful, distinguishing well between the various situations. It must never yield to simplistic and generalised solutions.

In the process of discernment, the pastoral minister is called to seek the logic of integration rather than the logic of marginalisation, “while avoiding the risk of scandal” (AL 299). “Mercy and reinstatement” (AL 296) should characterise the pastoral dialogue between the pastor and the faithful since no one is to be condemned forever. In pastoral dialogue, the pastor gives moral counselling to the faithful to evaluate correctly past and the present conduct, as well as the possibilities for the future, without however substituting their decision-making process since the pastor’s tasks is only to aid the conscience, not to replace it. In AL Pope Francis remarks that “every effort should be made to encourage the development of an enlightened conscience, formed and guided by the responsible and serious discernment of one’s pastor, and to encourage an ever greater trust in God’s grace” (AL 303). In personal discernment, the believer perceives, with the guidance of the pastor, the concrete possibility of the good or the good that is possible in the situation.

Concluding Reflections

AL claims that pastoral ministers, in the process of conscience formation and discernment, are called to take on a greater responsibility in evaluating with a merciful and a therapeutic intent the good present in the marital experiences of the faithful. This responsibility is greater in

marital experiences that are complex and in contradiction to the objective moral norm. FC provides a pastoral approach based on an authoritative frame of reference in which the pastor is an applier of the norm. Conversely, in AL the role of the priest or pastoral counsellor is to pastor and father to form rather than replace the moral conscience of the faithful and to accompany the faithful in their process of discernment and conscientious decision. AL subordinates situations, which are in contradiction to the objective moral norm, to the good of the person since the proper goal of the moral norm is ultimately the *salus animarum*.

The well-known dictum of St Augustine summarises the thrust of AL's renewed theology on moral conscience and discernment: *In fide unitas; in dubiis libertas; in omnibus, caritas* (In faith, unity; in doubt, liberty; in all things, charity). This quotation remains an important guide to pastoral ministers in their continuous efforts to form diligently the conscience of the faithful and in the process of moral discernment during pastoral dialogue. Unity in faith is crucial such as on the indissolubility of sacramental marriage. However, in cases of practical doubt about the applicability of the general moral law to particular complex situations, the existential inability to understand the moral law and limited capacity to follow the law, there can be a legitimate plurality of approaches. This plurality of pastoral approaches is the result of decisions taken in conscience after a process of personal discernment. The overriding principle that the pastor should follow in the conscience formation of the faithful and in their process of pastoral discernment is to hold always to a stance of charity and mercy towards all.

CHURCH AS FAMILY OF DOMESTIC CHURCHES

A New Model of the Church in the Synodal Way

*Davis Varayilan, CMI**

We are witnessing the beginnings of a new phase in the history of the Church. With the arrival of Pope Francis in Vatican, authoritarian or centralized forms of organization are slowly but steadily giving way to a synodal Church where laity, pastors and the bishop of Rome journey together and all listen to the Spirit. The dynamic and fast-paced post-modern world in which we live demands the path of synodality. To be a synodal Church, according to Pope Francis, the structure has to be “an upside down pyramid” with the top on the bottom. The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* is an attempt in that direction. Through the Exhortation, Pope insists that we must hold on to fundamental truths, general principles, laws and doctrines but go back to our heart and understand the challenges and problems of the married couples and the families with a compassionate heart. The overtone of the Exhortation is to move from the centre to the periphery and apply the medicine of mercy and tenderness, not laws and doctrines. The message that he wants to convey to the Church is that ‘the church is not a museum of saints but a field hospital for sinners.’

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Pope Francis is offering a new paradigm in *Amoris Laetitia* that calls for a change of direction in the way the Church carries out its ministry to families. At the heart of this shift is a fully incarnational approach which recognizes the relation between the Church and the family. I would like to explain this shift through a new model of the Church as Family of Domestic Churches. Models cannot bring out the whole picture into focus, they can provide an angle of vision. In the words of Avery Dulles, “When an image is employed reflectively and critically to deepen one’s theoretical understanding of a reality it becomes what is today called a ‘model.’”¹ This new model of the Church is presented in a synodal way.

According to Pope Francis,

A Synodal Church is a Church which listens, which realizes that listening ‘is more than simple hearing.’ It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the ‘Spirit of truth’ (Jn 14:17) in order to know what he “says to the Churches’ (Rev 2:7).²

He explains that synodality is built on a principle—‘What touches all should be considered and approved by all.’ He affirms that: “It is precisely this path of *synodality* which God expects of the Church of the third millennium.” What the Lord is asking of us is already in some sense present in the very word ‘synod,’ which means journeying together by families and the hierarchy.³

St Kuriakose Elias Chavara was a man who realised the importance of family in the Church and in the society in the nineteenth century. His effort to bring renewal in family life and his admonitions still influence our families and serve as bright beacons that guide our lives. He has given guidelines to Christian families in his own parish Kainakary in Kerala, known as *Chavarul, Testament of a Loving Father*. They explain the role of the parents and the children in the family and

¹Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1988 [2nd ed.]), 23.

²Address of Pope Francis, on the occasion of the ceremony commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops, in Paul VI Audience Hall, (Rome), Saturday, October 17, 2015, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html.

³Address of Pope Francis, on the occasion of the ceremony commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops.

give guidelines to make Christian family a domestic church, an image of heaven.

In this article, I shall make an attempt to present a new model of the Church as Family of Domestic Churches. To explain this model of the Church, we shall focus on three points: towards a new model of the Church, theological foundation for the new model and the relationship between the Church and the family.

Towards a New Model of the Church

In the context of family, a new model of the Church is required today because the Church is a mystery and the family is a reflection of that mystery, but the current challenges have eclipsed this mystery in family life. Moreover, none of the present models of the Church⁴ focus on the synodal approach of mutual listening and learning.

The Church is a Mystery

The Church that originates from the Trinity and co-instituted by both Christ and the Spirit⁵ is a supernatural mystery (Eph 4:4–6; 1 Cor 8:6). St Paul explains the Church as a mystery related to the absolute oneness of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit (Eph 4:4–6; 1 Cor 8:6; 12:6ff.). The fullness of God (Col 2:9) dwells in Christ and it is revealed to those whose hearts are open to the Spirit (1 Cor 2:12). Vatican II adopted the title of the first chapter of *Lumen Gentium*: “The Mystery of the Church.” In his opening address at the second session of the same Council, Pope Paul VI declared, “The Church is a mystery. It is a reality imbued with the hidden presence of God. It lies, therefore, within the very nature of the Church to be always open to new and ever greater explorations.”⁶

The mystery cannot be fully comprehended or defined but only be described with a plurality of complementary theological images, analogies, or models. The mystery of the Church is always greater and richer than any one model can capture. There is, therefore, no single

⁴The Bible uses 96 images of the Church and Avery Dulles uses 6 models of the Church as institution, mystical communion, sacrament, herald, servant and community of disciples. Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 19.

⁵Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, 3 Vols. (New York: Crossroad, 1983), Vol. 2: 9.

⁶Quoted in *Council Speeches of Vatican II*, ed. Hans Küng, Yves Congar, and D. O’Hanlon (Glen Rock, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1964), 26.

model that is ever exhaustive, or exists in a pure state. Nor can any model be interpreted in so exclusive a manner as to negate the teachings of other approved models.⁷ Models play an important role in understanding and responding to the problems of the church. A model in ecclesiology is a perception and expression of the mystery of the Church from a particular angle. The new model looks at the Church from the perspective of the family and families from the angle of the domestic Church.

Family: A Reflection of Church's Mystery

In *Amoris Laetitia* (AL), Pope Francis says, "The Church, in order fully to understand her mystery, looks to the Christian family which manifests her in a real way" (AL 67). Family is the image of God (AL 71) and it reflects the mystery of the Holy Trinity. In the *Chavarul*, St Kuriakose Elias Chavara writes to the families that, "A good Christian family is the image of heaven."⁸ A Christian family should be a Kingdom where God reigns supreme. St Chavara's fundamental vision about family was to make every family an earthly replica of the heavenly Kingdom. He advocated families to become another 'Holy Family.' Family is the way of the Church (AL 69). Pope Francis says, "The experience of love in families is a perennial source of strength for the life of the Church" (AL 88). At the same time, it is "through the Church, marriage and family receive the grace of the Holy Spirit from Christ, in order to bear witness to the Gospel of God's love" (AL 71).

Current Challenges of the Families and the Church

The families which are supposed to be a reflection of the Holy Trinity are undergoing great challenges in the Church due to increased mobility and migration, detachment of families from the support system, extreme individualism, and addictions of drug, alcoholism, gambling, etc. These challenges pose "a threat to the mature growth of individuals, the cultivation of community values" (AL 52). The families are steadily losing their power, attraction, functions and stability due to the increasing number of divorce and throwing the parental care of the children on the hired hands. People are less willing

⁷Council Speeches of Vatican II, 32.

⁸Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Chavarul: Testament of a Loving Father* (Kochi: Chavara Central Secretariat, 2018), 9. Henceforth abbreviated as CL for *Chavarul*.

to invest time, money and energy in family life but are investing the same for self-satisfaction and self-growth.

The Church faces great challenges of pastoral care of families in “irregular” situations like separated, divorced, abandoned, remarried, civilly married, mixed marriage, homo-sexual union/orientation, single parent families, etc. “As members of the Church,” they require not the fine points of moral doctrine but “pastoral care that is merciful and helpful” (AL 293). In his interview, Pope said, “The Church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful.” He reminds us, “Let us not forget that the Church’s task is often like that of a field hospital” (AL 291). A self-referential Church is locked itself up in doctrines, laws and teachings but the need of the time is to heal the families who are wounded and bring the salvific experience through merciful love. But it seems that the Church faces clericalism in administration, careerism in ministry, passivity in mission, a cold bureaucracy in morality (AL 312, 37) and downgrading of the consciences of the faithful (37). To face these challenges, we need a new model of the Church as family of domestic churches.

Theological Foundation for the New Model

Traditional Understanding of the Church

Until Vatican II, Catholic ecclesiology was more like a “‘hierarchy’ or a treatise on public law.”⁹ The Council of Trent defined the Church as a hierarchical society directly and explicitly instituted by Christ and taught the necessity of this institution for salvation. In this understanding of the Church the Holy Spirit and the laity were kept out of ecclesiological consideration. The impression was given that the laity was a dispensable member or appendage to a self-sufficient ecclesiastical institution. The clergy constituted the Church and had the pastoral monopoly while the laity was called to obey their pastors and defend the Church in the realm of public life and politics.

The role of the Holy Spirit in the Church was reduced to that of the guarantor of the accuracy of tradition and of hierarchical, sacramental or magisterial institution. The Spirit was considered the animator or

⁹Yves Congar, “The Historical Development of Authority in the Church,” in *Problems of Authority*, ed. John M. Todd (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1962), 144.

who gives life to the structure of the Church that was already founded by Jesus Christ. Since the focus was on Christ, the importance was given to the hierarchy and the structure of the community. Christology alone had become the central point of reference in the Catholic concept of the Church. For synodality, the Church has to breathe with its two lungs, it has to be seen and lived from a Christological and Pneumatological perspective.

Trinitarian Origin of the Church

The path of synodality for mutual listening of the Church and family is based on the Trinitarian origin of the Church. According to Congar the Church that originates from the Trinity is co-instituted by both Christ and the Spirit.¹⁰ “In speaking of Christ,” Congar writes, “Saint Paul does not so much refer to him as founder (founder, in the past, of a completed society, “*societas perfecta*”) but as an ever-present foundation (1 Cor 3:11f.)”¹¹ It was in the Spirit and through the Spirit that Jesus Christ laid the foundations of the Church (1 Cor 3:11) during his earthly life. The ecclesial means of grace¹²—the Word, the Sacraments, and the apostolic ministry—were not given by Christ in a finished form but were instituted gradually throughout the apostolic era by Jesus and the Spirit acting inseparably.¹³

In his farewell discourse in the Gospel of John, Jesus speaks of two ‘missions,’ that of the Spirit and of the Apostles (Jn 15:26–27),¹⁴ who will carry out his mission after his departure. The law governing the joint action is that when the Apostles receive the Holy Spirit, both the Apostles and the Holy Spirit bear witness to Jesus (Jn 15:26–27). The relationship between the mission of the Spirit and of the Apostles is abundantly evident in the Acts of the Apostles. The Scripture shows that the Apostles preached the kerygma “through the Holy Spirit” (1 Pt 1:12) and their words were powerful “in the Holy Spirit” (1 Thes 1:5;

¹⁰Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, 3 Vols. (New York: Crossroad, 1983), Vol. 2:9.

¹¹Yves Congar, “Pneumatology Today,” *American Ecclesiastical Review* 167 (1973): 442.

¹²Yves Congar, *Lay People in the Church: A Study for a Theology of Laity* (Westminster, Maryland: Newman Press, 1965), 31.

¹³Davis Varayilan, *Spirit and the Pilgrim Church: A Study of Yves Congar and the FABC Documents* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2008), 35.

¹⁴Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, 2:42.

Acts 4:31, 33; Heb 2:3–4). Peter (Acts 4:8) and Paul were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:17) before dedicating themselves to their apostolic ministry. Aloysius Pieris suggests that it is on the basis of this twofold sending of the Spirit and the Apostles that the Christians could and should call themselves “apostolic churches.”¹⁵

Synodal Character of the Church

The formula used by the Council of Jerusalem on the issue of circumcision, “It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us” (Acts 15:28), is the prototype of a synodal way of functioning of the new model of the Church. At Pentecost the Spirit was given not only to the apostles but also to those who gathered with them (Acts 1:14). Through baptism, the Spirit dwells in every member and has distributed charism to all for the common good, to build up the Church. Therefore, the ongoing discernment has to be done not only by the pastors but also by the whole People of God because “the *sensus fidelium*, or faith-instinct... is a gift of the Spirit to all as a body.”¹⁶ The Spirit’s anointing produces in each of the faithful the “supernatural appreciation of faith,” often referred to as *sensus fidei* (LG 35). The ‘*sensus fidei*’ creates an atmosphere of trust on the part of the *magisterium* and the readiness on the part of the faithful to submit to its decisions. Therefore, mutual listening and learning by the pastors and the families and both to the Holy Spirit is required to preserve the identity and continue the mission of Jesus.

Church as Family of Domestic Churches

The Church and family are inextricably bound together, they journey together in the pilgrimage of life, listening and learning from each other. According to Pope Francis, mutual listening is what characterizes the Synodal Church. He identifies three levels of mutual listening: the first local level, the second Episcopal level and the third ecumenical level. In this model of the Church, an attempt is made to mutual listening between pastors and the family. Pope is convinced that the interplay

¹⁵Aloysius Pieris, “I Believe in the Holy Spirit: Ecumenism in the Churches and the Unfinished Agenda of the Holy Spirit,” *East Asian Pastoral Review* 42 (2005): 97.

¹⁶Statement of IV Plenary Assembly of FABC, “The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World of Asia,” in *For All Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishop’s Conferences Documents from 1970 to 1991*, Vol. 1, ed. Gaudencio B. Rosales and C.G. Arevalo (Quezon City, Claretian Publications, 1997), 193.

between the family and the Church will prove a precious gift for the Church in our time (AL 87). We shall focus first on Church as family and then family as domestic churches.

Church as Family

The Church as family means that the pastors have to listen to and learn from families because “the family is the image of God who is a communion of persons” (AL 71), image of heaven where God reigns, living reflection of the mystery of the Holy Trinity (AL 11, 86) and is the privileged place of God’s self-revelation. Pope Francis expects the Church to become like a family in its approach and ministry. He affirms, “The Church is good for the family, and the family is good for the Church” (AL 87). What the pastors have to learn from families are the merciful love and accompaniment practised in the families.

Governed by Merciful Love

In the Gospel, Jesus reminds us that the supreme rule governing all others is the rule of love (Lk 10:27). St Paul is so convinced of the superiority of love over all the other virtues that he says, “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal” (1 Cor 13:1–3). The family is governed not by the law but by merciful love. The relationship of husband and wife is based on love, the same kind of love that Christ has for his Bride, the Church. Therefore, Pope Francis says, “The experience of love in families is a perennial source of strength for the life of the Church” (AL 88). The love in the family grows and deepens when “the couple experiences the beauty of fatherhood and motherhood, and shares plans, trials, expectations and concerns; they learn care for one another and mutual forgiveness. In this love, they celebrate their happy moments and support each other in the difficult passages of their life together...” (AL 88). This love further deepens when it reaches out to those who are weak and differently abled in the family. This approach of merciful love between the couples and between the parents and children must become the way of the Church.

In *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis challenges the pastors to radically rethink the ecclesial identity and mission and give priority to the merciful love of God towards the families, especially towards those who are in “irregular situations.” The way of Jesus is the way of the Church, that is, “not to condemn anyone for ever; it is to pour out the balm of

God's mercy on all those who ask for it with a sincere heart" (AL 296). On the "logic of pastoral mercy," Pope says, "At times we find it hard to make room for God's unconditional love in our pastoral activity. We put so many conditions on mercy that we empty it of its concrete meaning and real significance. That is the worst way of watering down the Gospel" (AL 311). Pope asks the pastors to "avoid a cold bureaucratic morality" and adopt a mindset which is open "to understand, forgive, accompany, hope and above all integrate" (AL 312). The logic of the Gospel is to reach out to everyone in whatever situations they find themselves "to experience being touched by an unmerited, unconditional and gratuitous mercy" (AL 297).

Pope Francis invites the pastors to put persons above laws and practice mercy before judgment, which means they have to stop applying "moral laws to those living in "irregular" situations, as if they were stones to throw at people's lives" (AL 305) because a person may come to recognize truth gradually or "not in a position to understand, appreciate, or fully carry out the objective demands of the law" (AL 295) or may be ignorant of the rule or does not understand its inherent values or circumstances which does not allow him to act differently; instead they have to apply the medicine of mercy. In AL, he reminds the pastors not to "forget that the Church's task is often like that of a field hospital" (AL 291) because he says, "The Church is not a tollhouse; it is the house of the Father, where there is a place for everyone, with all their problems" (AL 310).

The "field hospital" triggers the imagination of the urgency of pastoral help needed in the peripheries of the Church. "Field hospital" functions as a support system for the victory of the battle by providing treatment to the wounded persons on the spot and sent them back to join others in the battle. It demands from the pastors to have swift action to welcome the wounded ones to the Church with open hearts because "all of us are a complex mixture of light and shadows" (AL 113). The pastors have to see the faithful who are living together, or only married civilly, or are divorced and remarried or married people who live in an imperfect manner "with the eyes of Christ" because "the light of Christ enlightens every person" (AL 78).

Accompanied for Discernment

As the parents accompany the children in their growth, the pastors have to accompany the families, especially those who are in "irregular

situations,” “with attention and care” to restore “in them hope and confidence” (AL 291). The pastors must empty triumphalist attitude and reject authoritarian way of dealing with people that lays down the law and follow the example of Jesus who accompanied the Samaritan woman as learner and teacher. They have to “listen to them with sensitivity and serenity with a sincere desire to understand their plight and their point of view in order to help them to live better lives and to recognize their proper place in the Church” (AL 312), and to assist them to “understand the divine pedagogy of grace in their lives” and “reach the fullness of God’s plan for them” (AL 297).

While accompanying the families, the pastors are called not to replace but to “form consciences” (37) “according to the teaching of the Church and the guidelines of the bishop” so that they may become aware of “their situation before God” (AL 300). Only such an informed conscience can make a moral “judgment on what hinders the possibility of a fuller participation in the life of the Church and on what steps can foster it and make it grow” (AL 300). The overemphasis on doctrinal, bioethical and moral issues gives no room for the consciences of the faithful to carry out their own discernment in complex situations (AL 37). The individual conscience is the final arbiter of the moral life. *Gaudium et Spes* identifies conscience as “the most secret core and sanctuary of a man...(where) he is alone with God, Whose voice echoes in his depths” (GS 16, 2). Therefore, Pope exhorts the Church to make every effort “to encourage the development of an enlightened conscience, formed and guided by the responsible and serious discernment of one’s pastor” so that they can recognize in the given situation what “is the most generous response which can be given to God” (AL 303).

The pastors must listen to the Spirit together with the families in the process of discernment. Pope confesses that because of the immense variety of concrete situations neither the Synod nor the Exhortation could be able “to provide a new set of general rules, canonical in nature and applicable to all cases” (AL 300). The only moral solution to any and every situation is a path of careful pastoral discernment accompanied by a priest and a final judgment of personal conscience. Discernment means listening to what God is saying through the Spirit to us within our given circumstances of life. The Spirit dwells in every individual and in every local Church. Therefore, Pope Francis allows every country or region the freedom to interpret some aspects of the

teaching of the Church and “seek solution better suited to its culture and sensitive to its traditions and local needs” even though “unity of teaching and practice is certainly necessary in the Church” (AL 3). The practical discernment in particular circumstances cannot be elevated to the level of a rule because only general rules can be set forth not the details (AL 304). If the pastors follow the divine method of considering persons before laws, common good before one’s own desires, then “there can be no risk that a specific discernment may lead people to think that the Church maintains a double standard” (AL 301). In every crisis situation, the local Church must be able to discern and affirm as Peter said at the end of Jerusalem council, “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us” (Acts 15:28).

The Family as the Domestic Church

Christian families are called to be domestic Church and the Church is constantly enriched by the lives of the domestic churches (AL 87). The term “domestic church” describes the identity and mission of a Christian family, that is, the image of heaven and carriers of God’s mission.

Domestic Church

Lumen Gentium describes the family as the ‘domestic Church’ because it is the first place where young, baptized Christians learn about their faith (LG 11). *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, “The Christian home is the place where children receive the first proclamation of the faith. For this reason the family home is rightly called ‘the domestic church,’ a community of grace and prayer, a school of human virtues and of Christian charity” (CCC 1666). Families become the living domestic Church when married couples and parents, by their baptism and confirmation, exercise Jesus’ threefold office of priest, prophet and king within their families. To keep up the ideals of domestic church, the pastors have to prepare the engaged couples, accompany newly married ones “to strengthen marriages” (AL 307) and to “form consciences” (AL 37).

A family becomes a domestic church with the Sacrament of Matrimony, with the presence of Christ in the family and when faith becomes life and life becomes faith. But some families like remarried, civilly married, simple cohabitation are in “irregular” situations because they contradict the ideal of a domestic church which reflects the “union

between Christ and his Church" (AL 292). Pope exhorts the pastors that those in "irregular situations" are not to be seen as excommunicated but as baptized, as responsible subjects, as brothers and sisters, as living members of the Church and to whom the Spirit has given gifts and talents for the good of all (AL 299). Pope admits the possibility of God's grace working in those involved in second marriages and reminds the pastors not to consider those in any 'irregular' situation as "living in a state of mortal sin and are deprived of sanctifying grace." (AL 301).

Those in civil marriages and simple cohabitation require "pastoral care that is merciful and helpful" (AL 293) because Pope says, "when such unions attain a particular stability, legally recognized, characterized by deep affection and responsibility for their offspring, and demonstrate an ability to overcome trials, they can provide occasions for pastoral care with a view to the eventual celebration of the sacrament of marriage" (AL 293) and there is "a continual increase in the number of such people requesting the celebration of marriage in the Church" (AL 294). The resistance of such people to sacramental union is not motivated by prejudice but "by cultural or contingent situations" (AL 294). "These couples need to be welcomed and guided patiently and discreetly" because "those signs of love ... in some way reflect God's own love" (AL 294). Moreover, there is "a gradualness in the prudential exercise of free acts on the part of subjects who are not in a position to understand, appreciate, or fully carry out the objective demands of the law" (AL 295). If we accept that families are a privileged place of God's self-revelation and activity, then no family should be considered deprived of God's grace. Whenever there is a family striving to live together and to love one another, the Spirit is already present.

Domestic Church, an Image of Heaven

In *Chavarul* (CL) St Chavara says, "A good Christian family is the image of heaven" (CL 09). His fundamental vision about family was to make every family an earthly replica of the heavenly kingdom¹⁷ or another 'Holy Family' because Holy Family of Nazareth is heaven on earth. What makes the Christian family an image of heaven is the communion with God, with one another in the family and with others.

¹⁷Thomas Kadankavil, *Chavara: A Multidimensional Saint* (Kottayam: Deepika Book House, 2014), 27.

Communion with God takes place when fear of and devotion to the Lord becomes most valuable possession of a family. In the words of St Chavara, "A family in which the fear of the Lord pervades will enjoy the fruit of divine blessings in this world as well as in eternity" (CL 25). To increase the devotion to the Lord, St Chavara suggests, "Parents shall procure for their children the treasure of books packed with wisdom and philosophical knowledge that enhance piety" (CL 28). To have communion with God, it is essential for parents to establish an atmosphere of prayer in the home. If children are raised in a household of prayer, prayer will become as natural as breathing to them and will indeed provide a secure foundation. St Chavara insists, "Don't interrupt the routine of family prayer even if some important guests or visitors turn up at your house at that time" (CL 30). Pope Francis says, "Family prayer is a special way of expressing and strengthening this paschal faith" (AL 318).

Communion with one another in the family happens when "the members live together by the bond of blood and affection, when children duly respect and obey their parents, walk peacefully before God and each one, seeks eternal salvation according to his or her proper state of life" (CL 9). St Chavara writes to the parents, "Children are sacred treasures entrusted to you by God Almighty. You should also remember that these are the souls that Jesus Christ has entrusted in your hands to sanctify them with His most precious blood and to make them His servants and, thus, to offer them back to Him on the Day of Judgment" (CL 33). He writes to families, "Entrust yourself to the Divine Providence when you are faced with trials and tribulations, diseases and difficulties" (CL 27).

Communion with others is practised in a concrete way by rendering good to others every day and desirous of others' love and respect. St Chavara writes, "Days on which you have not rendered any good to others will not be reckoned in the book of life." "Let no beggar leave your home empty handed; likewise, don't hesitate, as much as you can, to give alms" (CL 21). "Don't deny or delay just wages to labourers; for, it is a grave sin crying out before the throne of God. Don't humiliate or trouble the poor; for, God will seek retribution from you on account of their tears" (CL 24). As Pope Benedict XVI pointed out, "closing our eyes to our neighbour also blinds us to God" (*Deus Caritas Est*, 16; AL 316).

Domestic Church, Carriers of God's Mission

Pope Francis suggests that the *sensus fidei* prevents a rigid separation between an *Ecclesia docens* and an *Ecclesia discens*,¹⁸ (a teaching Church and a learning Church) since the flock likewise has an instinctive ability to discern the new ways that the Lord is revealing to the Church. In fact, the Word of God is given to the whole Church to be preserved and transmitted (*Dei Verbum*, 2). Therefore, the proclamation of the Gospel is not something to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients. The whole Church teaches and the whole Church listens.

Christian families are the principal agents of evangelization. The call for the family to mission is: "Family, become what you are!"¹⁹ The very identity as a married couple impels them to mission. First of all, the mission has to be through "their joy-filled witness as domestic churches" (AL 200). The family is the place where people can be themselves and grow integrally. There must be evangelization and catechesis inside the family by raising their children in Christian faith. Home should be a place where the children learn about their faith through their parents' and grandparents' word and example and appreciate the meaning and beauty of their faith, to pray and serve their neighbour (AL 187). Faith is God's gift, yet parents are the means that God uses for it to grow and develop. Pope says that, for example, when mothers teach their little children to blow a kiss to Jesus or to Our Lady, the child's heart becomes a place of prayer (AL 287). "Children need symbols, actions and stories" (AL 288). Therefore, St Chavara instructs the parents,

As the children grow up, teach them to devotedly call on the names of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Let the children familiarise and kiss the image of the Holy Family and teach them to honour and venerate them. As they begin to speak, teach them to recite short prayers such as Our Father, Hail Mary, the Angelus, etc. (CL 34).

¹⁸Errol A. D'Lima, "Sensus Fidei and the Role of Laity in the Synodal Church," *Jeevadhara* 47, 290 (2017): 68.

¹⁹The Final Statement of the Eighth Plenary Assembly of Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, "The Asian Family Towards a Culture of Integral Life," in *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 2002-2006*, ed. Franz-Joseph Eilers (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2007), 29.

Secondly, Christian families are effective carriers of the Gospel in society. The loving relationships that are developed within the family have a missionary dimension. "Children who grew up in missionary families often become missionaries themselves; growing up in warm and friendly families, they learn to relate to the world in this way, without giving up their faith or their convictions" (AL 289). The family becomes an agent of mission "through its explicit proclamation of the Gospel and its legacy of varied forms of witness, namely solidarity with the poor, openness to a diversity of people, the protection of creation, moral and material solidarity with other families, including those most in need, commitment to the promotion of the common good...all this is an expression of our profound Christian belief in the love of the Father who guides and sustains us, a love manifested in the total self gift of Jesus Christ, who even now lives in our midst and enables us to face together the storms of life at every stage" (AL 290). The family's mission extends to the social, cultural, political and educational fields. In the multi-religious context of India, family is one of the Church's most effective agents of evangelization. The pastors have to strengthen family presence and relationships by building it truly as the domestic Church.

Conclusion

To become a family of domestic churches in a synodal way, the Church has to go through a process of vertical and horizontal decentralization. The vertical decentralization orientates the Church from Christ towards the Spirit who works inseparably with the glorified Lord. The Church has to collaborate with the Spirit to continue its mission. The vertical decentralization results in horizontal decentralization of the Church from hierarchy to people of God where every individual and every local Church has a role to play in building up the Church because of the presence of the Spirit. The *sensus fidelium* is given to all in virtue of baptism and anointing by the Spirit, which means all should share in carrying out the mission of the Church. The pastors must approach the families with the understanding that families are not problems to be solved but rather, they are opportunities for the Church to discern with the aid of the Spirit how God is active in our time and what God is calling us to do here and now.

Pope Francis invites the Church to shift from the tollhouse-image to family, that is, from a rule-centred view of the Church to a more mercy-

centred Church. The model of the Church as family of domestic churches is an attempt in that direction. The pastors must listen to and learn from the families to exercise their ministry with merciful love and accompaniment. The families must consider their role in the Church not just as collaborators but as co-responsible in carrying out God's mission by living as domestic Churches. This mutual listening and being listened to must be present at all levels in the Church for the synodality to become a way of life in the Church. The voice of the families was heard in the Synod on the family held in 2014 and 2015. This must become the way of the Church to respond to the signs of the times and to follow "what the Spirit says to the Churches" (Rev 2:7).

FAMILY: PRIESTLY AND RELIGIOUS FORMATION FOR MINISTRY

*Katarina Schuth, OSF**

Distinguished authors at the Conference on Vocation and Mission of the Family addressed almost every conceivable angle of family life based on the Catholic tradition. They covered topics ranging from the development of Catholic family spirituality and ethics in the *Chavarul* of 1868 to the worldwide reception of *Amoris Laetitia* in 2016. This presentation adds one other dimension by describing how seminarians are currently being prepared for ministry to families and how they ought to be prepared. The goal is to demonstrate ways of integrating the content of human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral areas of seminary formation with the teachings on family life and ministry found in the two documents that frame this conference, the *Chavarul* and *Amoris Laetitia*.

To establish the context, I will summarize the main points of the *Chavarul* and emphasize some of the beliefs on family it holds in common with *Amoris Laetitia* (hereafter AL) and some of the differences

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Schuth, Katarina. "Family: Priestly and Religious Formation for Ministry." In *Vocation and Mission of the Family: Reflections on Chavarul and Amoris Laetitia*, edited by Shaji George Kochuthara, 469–484. Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2020.

that need to be addressed in modern times. The main focus considers how these two sources and other church documents inform the basic structure of seminary programs on the topic of family ministry. Taking into account the cultural context, I will address the purpose and goals of each of the four areas of seminary formation as they deal with aspects of family. Then I will articulate several principles that guide preparation for priestly ministry overall, highlighting elements related to ministry to families.

Directives Found in the *Chavarul* and Related Ideas in *Amoris Laetitia*

In the Indian context, the *Chavarul* expressed the Church's long tradition and vision of the family in which it identified and incorporated the essential elements of family ministry. Its prophetic admonitions, far-advanced 150 years ago, covered not only the spiritual requirements as exemplified in Christian virtues, but also the human dimensions dealing with the upbringing of children. It envisioned the necessary content of pastoral formation by considering problems and difficulties families faced at the time, such as the effects of the social and economic conditions, the importance of education, and other practical elements. The *Chavarul* explored these topics in two parts: instructions on how family life was to be lived and the essence of proper guidance for children.

In Part 1, it expounded on "Precepts for Families" and in Part 2, it provided a brief discussion of the "Upbringing of Children." Part 1 begins with the simple but profound counsel, "Love one another" (Jn 13:34), that is, forgive the mistakes and shortcomings of each other. It continues, "The honor and blessing of a family lies in coexisting without any quarrels and to be on good terms with everyone" (Part 1, 1). In contrast, it observes: "How lamentable it is to find a home where there is discord and acrimony between brothers and sisters" (Part 1, 1). A series of suggestions for promoting respectable family life includes directives on religious expectations and practical behaviours. Praying together, celebrating the Lord's day, and fearing God are identified as foundational. Additionally, cultivating spiritual virtues such as acting charitably, living justly, and behaving humbly, complement and complete the religious obligations. These virtues must be reflected in everyday family activities and interactions, such as living frugally

and generously, handling money and debt prudently, working industriously, and dealing patiently with family trials.

Part 2 provided guidelines for the “Upbringing of Children,” in order for parents to impart proper formation. It begins: “Parents, you ought to know that bringing up your children is the most important thing and your primary duty in life” (Part 2, 1). Paralleling Part 1, it specifies both religious and behavioural topics. Parents should teach children at an early age to fear and love the Lord, to pray and become familiar with the Holy Family (Part 2, 1 and 2). They should see to the education of their children by sending them to school when they become of age (Part 2, 6). In matters of discipline, they should avoid extreme strictness and too much leniency (Part 2, 9). Children should be taught the commandments—what is sinful and what is proper; truth and justice should be held in high esteem (Part 2, 10). The theme of respectfulness permeates the instructions, especially as it relates to parents and elders. A surprisingly modern admonition counsels parents that “When they come of age, children should be given full freedom to choose their state of life (Part 2, 14).

These recommendations for building contented family life are fitting reminders that apply to the present day as expressed in the teachings of *AL*, a document concerned with some of the same themes as found in *Chavarul*. Under the rubric of family life, both documents address economic and social worries of families, struggles in raising children, and obstacles to cultivating spiritual practices. *AL* pays attention as well to the emergence of diverse cultures and lack of societal support for families when they are faced with difficult circumstances. At the same time, *AL* addresses specific moral norms of the day concerned with new questions on the substance of marriage law: what qualifies as Christian marriage, what causes for nullity are acceptable, and what are the differences between ideal and actual practices regarding marriage.¹ In light of today’s complex questions, effectively accompanying married couples requires listening to them and involving them in discernment about issues touching their lives. Also, in preparing seminarians, reflection with families should help lead them to faith-filled and

¹Msgr. John A. Alesandro, “How Is This Newness Read by Canon Lawyers?,” in *Amoris Laetitia: A New Momentum for Moral Formation and Pastoral Practice*, ed. Grant Gallicho and James F. Keenan, SJ (New York and Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2018), 48–60.

sensible pastoral decisions. It means orienting seminarians to the realities of family life—the pains and struggles as well as the joys and rewards.

Though the overall content of AL is not focused on seminary formation as such, it contains several passages (#203 and 204) that are so ordered. It recommends that “Seminarians should receive a more extensive interdisciplinary, and not merely doctrinal, formation in the areas of engagement and marriage” (#203). The backgrounds of many seminarians have not included adequate opportunities for psychological growth and for development of affective maturity,² both of which are required for successful family ministry. To make available the type of formation needed, AL asserts that “It is important for families to be part of the seminary process and priestly life, since they help to reaffirm these and to keep them well grounded in reality” (#203). It explains that seminarians should combine time in the seminary with time in parishes where they encounter the concrete circumstances of family life. Moreover, AL continues, “The presence of lay people, families and especially the presence of women in priestly formation, promotes an appreciation of the diversity and complementarity of the different vocations in the Church” (#203). AL includes another facet of formation for family advocates who can draw upon their practical experience and keep pastoral initiatives grounded in real situations. This interaction can happen with individual lay members and on committees oriented toward families. These approaches to family life ministry complement the ministry of priests (#204).

In a sense, the entire content of AL is pertinent to marriage and family life. Chapters three and four are dedicated to “The vocation of the family” and “Love in marriage;” they treat the positive elements of family life, such as the benefits of companionship and the joys of children, as well as instances of suffering and distress. Chapter eight, “Guiding, discerning and integrating weakness,” describes the complicated situations that arise in determining the causes of marriage issues, including practices and problems that are exacerbated within and between families—a concern more prevalent in some countries than

²A basic definition of affective maturity is “the ability to know what one feels, express those feelings, and manage them appropriately through the psychological phases and/or stages from adolescence into adulthood.” From Gerard J. McGlone and Len Sperry, *The Inner Life of Priests* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 85.

in others. Chapter seven, "Towards a better education of children" parallels exactly the topic of the "upbringing of children" in *Chavarul*. In light of these and other serious matters related to the complicated nature of family ministry, it is understandable that preparation for this ministry deserves full attention.

How Each Area of Formation Incorporates Aspects of Family Ministry

Using the resources of the *Chavarul* and AL, the next task is to consider how issues associated with family ministry are dealt with in each area of formation. In addition to the two presenting documents, other church statements deal with the requirements of this subject.³ The foundation of all priestly formation promotes the integral growth of the seminarian and allows for the integration of human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral formation. The newest universal document on seminaries, *The Gift of Priestly Vocation (Ratio)*,⁴ affirms this position: "The concept of integral formation is of the greatest importance, since it is the whole person, with all that he is and all that he possesses, who will be at the Lord's service in the Christian community." The passage continues, "It is necessary to adopt an integrated pedagogical model in order to reach this objective: a journey that allows the formative community to cooperate with the action of the Holy Spirit, ensuring a proper balance between the different dimensions of formation" (*Ratio* #89).

Today, seminaries make use of suitable approaches as they address each area of formation related to family life. Spiritual and intellectual formation have long functioned as mainstays of preparation for priesthood. Human formation, a relatively new and indispensable dimension, has evolved with varying degrees of refinement. The pastoral area has been required for some time and is now being further

³These universal church documents pertaining to seminary formation are: *Optatam Totius* (OT), Decree on Priestly Training, Vatican II Document, 1965; *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (PDV), I Will Give You Shepherds, Pope John Paul II, 1992; *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis (Ratio)*, The Gift of the Priestly Vocation, 2016; and national directives on Priestly Formation.

⁴The most recent edition of the *Ratio* was published in 2016 and promulgated by the Congregation for the Clergy. A previous edition was published in 1970 and revised in 1985.

developed with emphasis on cultural formation. In India, Dharmaram College provides a clear example of cultural adaptation of these universal guidelines. According to its mission, “Dharmaram aims at educating people who are prepared to commit themselves to the service of the Church and the world, which is accomplished through a holistic, spiritual, intellectual and cultural formation.”⁵ This statement expresses the same intent as found in major church documents. The content of these areas is articulated in the mission of Dharmaram with slightly different terminology, and at the same time comprises the holistic model specified by Pope St John Paul II in *Pastores Dabo Vobis*.

The Purpose of Human Formation and Content Related to Family Life

The focus now turns to explaining how preparation for family ministry is incorporated in each dimension of formation. Human formation represents the most noteworthy change in seminary programs since Vatican II. It is an area that contributes significantly to the ultimate goal of all formation and is especially meaningful relative to the way it affects ministry to families. It is intended to help seminarians become more Christ-like and able to communicate effectively with the people they meet in pastoral situations. Pope St John Paul II expresses the principle in this way:

The priest, who is called to be a ‘living image’ of Jesus Christ, head and shepherd of the Church, should seek to reflect in himself, as far as possible, the human perfection which shines forth in the incarnate Son of God and which is reflected with particular liveliness in his attitudes toward others as we see narrated in the Gospels (PDV 43).

The words most often repeated from this passage demonstrate its importance: “In order that this ministry may be humanly as credible and acceptable as possible, it is important that the priest should mold his human personality in such a way that it becomes a bridge and not an obstacle for others in their meeting with Jesus Christ the Redeemer of humanity” (PDV 43). The rationale for the development of essential human qualities is amplified by rapid cultural changes experienced almost everywhere. Since each culture has its own characteristic form and transforms at different rates, adjustment problems are created for

⁵Website accessed on November 5, 2018 <http://www.dharmaram.in>. The name “Dharmaram” is a combination of two Sanskrit words, dharma (virtue) and aram (garden), which together mean “garden of virtues.”

those who give and receive ministry. Common to many settings are the breakdown of family systems, lack of societal support for marriage and families, loss of religious sensibilities, and excessive use of technology. Responses to these circumstances require seminarians to develop human qualities that correspond to the concerns. This may mean finding different ways to establish contact with families who do not regularly attend services by using new forms of communication and adapting ordinary religious activities to culturally unique settings, as well as providing material support for those in need.

These views about human development are reaffirmed in the *Ratio*, which links the goal of achieving human growth and affective maturity to celibacy aimed at living a true and responsible love. By exemplifying the commitment to mature love as a celibate person, the priest can offer an example of fidelity and steadfastness to those in the married state. While each country and each seminary has a particular way of stating these goals, the expectations for human development are comprehensive. Seminarians need to acquire the virtues and qualities proper to a priestly life of service by fostering their own physical, psychological, and moral wellbeing and then assisting others along the same path. Their behaviour and motivation is to be directed toward the ultimate goal of bringing the message of the Gospel to all they meet (*Ratio* #94). To be authentic evangelizers, they must demonstrate their capacity to recognize the needs and values of the people they serve.

Recalling the necessity of affective maturity as identified in *AL*, the enormous task of developing this quality belongs to formators and, most importantly, to seminarians themselves. Formation faculty, in consultation with those who have first-hand knowledge of family life, need to design classroom learning and practical experiences that promote maturity, integrity, morality, and responsibility among seminarians. Indispensable personal virtues for this task take into account moral sensibility, self-awareness, and prudential judgement. The qualities that accompany these virtues include personal maturity, interpersonal skills, an aptitude for ministry, and common sense.

An added dimension, expressed clearly and emphatically in *Chavarul* and in *AL*, is that the outcome of human formation must be readily apparent to families who must be treated with honesty, justice, generosity, joy, and peace. If future priests grow in these virtues and qualities, they will be more likely to convey those ideals as they

evangelize parents and children. On a personal level, they must not only behave according to their state in life, but they must also translate that behaviour into the pastoral care they provide. If one possesses prudential judgement and interpersonal skills, they should be capable teachers by word and example—in homilies and in ordinary exchanges with parishioners.

The Purpose of Spiritual Formation and Content Related to Family Life

Spiritual formation has always been a fundamental component of seminary programs and has particular relevance for family ministry. It usually incorporates communal spiritual exercises such as the Eucharist and Liturgy of the Hours, as well as the individual religious practices of receiving the Sacrament of Penance and spiritual direction, and engaging in personal meditative prayer. This area of formation has a dual purpose: it strengthens and expands the spiritual life of the seminarian and it prepares the future priest to lead the community in prayer and in teaching about the spiritual riches of the faith. This understanding is expressed by Pope St John Paul II: “The life of intimacy with God, prayer and contemplation are intended to lead to a life of service to the people of God, offered with pastoral charity” (PDV #45–48). He further explains that spiritual formation should assist seminarians in developing a deeper relationship and communion with God. It should be structured for their ministry so that they can convey to the faithful the fundamental values and demands of the spiritual life as they develop a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Other documents communicate a similar message. *Optatam Totius* (hereafter OT) points out that the purpose of spiritual formation goes beyond personal holiness for the seminarian and calls for praying with and for families and teaching them, especially children, how to pray. This intention corresponds with the directives of AL in that formation should enable the future priest to listen, accompany, and engage the Catholic community in discussions of their faith.⁶ The *Ratio* emphasizes that spiritual formation should “be focused on personal union with Christ, born of and nourished in a particular way by prolonged and silent prayer” and “be directed at nourishing and sustaining

⁶Katarina Schuth, “*Amoris Laetitia* in Priestly and Seminary Formation,” in *Amoris Laetitia: A New Momentum for Moral Formation and Pastoral Practice*, ed. Grant Gallicho and James F. Keenan, SJ, 41–47.

communion with God and with our brothers and sisters, in the friendship of Jesus the good Shepherd, and with an attitude of docility to the Holy Spirit" (*Ratio* #101).

The content of both focal documents featured here also reflects the significance of spiritual formation. In the *Chavarul*, Part 1 concentrates on spiritual exercises that enhance family life. As previously noted, it names religious practices parents are expected to cultivate in their children: praying together, celebrating the Lord's day (Part 1, 3, 22, 23), and fearing God (Part 1, 19). Additionally, fostering spiritual virtues such as acting charitably, living justly, and behaving humbly (Part 1, 5, 14, 17,) are the fruits of these religious exercises. Part 2 is concerned more with practical matters, but it also offers specific spiritual admonitions: parents are directed to teach children to fear and love the Lord, to pray and become familiar with the Holy Family (Part 2, 1 and 2), and to prepare them for confession (Part 1, 8). Children are advised to respect their parents and elders (Part 2, 16).

The content of AL focuses even more on spiritual formation and family practices (it contains fifty-eight references to spirituality). Early in the document it identifies the home as a crucial place for religious exercises:

A family's living space could turn into a domestic church, a setting for the Eucharist, the presence of Christ seated at its table. We can never forget the image found in the Book of Revelation, where the Lord says: 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me' (Rev 3:20). Here we see a home filled with the presence of God, common prayer and every blessing (#15).

In later passages, AL emphasizes family spirituality, prayer and participation in the Sunday Eucharist. Couples are encouraged to meet regularly to promote growth in their spiritual life (#223). Pastors are admonished to counsel families to nurture their faith by means of frequent confession, spiritual direction and occasional retreats, as well as family prayer (#227). Chapter Nine (AL #313–324), "The Spirituality of Marriage and the Family" is dedicated entirely to spiritual formation. It suggests numerous practices for developing a spiritual life and it addresses topics similar to the *Chavarul*, notably on teaching children to pray. It identifies some of the positive effects of prayer,

With a few simple words, this moment of prayer can do immense good for our families. The various expressions of popular piety are a treasure of spirituality for many families. The family's communal journey of prayer culminates by sharing together in the Eucharist, especially in the context of the Sunday rest (#318).

AL conveys the message that it is a profound spiritual experience to contemplate loved ones with the eyes of God and to see Christ in them (#323). The positive effects of the spiritual preparation of seminarians takes into account not only their own growth, but the many fruitful pathways to a meaningful spirituality communicated to families.

The Purpose of Intellectual Formation and Content Related to Family Life

Intellectual formation is most effective in addressing ministry to families when it is integrated with other areas of formation and cognizant of pastoral implications. Several documents reinforce this concept and address the many ways this goal can be achieved. OT stipulates the following: "All the forms of training, spiritual, intellectual, disciplinary, are to be ordered with concerted effort towards this pastoral end." Spiritual training should incorporate the findings of psychology and pedagogy, and also "The spiritual training should be closely connected with the doctrinal and pastoral" (Section III). Further, OT specifies: Philosophical and theological disciplines are essential elements of priestly formation and they "must make connection between philosophy and the true problems of life" (Section V). The association here incorporates life issues and both human and pastoral formation. Similarly, U.S. bishops affirm "the reciprocal relationship between spiritual and intellectual formation. The intellectual life nourishes the spiritual life, but the spiritual life also opens vistas of understanding ... Intellectual formation is integral to what it means to be human" (PPF, #136).

Beyond identifying the connections among areas of formation, several academic disciplines are linked to formation topics raised in AL and reinforced in the *Ratio*. Related to the content and method of preaching, OT makes reference to "the heart of the decree" as the ministry of the word, of worship and of the parish; it affirms that all forms of training "are to be ordered with concerted efforts towards this pastoral end" (Section III). The U.S. bishops state that intellectual formation is to culminate in a deepened understanding of the mysteries

of faith that is pastorally oriented toward effective priestly ministry, especially preaching. They believe that the overall goal is to prepare a candidate who is “widely knowledgeable about the human condition, deeply engaged in a process of understanding divine revelation, and adequately skilled in communicating his knowledge to as many people as possible” (PPF, #138). These admonitions relate closely to the concerns articulated in the *Chavarul* and AL.

The content of Moral Theology is associated with similar issues taken up in the two primary documents. Almost every seminary requires courses pertinent to modern families. Basic moral principles are enunciated in Fundamental Moral Theology, as well as in courses on Christian Virtues, Sexual Morality, and Contemporary Social Issues. A problem frequently voiced about these courses is that they fail to adequately take into account the perspectives of men and women who live the reality of marriage and family life. Some faculty are unaware of the understandings, insights, and complications that arise from church teachings for those who are married; they neglect to discuss problems in a way that explains church teaching and at the same time does not dismiss, but supports, their concerns. In OT, the challenge is recognized:

The grace to be a shepherd comes with ordination. That grace, however, calls for the priest’s personal commitment to develop the knowledge and skills to teach and preach well, to celebrate the sacraments both properly and prayerfully, and to respond to people’s needs as well as to take initiatives in the community that holy leadership requires (Section 4).

The language of “learning” is applied in AL as an intellectual concept concerned with growth in family relationships between spouses and between parents and children. Mothers are given special credit as original teachers: “Mothers often communicate the deepest meaning of religious practice in the first prayers and acts of devotion that their children learn... Without mothers, not only would there be no new faithful, but the faith itself would lose a good part of its simple and profound warmth” (#174). The *Ratio* expresses concepts in more academic terms. It asserts that the goals of intellectual formation must enable seminarians “to enter into fruitful dialogue with the contemporary world” and allow them “to proclaim the gospel message to the people of our own day in a way that is credible and can be understood” (#116). These directives indicate that “a solid competence in philosophy and theology, along with a more general educational

preparation” is needed if future priests are to deal with the issues of the present time and the culture in which current parishioners live (#116). The ultimate goal of intellectual formation is to ensure the readiness of seminarians for ministry, especially in the realm of family, the main themes of both the *Chavarul* and AL.

The Purpose of Pastoral Formation and Content Related to Family Life

Since Vatican II, pastoral formation has gained prominence. It is the most natural and direct in content and characteristics that unify the whole of formation dealing with family ministry. Seminaries generally require courses in Pastoral Theology/Skills, Homiletics, Moral Theology, and Canon Law, and also training through Sacramental and Liturgical Practica. Some of these studies are classroom oriented and many others incorporate field education experiences where the course material is applied in diverse pastoral settings. Continuing the tradition, the *Ratio* specifies the purpose of direct contact of the faithful with the seminarian, who is “...to acquire the inner freedom to live the apostolate as service, able to see the work of God in the hearts and lives of the people” (#119). Then he “will begin to see himself as a group leader and to be present as a man of communion. He will do so by listening and carefully discerning situations and by cooperating with others and encouraging their “ministeriality”” (#119).

Other documents also accentuate the role of pastoral experiences in seminary formation. OT insists that all aspects of formation be directed to pastoral ends: “The whole training of the students should have as its object to make them true shepherds of souls after the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, teacher, priest and shepherd” (Section VI). This pastoral aim should have precise content and characteristics that unify and give specificity to the programs that prepare future priests. Pope St John Paul II endorsed this position, “The whole formation imparted to candidates for the priesthood aims at preparing them to enter into communion with the charity of Christ the good shepherd. Hence their formation in its different aspects must have a fundamentally pastoral character” (PDV 57).

In accord with the content of *Chavarul*, other church directives reinforce the responsibility of developing pastoral courses involving family ministry. In AL, Pope Francis treats various pastoral perspectives that are aimed at forming solid and fruitful families according to God’s plan. He regrets “that ordained ministers often lack the training needed

to deal with the complex problems currently facing families" (#202). The Pope adds, "the psycho-affective formation of seminarians needs to be improved, and families need to be more involved in formation for ministry. Faculty need to intentionally reinforce the responsibility of future priests to address realistic concerns of adults and children."⁷ Unfortunately, psycho-affective formation is usually not treated in pastoral courses. Recently the content has been added to Human Formation, but usually the instruction is not provided by laity and so may lack necessary family perspectives. How to provide sensitive support for families, especially for children, takes years to learn (AL #253), and accentuates the complexity of refining and improving pastoral formation for families.

Among pastoral areas, seminaries commonly include courses that address the ministry of the word of God in preaching and worship. Many biblical references to families are noted in AL (e.g., #17, 28, 149, 156) and can readily be accessed. Faculty need to reinforce the responsibility of future priests to address in their homilies realistic concerns of families. They must concentrate on the needs of adults and children in ministries of worship, prayer, and celebration of the sacraments, and in other liturgical functions that are part of pastoral practice.⁸ One of the most difficult pastoral situations to deal with is the death of loved ones. These occasions require sensitive support of families (AL #253), which accentuates the complexity of pastoral formation and the years it takes to refine and improve it.

Canon Law courses are part of the pastoral curriculum whose central concerns revolve around accompanying abandoned, separated or divorced persons. AL underscores the recent reform of the procedures for marriage annulment and highlights the suffering of children in situations of conflict. It concludes, "Divorce is an evil and the increasing number of divorces is very troubling. Hence, our most important pastoral task with regard to families is to strengthen their love, helping to heal wounds and working to prevent the spread of this drama of our times" (#246). It also deals with situations of marriage between a Catholic and a Christian of another denomination (mixed marriages),

⁷Website accessed on March 21, 2019: <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2016/04/08/160408b.pdf>.

⁸Theological knowledge of the sacraments and prayer are typically found under intellectual formation in Dogmatic/Systematic courses.

and between a Catholic and someone of another religion (disparity of cult) (AL #247). Regarding families with members who have homosexual tendencies, it reaffirms the necessity of respecting them and refraining from any unjust discrimination and every form of aggression or violence (#247). Canon Law also deals with the preparation of the engaged for marriage; accompaniment of couples in the first years of married life, including responsible parenthood; and with certain other complex situations and crises, knowing that “each crisis has a lesson to teach us; we need to learn how to listen for it with the ear of the heart” (#232). Causes of crises in marriage are sometimes misunderstood, possibly caused by delayed affective maturity of the minister or lack of comprehension of the problems.

Another aspect of formation that prepares seminarians for family ministry are pastoral experiences, which have become more common and more diverse in recent years. These placements must be deliberately chosen and reviewed to ensure that changes in demographics and spiritual needs are taken into account. Regular interaction between those who have authority and responsibility for ministry and seminary leaders must focus on sharing information about characteristics and changing dynamics in ministry settings, in seminarians, and in the seminary programs.

Principles Guiding Seminary Formation Applied to Family Ministry

General principles guiding seminary formation are articulated in basic church documents concerned with preparation for priesthood, all of which are cognizant of the importance of family ministry. The examples that follow are relevant to these issues.

1. Seminary programs must integrate all dimensions of formation in order to prepare seminarians for holistic *ministry to families*, making explicit the connection among the human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral aspects.

2. Preparation for ministry must include a thorough knowledge of the Church as it exists wherever the newly ordained will be ministering, that is, *the cultural context in which families live must be understood* in order for the ministry to be beneficial.

3. The beliefs and philosophies, the values and attitudes that constitute *the organization of family life are deeply affected* by the culture of

each country. Thus, cultural sensitivity requires a genuine appreciation of the diversity that marks not only the Catholic Church in each country, but also the diversity that typifies societies more broadly. The approach taken by the Church must show an appreciation for the multifaceted reality of each society.

4. Characteristics such as age, *family life experiences*, previous involvement in parishes, and number of years in formation all make a difference in selecting the most effective approaches in instructional materials and experiences for seminarians.

5. The involvement of laity in all areas of formation for *ministry to families* is necessary and advantageous. In classroom settings, the insights of laity should be included through their personal presence as faculty or guest speakers, through the design and focus of discussions and through the content of the readings assigned.

6. Pastoral formation must incorporate significant scheduled and supervised experiences in parishes and schools, as well as in other places where *families are being served in ministry settings*.

Concluding Remarks

The goal of seminary formation is to prepare priests who are confident of their own way of ministering and at the same time open to learning new methods and engaging with lay faithful in the exercise of ministry. Future priests need to listen to and discern the faith with the people they accompany, using their intellectual acuity, human characteristics, spiritual depth, and pastoral abilities. Each dimension is influential in the challenges of pastoring according to the admonitions of the *Chavarul* and AL. This endeavour engages all the “new pieces” identified as part of adult faith: examining the joys and difficulties of marriage and family, understanding the role of conscience, and taking responsibility for decisions. It certainly requires faculty who will help seminarians form an adult faith of their own, deal with the untidiness of discipleship, and accept the role of conscience in the Christian life, especially as related to married life, sexual relationships, bringing up children, and passing on the Catholic faith to future generations.

For many seminarians, the difficulty with *Amoris Laetitia* is that it is decidedly not a series of answers to questions about the many concerns and struggles of family life, especially those dealing with sexuality and marriage. Rather, it is the challenge of accompanying the faithful in the

process of evangelization by engaging with them in discussion of their concerns and enabling them to discern what is right, that is, helping them to form their consciences on these important issues. This process is difficult for some seminarians and their mentors to accept since it may seem like loss of control. The reception of the document, or failure to do so, is not the same in all cases and places. Some reasons for resistance or acceptance relate to the backgrounds of seminarians, the positions taken by faculty, and the expectations of bishops and religious superiors in charge of seminaries.

Depending on many factors, the teachings of AL are being received and disseminated in seminary formation programs and ongoing formation of priests with greater or lesser enthusiasm. Even within each seminary or presbyterate univocal acceptance is not necessarily discernible. Pope Francis said that he learned a great deal from the bishops through the Synod as they shared their hopes and aspirations, their concerns and challenges. He said that “The Synod process allowed for an examination of the situation of families in today’s world, and thus for a broader vision and a renewed awareness of the importance of marriage and the family” (AL #2).⁹ To the extent that teachings of AL are an integral part of initial and ongoing formation, the more likely will the renewal and rebirth of the church be realized as families feel welcomed and accepted for who they are. These lessons were understood well by those who taught about the *Chavarul* more than a century and a half ago and whose wisdom is still a strong foundation for family ministry today.

⁹Website accessed on November 5, 2018: Pertaining to Chapter six (199–258). <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2016/04/08/160408b.html>.

MARRIAGE PREPARATION PROGRAMME IN LIGHT OF *CHAVARUL* AND *AMORIS LAETITIA*

E. William, MI[♦]

Marriage preparation programme is one of the most effective means to lay the foundation for stable families. Often, the engaged couples lack role models who can educate them to learn about the vision of marriage, purpose of sexuality, and relevance of chaste love. *Chavarul* of St Kuriakose (written 150 years ago) and *Amoris Laetitia* of Pope Francis (2016) speak a lot about education in Christian faith and morals, especially in the field of marriage and family. Chavara says, “A Good Christian family is the image of heaven,”¹ and he continues, “The only sweet consolation for a person experiencing trials and tribulations in the sorrowful valley of this world is to belong to and live in a family where love, order, and peace reign” (*Chavarul*, 9). *Amoris Laetitia* is also concerned with problems in marriage and family since the engaged couples are not able to approach marriage and family issues within the broader framework of an education for love and for mutual self-giving in an age when these topics tend to be trivialized and impoverished.² My paper here presents the relevance

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¹Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Chavarul: Testament of a Loving Father* (Kochi: Chavara Central Secretariat, 2018), 9. Hereafter, *Chavarul*.

²Cfr Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*: Post-synodal apostolic exhortation (Rome: Vatican Publications, 19th March 2016), 280. Hereafter, AL.

William, E. “Marriage Preparation Programme in Light of *Chavarul* and *Amoris Laetitia*.” In *Vocation and Mission of the Family: Reflections on Chavarul and Amoris Laetitia*, edited by Shaji George Kochuthara, 485–502. Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2020.

of appropriate Marriage Preparation Programme (MPP) in light of *Chavarul* and *Amoris Laetitia*.

Relevance of Effective Preparation

Young couples should be like simple shepherds ready to know what they do not know and those already engaged should have the attitude of three wise men to know more and more.³ Simplicity and humility are important virtues the young couples and those engaged should have when they come for MPP. According to the vision of Chavara, education will wipe away all abnormalities including those in marriage. It creates human beings to be unique with personal charisma for establishing equity and justice in the society. It brings a clear and specific vision and attitude, creative plan of action to raise human dignity, and constant and practical efforts to illumine human minds.⁴ It is inevitable for its all-round progress and development.⁵ It includes all, expands its horizon and makes the educated excellent in every aspect of life.⁶ For people denied of education, we have to be educators; for all deprived of right vision of love in marriage, we have to become apostles of implanting genuine love; and for all denied of knowledge, we have to become disseminators of knowledge; for those caught in the grip of old traditions, we have to become heralds of social and family transformation.⁷

Pope Francis, in his Address to the Association of Catholic School Parents, emphasises the relevance of education:

As parents, you are *depositories of the duty and of the primary and inalienable right to educate your children*, and in this regard to give the school positive and constant help with the task. It is your right to demand proper education for your children, an education that is *integral and open to the*

³Cfr Fulton J. Sheen, *Eternal Galilean* (Bombay: The Society of St Paul, 1997), 10 ff.

⁴Mollykutty P.V., "St Kuriakose Elias Chavara: A Unique and Vibrant Educational Visionary of Kerala," in *International Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research* (online) 3, 2 (April–June 2015): 279–287, <http://researchpublish.com/journal/IJSSHR/Issue-2-April-2015-June-2015/0>.

⁵Joseph Varghese Kureethara, "Unique Contributions of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara in Education," <http://kureethara.blogspot.com/2006/10/unique-contributions-of-blessed.html>.

⁶Mollykutty P.V., "St Kuriakose Elias Chavara."

⁷Mollykutty P.V., "St Kuriakose Elias Chavara."

most authentic human and Christian values. It is also your task, however, to ensure that the school is equal to the educational role entrusted to it, particularly when the education it offers claims to be “Catholic.”⁸

According to him, “Solidarity, as a moral virtue and social attitude born of personal conversion, calls for commitment on the part of those responsible for education and formation.”⁹ He continues, “Teachers, who have the challenging task of training children and youth in schools or other settings, should be conscious that their responsibility extends also to the moral, spiritual and social aspects of life. The values of freedom, mutual respect and solidarity can be handed on from a tender age.”¹⁰ Right education will facilitate practical application of the Gospel of Jesus in the areas of marriage, sexuality, family, procreation and education of children and chastity in marriage.

Need for Effective Education in MPP

The Catholic Church has been preparing her children to the sacrament of marriage and family. But still many marriages face crises; divorces are on the rise. 150 years ago, when there was stability of marriage and family compared to the present, Chavara knew there were problems within families and he was concerned about them. He said,

How sad and unfortunate are the families that have no concern about orderliness in their homes? How many of such rich, famous, and respected families have been ruined? How often have the behaviour and attitude of these families led to quarrels, commission of sins, destruction, and death? (*Chavarul*, 9–10).

What about now? Many attempts in educating couples have been introduced, but the problems within the families have increased. In this context, *Chavarul* serves as “rules of conduct for families” (*Chavarul*, 10).

Pope Francis speaks about the need for MPP. Referring to *Relatio Synodi* 2014, # 39, he says,

⁸Pope Francis, *Address to the Association of Catholic School Parents (AGESC)*, Clementine Hall, Saturday, 5 December 2015, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/december/documents/papa-francesco_20151205_agesc.html.

⁹Pope Francis, XLIX World Day Of Peace, “Overcome Indifference and Win Peace,” 8 December 2015, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20151208_messaggio-xlix-giornata-mondiale-pace-2016.html.

¹⁰Pope Francis, “Overcome Indifference and Win Peace,” 6.

The complexity of today's society and the challenges faced by the family require a greater effort on the part of the whole Christian community in preparing those who are about to be married. The importance of the virtues needs to be included. Among these, chastity proves invaluable for the genuine growth of love between persons. In this regard, the Synod Fathers agreed on the need to involve the entire community more extensively by stressing the witness of families themselves and by grounding marriage preparation in the process of Christian initiation by bringing out the connection between marriage, baptism and the other sacraments. The Fathers also spoke of the need for specific programs of marriage preparation aimed at giving couples a genuine experience of participation in ecclesial life and a complete introduction to various aspects of family life (AL 206).

Right education in MPP is needed because "Learning to love someone does not happen automatically, nor can it be taught in a workshop just prior to the celebration of marriage. For every couple, marriage preparation begins at birth" (AL 208). MPP aims at educating for responsible freedom and for maturing their own beliefs and attitudes, to discover their own truth, values, and moral norms, incarnated in the filial love for God and the brotherly love towards others (AL 264). Many elements contribute to furthering this: experience, practical advice, rational thought, and motivations of the faith (AL 128, 133, 137,139).

Being engaged and planning a wedding is both exciting and overwhelming (AL 212). It is because the period of engagement is not only a time to prepare for a wedding day but for a lifetime of marriage.¹¹ Engaged couples tell us that for them it is or was a great help to discuss together how they can begin to put into practice the qualities they want to live out as a married couple.¹² As couples gather together to prepare for marriage, we do not overwhelm them with every single resource from the Catholic Church but give them quality information and MPP should be comprehensive, not be exhaustive or

¹¹Donald Cardinal Wuerl, *Sharing in the Joy of Love in Marriage and Family: A Pastoral Plan to Implement Amoris Laetitia*, Archdiocese of Washington, Produced in collaboration with the Archdiocesan Secretariats for Pastoral Ministry and Social Concerns, Education and Communications, 32, <https://adw.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/PastoralPlan-AmorisLaetitia.pdf/>.

¹²Donald Cardinal Wuerl, *Sharing in the Joy of Love in Marriage and Family...*, 32.

total. We have to be prudent and intentional about the quality and quantity of information.¹³

MPP continues even after marriage through accompaniment of couples in the first years of married life to cultivate responsible parenthood and to face complex situations and crises, knowing that “each crisis has a lesson to teach us; we listen for it with the ear of the heart” (AL 232). Each relationship will have moments of unity and conflict and each couple should be aware of any sources of woundedness or conflict in their relationship. “In any event, if one partner clearly recognizes the other’s weak points, he or she needs to have a realistic trust in the possibility of helping to develop the good points that counterbalance them, and in this way to foster their human growth” (AL 210).

MPP should provide the tools needed to face trials together and thereby prevent problems that might lead to a break-up of the marriage and family. MPP continues in the education of children in schools, parishes and within the family with respect to caring for one another, developing moral virtues, experiencing socialization, and fostering good habits.¹⁴ Couples who come for MPP can be enabled to seize this opportunity to be re-evangelized and encouraged to rediscover the joy and meaning of our Catholic faith.¹⁵

Characteristics of Effective Education in MPP

The characteristics of effective education in MPP are part and parcel of and inherent to every person who decides to enter into marriage and family.

MPP as a Communitarian Education

Education in MPP is a community endeavour. Church is not merely a venue for scanning the sacred pages of the bible by a group of people prepared to educate only the faith, but she has to educate the rules of right conduct within the families because community is a progressive

¹³Cfr Catholic Apostolic Centre, “9 Lessons for marriage preparation from Pope Francis’ *Amoris Laetitia*,” in <https://www.catholicapostolatecenter.org/blog/9-lessons-for-marriage-preparation-from-pope-francis-amoris-laetitia>.

¹⁴Donald Cardinal Wuerl, *Sharing in the Joy of Love in Marriage and Family...*, 32.

¹⁵“*Amoris Laetitia* in Catholic Marriage Preparation,” <http://www.heraldmalaysia.com/news/amoris-laetitia-in-catholic-marriage-preparation/44079/13>.

ground for fathoming and translating the value of the Gospel.¹⁶ Community education should make the young couples to be sure of our presence for them. “We are here for you: We say: ‘Your hopes are ours! Please know that as you set out to love each other and build a life-long marriage together you don’t have to do this alone. We are here for you, and we will journey with you. Your love is contagious and life-giving for us all” (AL 207).

Community education begins from the parents. Chavara says,

Parents, you ought to know that bringing up your children is the most important thing and your primary duty in life Children are sacred treasures entrusted to you by God Almighty. You should also remember that these are the souls that Jesus Christ has entrusted in your hands to sanctify them with His most precious blood and to make them His servants and, thus, to offer them back to Him on the Day of Judgment (*Chavarul*, 33).

In a similar vein Pope Francis points out the significant role parents can play in preparing their children for marriage:

What they received from their family should prepare them to know themselves and to make a full and definitive commitment. What they received from their family should prepare them to know themselves and to make a full and definitive commitment. Those best prepared for marriage are probably those who learned what Christian marriage is from their own parents, who chose each other unconditionally and daily renew this decision (AL 208).

Parents are invited to take their responsibility as ‘first educators.’¹⁷ Francis is not downplaying the role of the school but calling for parents to take their responsibility as ‘first educators’ seriously and reminding education professionals that they must work *with*, and not against the family.¹⁸

¹⁶Manjula Scaria and Binoy Joseph, “St Chavara: A Harbinger of Human Dignity,” *International Journal of Recent Research in Social Sciences and Humanities* (IJRRSSH) 2, 2 (April–June 2015): 195–200, www.paperpublications.org.

¹⁷Breda O’Brien, ed., *Exploring Amoris Laetitia: Opening the Pope’s Love Letter to Families* (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2017), 100.

¹⁸Leonard Franchi, “How *Amoris Laetitia* Reclaims the Role of Family in Education,” <https://cvcomment.org/2016/05/11/how-amoris-laetitia-reclaims-the-role-of-family-in-education/>.

Strong family tries to teach the members to exercise mutual love, respect, and understanding that nourish family life. Chavara reminds the parents to love and respect each other: "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."¹⁹ He reminds parents that spiritual nourishment to their children is unavoidable.²⁰ Parents shall keep a close watch in the educational pursuits of their children. It must be ensured frequently that they are not trapped into undesirable friendships (*Chavarul*).

We must confidently and patiently develop organic family pastoral care (AL 200, 202, 207, 208, 227, 229, 230) because salvation must be the ultimate aim of a family.²¹ For this, personal closeness and family encounters, small groups and communities are more beneficial than convoked assemblies and crowded meetings. With this aim, it is necessary to promote the families themselves as protagonists and their missionary responsibility (families which go forth), while emphasizing the cooperation of movements and ecclesial associations.

Families are called to a primary and vital mission of education. Families are the first place where the values of love and fraternity, togetherness and sharing, concern and care for others are lived out and handed on. They are also the privileged milieu for transmitting the faith, beginning with those first simple gestures of devotion which mothers teach their children.²²

For Francis, the family is the primary locus of education and it is the school of good living, one that provides the training ground for the development of good habits: "Without the conscious, free and valued repetition of certain patterns of good behaviour, moral education does not take place" (AL 266).

¹⁹Letters, in *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara*, Vol. IV, IX/6, 114, as cited in Ann Elizabeth, "Kuriakose Elias Chavara: Visionary and Karmayogi of Families," *Herald of the East* 10, 1 (2014): 119–132.

²⁰Letters, IX/6, 113.

²¹Clement Perumbully, "Chavarul in Today's Context of Families," <https://stchavaraforyouth.wordpress.com/2018/02/24/chavarul-in-todays-context-of-families/>.

²²Pope Francis, XLIX World Day Of Peace, "Overcome Indifference and Win Peace," 8 December 2015 (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana), 6.

Together with the family, the role of parish family is equally paramount in this preparation of the young couples to marriage, and because marriage preparation is “just the beginning” (AL 218). Pope Francis sees a preparation ultimately “parish-based”²³ and underlying the importance of parishes, he says, “The main contribution to the pastoral care of families is offered by the parish, which is the family of families, where small communities, ecclesial movements and associations live in harmony.”²⁴ Greater effort on the part of the parish in our shared responsibility should be there to welcome and accompany families.

[It is] essential that both parish and the State continue to work with each other to provide the necessary supports to strengthen marriage and the family. Investment in children and young people and in the development of responsible, respectful, caring and loving relationships between couples, whether parents or not, and between parents and their children, is a social responsibility and it makes good economic sense.²⁵

MPP as Education to Prayer

An essential part of MPP is an education to prayer. Pope Francis teaches us that MPP calls us to be ‘humble and realistic’ (AL 36) and always to trust in God’s grace. For the lifelong commitment of marriage to succeed, it must be rooted in the daily prayer of husband and wife, which begins with the marriage preparation. Personal time of prayer and reflection ensures each spouse’s growing in relationship with Christ, while prayer as a couple unifies the spouses, improves their communication with one another, and grounds their relationship in Christ. When both personal and communal prayer are alive within a marriage, the relationship of husband and wife is being revitalized and strengthened in such a way that it can reflect the love of the Trinity and pour out into society as a whole. Those who help prepare a couple for marriage should help them experience these moments of prayer, which prove to be beneficial (AL 216). Family prayer and acts of devotion can be more effective than more formal processes (AL 288). This is part of

²³Sarah Mac Donald, “Accord to Review Programs in Light of *Amoris Laetitia*,” <https://www.catholicireland.net/accord-review-programmes-light-amoris-laetitia/>, 15 February 2017.

²⁴*Relatio Finalis* (2015), 77, as cited in *Amoris Laetitia*, 202.

²⁵Mac Donald, “Accord to Review Programs in Light of *Amoris Laetitia*.”

the 'orderly process of handing on the faith' which we need today more than ever (AL 287).

Personal and communal prayer leads the couples to marital and family spirituality, which "is made up of thousands of small but real gestures" (AL 315). The Pope clearly states that "those who have deep spiritual aspirations should not feel that the family detracts from their growth in the life of the Spirit, but rather sees it as a path which the Lord is using to lead them to the heights of mystical union" (AL 316). Everything, "moments of joy, relaxation, celebration, and even sexuality can be experienced as a sharing in the full life of the resurrection" (AL 317). He then speaks of prayer in the light of Easter, of the spirituality of exclusive and free love in the challenge and the yearning to grow old together, reflecting God's fidelity (AL 319). Pope Francis speaks about prayer in terms of the spirituality of *care, consolation and incentive*: "All family life is a 'shepherding' in mercy. Each of us, by our love and care, leaves a mark on the life of others... It is a profound "spiritual experience to contemplate our loved ones with the eyes of God and to see Christ in them" (AL 322, 323).

It is the first responsibility of the parent to introduce children to prayer and spiritual practices that nourish the soul.²⁶ Family prayer is the soul of the family and each member has to be at home in the evening for family prayers.²⁷ In the evening, after the Angelus, say the family prayers in common. "Do not interrupt this routine because of some important guests being in your house at that time. Do not fail to observe this regular feature on any account" (*Chavarul* 30). Chavara teaches us to overcome the hardships of life with the power of prayer, with the grace to trust God in crucial moments such as financial crisis, choosing the right vocation of life and impending job opportunities. Prayer helps the couples to receive the grace to be obedient to the will of God and to lead an ideal Christian life built on God's Word.²⁸ Prayer helps the couple to have a cordial communication among family members, leading them to mutual sharing, understanding and acceptance. On the occasions of family get-together, prayer, meals, recreation, etc., the anxieties and aspirations of individual members

²⁶Perumbully, "*Chavarul* in Today's Context of Families."

²⁷*Letters*, IX/6, 114.

²⁸St Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Novena Prayers* (Kakkanad, Kochi: Chavara Central Secretariat).

are shared, discussed, and resolved. This will save a family from many complications and burdens.²⁹

MPP as a Journey in Discernment

It is an undeniable fact that MPP is a journey in discernment. It continues in the lifelong project of building the future together, accepting one another as unfinished and needing to grow (AL 218). This journey is a dynamic journey of two drivers of life-vehicle with four wheels of invocation, evocation, provocation and convocation.³⁰ On this journey, the learning couples *invoke* the deep longing for their indissoluble and uninterrupted union and they choose what they love and love what they choose in God: a vocation, a wife or husband, a child, a neighbourhood; they *evoke* in them the inherent qualities available in and for each other so that many things will be learned, about each other, likes and dislikes, wider families, and children; they *provoke* a sense of getting disturbed so that they are ready to enter into marriage with courage and hope and the real secret of life is to learn to love the givenness of their life to each other; and they *convoke* the whole assembly to take the responsibility for any failure that would be there in the future.³¹

This journey into marriage preparation is a quality journey. It is a quiet and gentle reflection on all that happens to us, trying to discern how and when the Lord is speaking to us, providing us with all that we need, even in the simplest of ways. And all of this takes place within the realities of daily family life. Discernment needs time and patience, a readiness to talk over together the events of a day and the precious moments of clarity and grace that can suddenly appear. Discernment is not about discovering what more we can get out of this life, but about recognizing how we can better accomplish the mission entrusted to us at our baptism³² and how they are renewed and sustained as a couple and as a family. There is a lot of discernment process in the upbringing of the children. *Chavarul* is very important in this regard as it delineates the various rules in the upbringing of children (*Chavarul*, 1–15).

²⁹Elizabeth, “Kuriakose Elias Chavara.”

³⁰Cfr E. William, *I am your Neighbour: A New Way Being Pastoral to the Needy* (Bangalore: St Camillus Publications), 2019.

³¹William, *I am your Neighbour: A New Way being Pastoral to the Needy*.

³²Cfr Francis, *Gaudete et Exultate*, 174.

Elements of Effective Education in MPP

Here are some of the elements which are to be educated to the engaged couples during the MPP. These are practical applications of the appropriate education in MPP.

5.1. Education to Call to Holiness

The call to holiness is the hallmark of MPP. This fact was already outlined in *Gaudete et Exsultate*, where Pope Francis says:

I like to contemplate the holiness present in the patience of God's people: in those parents who raise their children with immense love, in those men and women who work hard to support their families, in the sick, in elderly religious who never lose their smile. Very often it is a holiness found in our next door neighbours, those who, living in our midst, remind us of God's presence.³³

He continues by saying that this holiness, to which we are all called, grows through daily actions, the small gestures which are the building blocks of family life. Such holiness is the work of the Holy Spirit.³⁴

Chavara relates holiness in attending Holy Qurbana, in listening to sermons, in reading good books and in visiting the sick, especially the poor ones and in exercising charity in general.³⁵ For Chavara, holiness is rooted in doing the will of God; it is clinging on to hope amidst miseries of life and to glorify God; it has to begin in the early childhood so that the couples will be enriched with Divine knowledge and the gift of internal prayer.³⁶ Holiness should start from childhood onwards through small gestures of reciting prayers and these should be educated in MPP in order to recheck about their devotion. Holiness, practiced through devotion before marriage, will be the one that continues afterwards and therefore there is need for education to holiness (*Chavarul*, 34).

³³*Gaudete et Exsultate*, 7.

³⁴Cardinal Vincent Nichols, "Support and Preparation for Marriage in *Amoris Laetitia*," Keynote Address given at World Meeting of Families in Dublin on 23rd August 2018, <https://rcdow.org.uk/cardinal/addresses/support-and-preparation-for-marriage-in-light-of-amoris-laetitia/>

³⁵"*Chavarul* for Parents," <http://www.chavaraculturalcentre.org/chavarul.html>

³⁶Chavara, *Novena Prayers*...

Education to Marriage and Family as Vocation

Young couples are to be helped to understand marriage and family as vocation. MPP encompasses formal marriage preparation which should help couples discover the dignity of the married vocation. AL asks priests and other pastoral workers, in preaching and teaching catechesis, to propose the Christian concept of marriage in its entirety (AL 303, 307). We strive to offer a clear vision to those who seek to be married, which includes how marriage is rooted in the love of God and how it is an expression of the faithfulness and fruitfulness of God's love. We have a vision of marriage being intertwined with the love Christ has for his Church, a love which includes sacrifice, forgiveness and healing. Our teaching is a rich vision that informs all that we want to share with those who are starting out on married life.³⁷

According to Chavara, the renewal of both the Church and society depend a great deal upon the revitalization of family, which is the smallest unit of any society. The constitution of a good family would lead to the development of a healthier society and value-based nation because family is the *sanctum sanctorum* of a society.³⁸ It is with this intention that he invited family members to cultivate love, order, and peace, even if that would call for sacrificing personal convenience and comfort. Chavara had high regard for family. According to him, family has the place in the redemptive plan of God, in the mission of the Church, and in social networking.³⁹

This wider vision of marriage shapes all of the work of MPP. The constant tradition of the Church teaches that marriage is an indissoluble union, which ends only by the death of one of the spouses. CCC talks about the "unequivocal insistence on the indissolubility of the marriage bond."⁴⁰ The love of the spouses requires, of its very nature, unity and indissolubility, which embraces their entire life: 'so they are no longer two, but one flesh.'⁴¹ "The deepest reason is found in the fidelity of God to his covenant like that of Christ to his Church."⁴² It is on these

³⁷Vincent Nichols, "Support and Preparation for Marriage in *Amoris Laetitia*."

³⁸Elizabeth, "Kuriakose Elias Chavara."

³⁹Saju Chackalackal, "Saint Chavara—Champion of Families," <http://lightoftruth.in/column/saint-chavara-champion-families/>

⁴⁰*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1615.

⁴¹*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1615, 1644.

⁴²Sean Wales, "Communion for the Divorced and Remarried?" *Asian Horizons* 7, 1 (2013): 188–203, at 194.

unmovable foundations that the Church proclaims her immutable doctrine, enshrined in Canon 915 of CIC. AL confirms the traditional doctrine: Christian marriage is indissoluble, grounded in fidelity, fruitfulness, freedom and totality (AL 86, 123–124, 291–292). Indissolubility, more than a yoke, is a gift to be appreciated and cultivated (AL 62); divorce is an evil, and its increase is causing concern (AL 246, 291); the growing acceptance of divorce poses another threat to the family, and the same-sex marriage threatens ‘the family’ and could ‘disfigure God’s plan for creation.’⁴³

MPP is aimed at marriage as a covenantal relationship. From Trent to Vatican II, the simple answer was the marriage bond understood as a life-long contract. The language of contract leans heavily towards the legalistic, financial, dynastic aspects of a union. Even so, the mere fact of making a contract did not remove the possibility of sin, of breaking the contract or of setting it aside. With Vatican II, there is a substantive shift in the Western theology of marriage: to use a sort of theological shorthand, from contract to covenant. Whereas a contract is a minimalist legal device, a covenant is a maximalist union in love—“intimate partnership of Life and Love.”⁴⁴ Whereas a contract is focused on rights and obligations (“rendering the debt”), a covenant of love is personalistic and focuses on gifting one another.⁴⁵

Though Pope Francis does not speak about marriage in terms of covenant, he still speaks about the dignity of marriage. He says, “Marriage is not simply a convenient relationship, but it is a serious but heroic and joyful, and sanctifying undertaking ‘until death do us part’” (AL 214). They should be helped to perceive the attraction of a complete union that elevates and perfects the social dimension of existence, gives sexuality its deepest meaning, and benefits children by offering them the best context for their growth and development (AL 215).

Education to Chaste Love

AL sees authentic human and Christian love as the only force capable of saving marriage and the family. It must be placed at the

⁴³Cfr *Amoris Laetitia*, 297–298, 301, 305. Cfr also Samuel Osborne, “Pope Francis says gender theory is part of a ‘global war’ on marriage and family,” <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/pope-francis-catholic-church-gender-theory-global-war-traditional-marriage-family-a7341226.html/>.

⁴⁴Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 85.

⁴⁵Wales, “Communion for the Divorced and Remarried?” 195.

centre of the family (CS 48–49; AL 67) and Pope Francis himself forcefully stresses the fact that conjugal love by its very nature defines the partners in a richly encompassing and lasting union (AL 123), precisely within that “mixture of enjoyment and struggles, tensions and repose, pain and relief, satisfactions and longings, annoyances and pleasures” (AL 126) which indeed make up a marriage. *Amoris Laetitia* presents love as a choice, decision and commitment.⁴⁶

Following St Paul’s hymn of love (1 Cor 13:4–7), the Pope says that conjugal love is authentic if the spouse appreciates the partner and wants mutual good. It is oblation and spiritual; but it also includes affection, tenderness, intimacy, passion, erotic desire, pleasure given and received, and openness to procreation and educating children. It is a totalizing friendship, and, as such, it prefigures and anticipates the mystical union with God and represents a particular path of holiness, a specific vocation. The couple’s relationship is a permanent path marked by the beauty and joy of being loved and loving, but also by faults and sins, difficulties and suffering. It should be considered with realism and confidence, as shared continuous growth and development, realized through small steps, with practical exercises, patience and persevering (AL 266–267). “Love is thus a kind of craftsmanship” (AL 221), just as the education of children is (AL 16, 271, 273).

In the same line of AL, *Chavarul* also brought about the relevance of love. Family is that interior source which provides a spirit of intimacy to relationships. It functions as a forum to give and take love.⁴⁷ Chavara reminds the families: “Be charitable to each other. Love one another and forgive mutually each one’s faults and shortcomings. The honor and good fortune of a family lies in avoiding all factions and living in perfect amity and peace with all.”⁴⁸ All are called to be humble and to work toward greater perfection (AL 325), towards “transformation of love” (AL 163), which means there is no guarantee that we will feel the same way all through life. Yet if a couple can come up with a shared and lasting life project, they can love one another and live until death, enjoying an enriching intimacy.

⁴⁶Herald Malaysia Online, “*Amoris Laetitia* in Catholic Marriage Preparation,” <http://www.heraldmalaysia.com/news/amoris-laetitia-in-catholic-marriage-preparation/44079/13>.

⁴⁷Elizabeth, “Kuriakose Elias Chavara.”

⁴⁸*Letters*, IX/6, 103–104.

Education to Sexuality

In an age when sexuality tends to be trivialized and impoverished, sound sexuality education needs to be carried out “within the broader framework of an education for love, for mutual self-giving” (AL 280) which is expressed only in marriage through *opus naturae* antecedent (those attractions, feelings, gestures and expressions proper to the couples by nature), *opus hominis* proper (that intimate experience of the couple which leads to sexual union) and *opus naturae* posterior (those acts proper to the child from the moment of conception), in order to avoid every form of sexual aberrations outside marriage like premarital and extramarital sex. It is because *opus naturae antecedent*, *opus hominis proper* and *opus nature posterior* are that unitive act leading to procreative act proper only in the context of marriage.

Sexuality education addresses the gift of the body.⁴⁹ In marriage, the couples live out their love very profoundly and even more powerfully through their bodies: there is a power circuit indeed (*opus naturae antecedent*). Young couples need to know the treasure of Christian wisdom about love, learning, for example, the resonance of the phrase ‘This is my body, given for you’ (*opus hominis proper*). As a result, there is the conception of a new child which is blessed, and a blessing linked to your identity and intimacy (*opus naturae posterior*).⁵⁰

In MPP, we seek to balance the call to love each other with the innate call to welcome the gift of children. There is, of course, fruitfulness in both of these forms of generous love (AL 151). Children are divine investments, and they shall be brought up in the best way possible and all kinds of protection shall be extended to them (*Chavarul*). As Pope Francis says, “The time of engagement becomes a time of initiation into surprise, the surprise of the spiritual gifts with which the Lord, through the Church, enriches the horizon of the new family that stands ready to live in his blessing.”⁵¹

Sexuality education aims at love’s fruitfulness and procreation, which is against every type of contraceptive. It speaks in a profoundly spiritual and psychological manner about welcoming new life (which is

⁴⁹Vincent Nichols, “Support and Preparation for Marriage in *Amoris Laetitia*.”

⁵⁰Vincent Nichols, “Support and Preparation for Marriage in *Amoris Laetitia*.”

⁵¹General Audience, St Peter’s Square, 27 May 2015, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20150527_udienza-generale.html/.

against abortion), about the waiting period of pregnancy, about the love of a mother and a father in being gifted with a child (which is against artificial reproductive technologies). The family is the setting in which new life is not only born, but also welcomed as a gift from God. Pope Francis encourages mothers to experience and treasure the joys and hopes of pregnancy: “With great affection, I urge all future mothers to let nothing rob you of the interior joy of motherhood. Your child deserves your happiness.”⁵² The love of a father and mother is critical. It is manifested in their love for the child as well as their love for each other. He speaks of the important role of a mother, and thanks mothers for what they are in their family and for what they give the church and the world. Pope Francis also stresses the importance of fathers, especially a father who is always present (AL 174, 177).⁵³

Education to Wedding Liturgy

Marriage is a lifelong commitment and is more than the wedding ceremony. The couples are in fact celebrating something beautiful and life-changing. However, they should not let themselves be carried away by the details of planning the ‘perfect wedding day,’ not to get too invested in the consumption of material goods or the planning of the wedding day itself, inviting them instead to focus on rooting their relationship in Christ, the sacraments and prayer, and the lifelong commitment they are about to enter into (AL 215). MPP should ensure that the couple do not view the wedding ceremony as the end of the road, but instead embark upon marriage as a lifelong calling based on a firm and realistic decision to face all trials and difficult moments together (AL 211). Pope Francis speaks of the wedding liturgy becoming the lived reality. It is a reality that permanently influences the whole of married life, the language of the body, and the signs of love shown throughout married life, all become an uninterrupted continuity of the liturgical language. Married life, in a certain sense, becomes liturgical (AL 212–216). For this reason, it is important to learn more about and understand the meaning behind the signs used in the liturgical celebration—the rings, the dress, the vows, etc. In the case of two baptized persons, the commitment expressed by the words of consent

⁵²Cfr Ursula van Nierop, “Love always Gives Life—A Mother’s Reflection on *Amoris Laetitia*,” <http://www.jesuitinstitute.org.za/index.php/2016/04/26/love-always-gives-life-a-mothers-reflection-on-amoris-laetitia/>.

⁵³Cfr Ursula van Nierop, “Love always Gives Life.”

and the bodily union that consummates the marriage is only seen as signs of the covenantal love and union between the incarnate Son of God and his Church. The body, created with a God-given meaning, “becomes the language of the ministers of the sacrament, aware that in the conjugal pact there is expressed and realized the mystery that has its origin in God himself” (AL 213).

Education to Primacy and Formation of Conscience

Education to primacy of conscience and its formation is paramount in MPP and therefore it should be respected. The magisterium can outline the moral principles and standards, assist the faithful in forming their conscience and then leave it up to the individuals to follow their conscience. As would be expected, the Pope also highlights the need for proper formation of conscience. Pope Francis affirms it as essential, as expressed in AL: “Decisions involving responsible parenthood presupposes the formation of conscience, which is ‘the most secret core and sanctuary of a person.’”⁵⁴

Education to formation of conscience should be very much pastoral because of the pressing need of God’s mercy. Through our education, the couples should be prepared to receive the God of mercy rather than the God of judgement, which approach might help the couples to prepare well for the marriage. While it is very important to teach the couples the full ideal of marriage (AL 307), we should not put so many conditions on God’s mercy that we empty it of its concrete meaning and real significance and we will be indulging in “the worst way of watering down the Gospel” (AL 311). Without respect for the primacy of conscience and its formation and with an overzealous interpretation of doctrine on marriage, education to MPP might “water down the Gospel” and could compromise the Gospel message of mercy.⁵⁵

Conclusion

Effective Education in MPP is the need of the time. The Christian community has a role in forming couples for marriage. It demands

⁵⁴AL, 222, Cfr Peter I. Osuji, “Who am I to Judge? A Revival of the Primacy of Conscience and the Impact of Culture in the Formation of Conscience,” *Asian Horizons* 10, 4 (2016): 723–737, at 727–728.

⁵⁵Cfr James F. Keenan, “Receiving *Amoris Laetitia*,” *Theological Studies* 78, 1 (2017): 193–212, 195.

adequate preparation and accompaniment. In AL, the Holy Father gives priority to the practice of pastoral accompaniment, which in its most fundamental aspect involves leading others closer to God. The Church wishes with humility and compassion to reach out to these people and families and help them through discernment, dialogue and prayerful support and understanding to overcome obstacles through accompaniment. We also have to consider how we continue to accompany and support couples throughout their marriage and family life, helping them 'to keep dancing towards the future with immense hope' (AL 219). This hope is the leaven that makes it possible to look beyond arguments, conflicts and problems, and live fully in the present. The best way to prepare a solid future is to prepare well in the present moment through right MPP (AL 219). In the line of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara, we are called to do introspection on the need for effective education in MPP in order that the couples who are engaged for getting married should prepare themselves to belong to and live in this heaven called family (*Chavarul*, 9).

LISTENING TO FAMILIES

WITNESSING CHRIST IN THE FAMILY

*Mathew Joseph & Jincy Mathew Kaniampady**

Family is the domestic church and marriage happens in heaven. But it is a challenge to live the family life witnessing Jesus every day and to bring up the children in faith. We want to share the ten challenges that we faced as a family. We practice it as the Ten Commandments for a successful family life. We will be sharing our experience and how we face these ten challenges every day in our family.

A Successful Marriage is not about Finding a Partner Similar to you, but Complementing Each Other

I [*Mathew Joseph*] have seen many people looking for a life partner with similar interests, same profession, similar hobbies and tastes. Ours was an arranged marriage and we have totally opposite tastes and interests. But we enjoy the differences. We understand our strengths and differences and complement each other.

We have totally opposite food habits. My wife was a vegetarian at the time of marriage, and I was a non-vegetarian. But gradually she started liking the non-vegetarian food and now we both like non-vegetarian food.

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Joseph, Mathew and Jincy Mathew. "Witnessing Christ in the Family." In *Vocation and Mission of the Family: Reflections on Chavarul and Amoris Laetitia*, edited by Shaji George Kochuthara, 505–511. Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2020.

We have totally opposite prayer styles. I like personal contemplative prayers whereas she likes praying the rosary. Even now we continue to have this difference, but I join the family prayer where we pray the rosary. I understand that, more than my personal preference, rosary and family prayer are the unifying factor in our family.

We work in totally different professions and we have different interests and hobbies. But when we discuss about our work, interests and hobbies every day, it is an opportunity to explore and understand each other. It helps to bring our relationship closer. In the middle of all our differences, we experience the love of God uniting us in our family.

Choose the Family Vocation as a Mission

Marriage is not the last option for people who do not want to become a priest or a nun. Marriage is not a sacrament for the people who do not want to become a priest or a nun. But marriage is a mission to witness Jesus in this world and build up the domestic church and bring up the future church through our children.

Before marriage, there was a period in my life when I used to seriously think and pray about my vocation. I seriously considered priesthood and prayed about it for a few months. I found that there were many holy priests in the history of the church, but very few married people who witness Jesus in this world. I got a strong conviction that it is really a challenge in the modern world to witness Jesus in the corporate world which is corrupt and have degenerating values. It is a challenge to balance between the family, work and social life and be a witness of Jesus in all these areas. I got this conviction and hence decided to take up the family vocation as a mission. I thank God for helping us in our family mission.

Do not Sacrifice your Children on the Altar of your Career

This is an era of double income, no kids. Fortunately, Christian families have children even though both husband and wife are working. Many of them leave their children with servants or in baby care homes. Parents these days rarely get time to take care of their children when they need their parents care the most. Children are the most precious gift from God. If a situation comes in your family to choose between career and children, do not sacrifice your children on the altar of your career.

When we had our first child, both of us were working as software engineers in Bangalore. There was an option to hire a servant to look after the child when we both go to work. But we did not want to leave our child in the hands of a servant. She decided to resign her job to take care of the children. She took a break from her career for seven years till the second child started going to school. Later she changed her career from software engineering to teaching profession and joined a school as a computer teacher so that she could give more time to the family. When we look back, this was the most important decision of our marriage which gave strong foundation to our family and the formation of our children.

Give Jesus as a Solution to the Problems

“I study history, chemistry and physics in school. Same way I study catechism in the Sunday school. But I don’t see any relevance for it in my life.” This is a concern shared by a student in my Sunday catechism class.

This generation of children study about the life of Jesus in the same way they study about Napoleon or Akbar from their history book. But Jesus is not becoming a living experience in their life. They score good marks in their catechism exams, but God is not influencing their life. This is the challenge faced by the global church when we deal with the young generation. Religion and faith are not making any sense to them in their life since they are not able to experience God as a living reality in their life.

We can learn the lesson from our forefathers. Two centuries ago, there was no catechism and no faith formation. The lay people did not have access to the Bible or the church teachings. But faith was handed down from generation to generation for two thousand years in India. God was an integral part of the life of our forefathers. God was a necessity for their survival. They totally relied on God in every problem that they faced. They prayed to God when floods were destroying their farm. They prayed to God when the wild animals attacked them. They prayed to God when they fell sick. They prayed to God for good harvest. God was a solution to every problem in their day-to-day life.

Unfortunately, this faith is missing in the current generation. Since most of our families are financially sound, we don’t completely rely on God for our problems. We work with our talents to grow in our career.

We depend on science alone to cure our diseases. We teach our children to conquer the world with their skills and talents, but forget to teach them to rely on God every day, every moment.

In my family, we give Jesus as a solution to the problems that the children are facing. The problems are different for different age groups and hence the solutions also should be different as the child grows. We teach them to pray for the little things happening in their life. We pray for our personal intentions during our family prayer. We pray for each child before they leave for school in the morning. We taught them to pray alone for every problem they are facing and for their studies. Our four-year-old daughter prays to Jesus and Mother Mary every day before she goes to school so that she will not fall down in the school or while walking. We give Jesus as a solution to the problems that she is facing as a four-year-old child. Elder children pray for the exams and for their studies every day. They pray alone when they get tensed about their studies. They pray when they feel sad or frustrated. They are gradually building a personal relationship with Jesus and experiencing Jesus as a solution to their little problems every day.

Provide a Spiritual Ecosystem for the Faith Formation of Children

The character and the faith formation of the children depend largely on their peer group, media, school and the culture they live in. There are many children from good catholic families going astray due to the bad influence of their friends and the media. So, it is very important to provide a spiritual ecosystem for the children during their formative years.

We used to watch Malayalam TV serials every day. But later we observed that those programmes are promoting distorted family values which are against the Christian faith. We stopped watching such TV programmes and it is 16 years now we stopped watching it in our family. Now we watch only good TV programmes. I used to read the *Times of India* newspaper from 1991. During the last two decades, *Times of India* has started publishing vulgar pictures. So, we stopped the *Times of India* and started buying *The Hindu* newspaper nine years back. We do not want pornography to enter our family everyday through these newspapers. Our children like reading and hence we have subscribed many catholic spiritual magazines which help them in

their faith formation. Our children use internet, social media and mobile phones only for study purpose and use it only under parent supervision.

We do not use alcohol and cigarettes in our family even during parties or celebrations.

All these ensure that our children have the right environment to grow in their Christian faith.

Preach always; If Necessary, Use Words

This generation of parents have the habit of giving too much advice and imposing their ideas and dreams on their children. The children today are fed up with listening to these advices and continuous scolding. It is very easy to enforce our dreams which we could not fulfil on our children. What they need is examples and role models and not theoretical advices. So, do not bombard the children with advices and dreams, but practice what we preach.

We try to live our faith every day and let our life be an example for the children to learn the Christian life. We try to be a companion to the children to help them identify their talents and skills so that they can live their dreams. As St Francis Assisi says, 'Preach always, if necessary, use words.' This is very much applicable in our families.

Dinner time is when our children talk about their dreams and future plans. We share our experiences and give our opinions to help them shape their dreams. We try to identify their talents and motivate and encourage the positives.

We have our daily family prayer in the evening, and it helps us to grow together in faith.

Live the Christian Faith Every Day, Everywhere

It is very easy to be a good Christian on Sundays when we go to the church. It is easy to practice our faith in the church through all the rituals and celebrations. It is easy to be part time Christians. But living our faith in the world, in the society and at the workplace is a challenge. That is the mission every family should take up. We are called to be a witness to Jesus and practice our Christian faith and Christian values in the world.

I am a mechanical engineer and started my career as an inspection engineer working with the world's largest inspection company. My job

was to certify the export consignments which are going to be exported to different countries by the exporters in India. The exporting companies used to offer bribe every day to pass their consignments. I took a stand against bribe and did not accept these bribes. It was really tough to stand for Christian values when everyone else was accepting bribe. It was a struggling period of seven years and God helped me to take a strong stand against corruption.

There used to be parties offered by the exporters almost every day. Alcohol was regularly served in those parties in star hotels. I took a strong stand against alcohol even when everyone else used to drink. I used to drink juice in those parties when everyone else was drinking alcohol. I took it as an opportunity to live my faith and practice my Christian values. There were times when people from other religions used to ask me why I did not accept bribe and did not drink alcohol. I got the opportunity to discuss about my faith to people from different religions.

Trust God, Trust your Family also

It is easy to say that we Trust in God. But trusting our own family is equally important. Trust your wife and children always. Trust your wife completely. The family is built on top of this mutual trust between the husband and wife. Trust the children in financial dealings. It is a very important aspect of the faith formation of our children. When we trust our own family members, they learn to trust others and learn to trust even the people outside our family and the society.

In our family, we have one common money purse and one common saving. We share all the money as a family and do not keep separate accounts. Whenever my wife or children need anything, they are free to take the required money from the purse. They always inform about their needs and they have never stolen even one rupee till now. Trust is reciprocal. When I trust my family members, they trust me too. They have never wasted even one rupee till now and they know the value of money. Before buying anything, we discuss about it in our family and proceed with shopping only when we agree on it. If we don't trust our own children, who else will trust them? Trusting our family can work wonders and help the children in their faith formation and personality development.

Dining Table is the Altar of Faith Formation

Dining table is the family faith formation place. It is the time when the whole family come together and share the love. Do not bring TV, mobile phones and other media to the dining table.

Dinner time is when we discuss about different secular topics, studies, faith related doubts, etc. We crack jokes, pull legs and share our dreams and problems. We have kept the TV and other media away from the dining room. Children ask their doubts about the Bible, their dreams and general topics during our dinner time and we discuss and clarify it together. It is a great way of sharing, caring and growing in faith together as a family.

Be honest with your children. Admit if you don't know something. They will appreciate your honesty.

Seek First the Kingdom of God and the Rest will be Added unto you

Keep Jesus as the centre of your family and you will never fail in your life. That is our experience. I have been working among the youth for their faith formation for the last 30 years. I did not take bribe for seven years when it was easy for me to make money. But when I look back after so many years, God has provided everything we needed in our life. Good family, career, wealth and good children. We lack nothing.

Four years back at the time of our third child's birth in a hospital in Bangalore, my wife had some sudden medical complications. On the second day after delivery, she had sudden internal bleeding and was in serious condition. She was taken for surgery immediately. Since it was a sudden incident, I was alone in the hospital when she was brought back to the ICU in an unconscious condition. I was standing near her bed in the ICU completely broken and nobody was there to help or console me. Suddenly a nurse in the ICU came to me calling my name. She told me not to worry and assured me that she would take care of my wife. That was the first time I was meeting that nurse. She told me that she was a participant in the marriage preparation course which took place the previous week in Bangalore where I had taken a class for them. Amazing are the ways in which God sends His angels when we are in dire situations.

TRUST, THANKS AND SURRENDER

N. Joseph Ashok Kumar and Srividhya♦

I (*Joseph Ashok Kumar*) was born in a Roman Catholic family in Tamilnadu. My father was a businessman, and he attained God's feet when I was in the 8th year of my school studies. My mother, a staff nurse at a Government hospital sacrificed the rest of her life for the upbringing of my sister and me. In spite of the responsibility of clearing the debt my father had incurred to run his business, my mother provided us a blessed life. However, I fell into bad company in my school and there was a time when I was not able to handle things and decided to end my life, instead of being a nuisance to my mother and sister.

However, God had different plans; the almighty made me to learn the meaning of life and showed me how much he loves me when I was in the hospital, where I was admitted after the attempt to commit suicide. I realized how miracles happen, yes, how our Lord carries us in our troubles. Lord does not take away our pain, but he teaches us to face the pain and go through it, making us even stronger. The moment I got this wisdom from God, everything seemed easy and acceptable. I was starting the baby steps in understanding the glory of God.

Life rolled on, and though at times I derailed, I was adamant in being honest. I always believed that like my Jesus, we are born to take pain

♦**N. Joseph Ashok Kumar** started his career as a Salesman and then grew to serve various industries. Currently, he works as Senior Technical Specialist at Philips Health Care, India. Joseph is also a Parish Council Secretary and the Youth Animator of Christha Prabhalaya Church, Jayanagar. He is also a member of St Vincent De Paul Society and St Montfort. He is committed to spread the Work of God by example and to start a school for underprivileged children and provide free quality education to empower them. **Srividhya**, completed her schooling at St Lourdes school and did her Bachelors in history in Arts college, Chennai. Vidhya worked for ICICI bank in the home loans division until our child was born in 2009. Vidhya, became a Christian in 2001.

Ashok Kumar, N. Joseph and Srividhya. "Trust, Thanks and Surrender." In *Vocation and Mission of the Family: Reflections on Chavarul and Amoris Laetitia*, edited by Shaji George Kouchuthara, 512–515. Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2020.

and not to inflict pain, and this is the only path to happiness. I started working and met Vidhya in the office where I worked. After few years we decided to be wed locked.

Trusting God

Ours was a Love marriage¹ and we exchanged our marital vows in front of the Most Sacred Eucharist on 19 January 2001. My wife was from a non-Christian background and she was baptised before marriage. The conversion was not just a ceremony, but she received Christ with all her heart. Daily prayers and reading bible became an integral part of her daily life.

We were childless since then and even after consulting a fraternity of medical advisors and undergoing few medical procedures, the state remained the same; we trusted that our Lord's plan was greater than any of the human intelligence.

We also visited the Basilica of Our Lady of Snows in Tuticorin to offer prayers and thence we started feeling that Mother Mary was interceding for us. We started to recite the Rosary whenever we could. That is when we started feeling how foolish we had been for all the years by just keeping the rosary as an ornament and not reaping the abundant blessings by reciting the promises given by God. We understood that Rosary is the most powerful tool we have with us to fight any evil that prevents God's blessings from reaching us. Yes, like how the light of the candle destroys the darkness, the Rosary slowly destroyed the evil around us, and we started seeing rays of God's light emerging.

In 2008, God bestowed his grace on us to bear a child. Yes, the doctors confirmed that my wife was carrying. In the pregnancy period, during one of the regular scans, it was revealed that a fibroid was growing along with our child. It was a very scary revelation, apart from being a threat to my wife's life and pregnancy; the doctors even said that the fibroid might create a few permanent ailments for the child. However, we did not fear because it was God's light that had transformed into life.

¹In India, most of the marriages are still arranged by the families. Instead, if the marriage takes place following a love affair of the boy and girl—with or without the consent of their families—that is usually called a 'love marriage.'

Our gynaecologist was a catholic and she was the same doctor who was my mother's gynaecologist when I was born 35 years back. God's plans are divine.

As we were nearing the day to witness God's blessings visually, we visited our doctor on October 3rd. The doctor asked if they could proceed with the caesarean section on the next morning at 4 am. We were excited but little worried, said nothing nor had any questions, we said, "Sure doctor as you say." We continued praying and "Trusting" God.

It was already the next morning, but the doctor came a little late, while entering she was sorry for the delay and said that she had been to the church to offer prayers before the C-section. Now, we really understood that the fully-grown fibroid is life threatening. However, we continued to pray.

Thanking God

On 4 October 2008, at 4:30 am God blessed us with a son, and we baptized him as Naveen Nathaniel Joseph. We experienced the abundant blessings of our God at the time of Naveen's baptism. We thank our God every time we see our son. We TRUSTED in our Lord, now it is our turn to give thanks to our Lord.

Surrendering Ourselves to God

The blessings continued, as Naveen grew to be a naughty kid. One day, we were called by one of Naveen's teacher to meet her regarding Naveen's behaviour. We were speechless while listening to the teacher soft words. Yes, she said that Naveen might have ADHD,² and she suggested we consult the in-house counsellor to seek help at this early stage.

Again, we know that it is the tests that make us even stronger and we believed that these are God given opportunity to nourish our spiritual beliefs. Now, we "Surrendered" ourselves to God to give us the strength

²ADHD is a disorder that makes it difficult for a person to pay attention and control impulsive behaviours. He or she may also be restless and almost constantly active. ADHD is not just a childhood disorder. Although the symptoms of ADHD begin in childhood, ADHD can continue through adolescence and adulthood.

to go through this phase. We met the counsellor, received her advice, and worked according to them.

Naveen Nathaniel has showed a significant improvement in the last 3 years. There are times we lose our patience and shout aloud at Naveen's restlessness, but we try to remedy that by our love. We keep asking God to bless him and give the willingness to serve God.

We may not know the turn of events in Naveen's life for the years to come, but we know that Prayer is the only solution to all our problems. I always remember the words of God in Jeremiah 1:5: "I chose you before I gave you Life, and before you were born I selected you..." and Matthew 6:26-34, where God asks us not to worry, as the heavenly father knows what we need.

We Trust, give Thanks and Surrender ourselves to God throughout our life. All Praises to God! Ave Maria!

**CHALLENGES TO THE FAMILY:
RESPONSES FROM BISHOPS**

CHALLENGES TO THE FAMILY AND RESPONSE OF THE CHURCH

Archbishop Peter Machado♦

In a message that was released from the Vatican on 27th March 2017, Pope Francis, in preparation for the ninth world meeting of families that was to take place in Dublin from 21 to 26th August 2018, sent a message that spoke of “Gospel of the Family—Joy for the World.” The Holy Father rightly asserted, “The family, therefore is the “Yes” of God’s love.”

The inspiration for this assertion is from the Bible itself, which is basically a book of families, starting with the family of Adam and Eve till the Holy Family of Nazareth. The Holy Bible is a source book of solutions for crises in families as also reconciliation, given the records of chronicles of birth, death and other memorable moments in life of the family.

Challenges with Special Reference to Bangalore Archdiocese

Crisis of Faith

Bangalore is turning out into a concrete jungle with skyscrapers and high size buildings. It is a Cosmopolitan city with the increasing population and problems of pollution, transport, etc. In faith matters, the traditional devotions and faith links are missing because of the racing city culture, lack of time, lack of interest and interpersonal contacts.

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Machado, Peter. “Challenges to the Family and Response of the Church.” In *Vocation and Mission of the Family: Reflections on Chavarul and Amoris Laetitia*, edited by Shaji George Kochuthara, 519–521. Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2020.

Crisis of Morality

With rapid civilization and hi fi cultural modes setting in, moral values are shifting with the media playing a havoc. Everything is guided by advertising and show-business culture, ruled by comfort and conveniences. This has also resulted in a lot of moral compromises between couples and families. Women are most vulnerable at home or in public spaces, which include offices and factories.

Crisis of Economics

Bangalore is now more than a global village. There are no villages; they are swallowed in the city circumferences and circles. The cost of living is high. The rich become richer and poor are left to rot. Though families have become smaller and nuclear, yet money matters most. The market is driven by consumeristic choices with use-and throw attitude.

Crisis of Identity

In the city where anyone or everyone is just anonymous, not known except to the family members or friends or business circles, there is a crisis of identity. The dignity of the human person is not held high. The sick, old, specially-abled are no longer welcome members of the family; rather they are considered a burden even by the family.

Suggested Responses*Family Spirituality to Couples to Help Tide over Family Crises*

This will not only increase their faith quotient, but also will act as a support system. The family rosary and reading of the Bible in the family can sustain them with a sense of hope in the face of their problems.

Value Based Catechesis for Youth, Children & Adults

A value-based catechesis will help in some way to counter the crisis of morality. The Pastors and the Religious in the parishes play a great role in person to person, family to family apostolate. The visit of the families by the Pastors can provide the much-required healing touch in crisis moments. Family associations can function also as crisis cells and family counselling can guide people to correct moral principles.

A Support System for Families in Face of Economic Crisis is a Must

The local church and Religious have to find solutions to accommodate children in their educational institutions with fees concessions and incentives for their education. Those with bigger families have to be helped more. Houses for the poor, supply of rations and some sort of employment schemes for those who have migrated to the cities and have been left in the lurch or have been cheated have to be helped to arise.

Family or Neighbourhood Unions on the Model of SCC Groups

Such family or neighbourhood unions can counter the identify crisis among individuals and families. Meeting of families in small groups can create a support system for recognition and immediate help to struggling families.

Conclusion

In the face of development and change, adaptation to change is a necessary component in meeting contemporary challenges. Families are evolving and the family system is itself in evolution. All the same, the family holds the future of humankind. As Pope Francis would say, there are no perfect families nor perfect individuals. Everyone has to find a solution and be part of the solution. Every family is unique and special, and God forms part of our family system.

CHALLENGES OF THE FAMILY AND RESPONSE OF THE CHURCH

Archbishop Antony Kariyil, CMI♦

On this auspicious occasion when we are gathered here to celebrate the 150th Anniversary of the Publication of *Chavarul* by St Kuriakose Elias Chavara, I have great pleasure in presenting before you a few “Challenges of Family and Response of the Church.” This presentation is based on the discussion I had with four parish priests of the Diocese of Mandya and my own pastoral experiences.

Large Vs Small Families

Large families of the past had disadvantages of anonymity and impersonality. But they had several positive dimensions. For, with the presence of several siblings, children had to make a lot of adjustments and compromises in such matters of food, use of infrastructure facilities, social interactions, etc. A small family does not require such adjustments which may lead to several problems connected with adjustments in the future, especially after marriage.

The Church, therefore, encourages large families today. Parish priests told me that the practice of the Bishop himself officiating Baptism of the fourth and subsequent children of a family, instructions

♦**Archbishop Mar Antony Kariyil, CMI** is the Metropolitan Vicar of Ernakulam–Angamaly Archdiocese. He was bishop of Mandya (2015–2019). He was professor and later principal of Christ College (now Christ University), Bangalore, principal of Rajagiri College of Social Sciences, Kalamassery, and Director of Rajagiri Business School and Rajagiri School of Engineering and Technology. Mar Antony Kariyil was the Prior General of the CMI Congregation (2002–2008) and the provincial of the Sacred Heart Province, Kochi (2008–2011). His academic qualifications include BTh (DVK, Bangalore), LPh (JDV, Pune), PhD (Pune University). He has several publications to his credit, including three books.

Kariyil, Antony. “Challenges of the Family and Response of the Church.” In *Vocation and Mission of the Family: Reflections on Chavarul and Amoris Laetitia*, edited by Shaji George Kochuthara, 522–526. Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2020.

given to parents during homilies, etc. seem to bear fruit as some of the parents have realized the importance of large families and have started acting accordingly.

Grandparents

Presence of grandparents in our traditional families used to neutralize tension between parents and children. Further, grandparents used to transmit culture and tradition of families and of the community to the young ones.

Because of practical reasons, it is not possible to bring grandparents to families in urban centres like Bengaluru. This gap could be filled by encouraging children to spend holidays with their grandparents in their hometown.

Cultural Advancement of Children

Today we are living in a scientific and technological era. Information and knowledge of our youngsters correspond to the technological and scientific achievements we have made.

This may lead to a communication gap between parents and children. A proper communication with children will be possible only if parents update themselves with latest information.

Freedom without Responsibility

I remember a group of four pairs of boys and girls of a college who went on a pleasure trip for three days without permission from the college. As the news leaked out, they were all caught by the college authorities. During interrogation by teachers, one of the girls asked them, "Why are you worried about us? Do we not have the freedom to go anywhere we like as we all are above 18?"

Quite often youngsters are not in a position to understand the dangers involved in such cases. There was a breakup of a romantic relationship of a boy and a girl in the same college. The boy then forwarded to his friends a picture of her naked body which subsequently led to her suicide.

The youngsters should, therefore, be taught about responsibility which should go along with freedom.

Children in Decision Making

Because of the small number of children, parents in general, oblige to the demands of their children. Thus, children gradually have become decision makers in the family. As already pointed out above, it is likely that many such decisions go wrong.

The parents should, therefore, have the moral courage to say 'No' to some demands of their children. For example, expensive gifts during their birthdays.

Work Pressure and Job Schedule

One of my former girl students one day requested me, "Bishop, please tell my husband to reduce his work and spend some time with our children, as I do not even see him these days."

Recently a WhatsApp message presented a lady teacher crying while going through the answer scripts of her students. The reason she gave her husband was "a student has written that he would like to be born as a smart phone because his parents are always with smart phones even when they are at home and therefore, they do not have time to be with him." Husband then asked her, "Why should you cry because of this?" The wife replied, "it is because the child who has written this comment is our own son."

Parents should, therefore, be conscientized about the need to find time to be with the family members. A VVIP one day told me that whatever be his works, he spends at least one day every week with his wife and children.

Inter-Religious Marriage

Theologically inter-religious marriages may not be an issue. But their pastoral and practical implications have to be taken note of. As the partners come from different religious and cultural backgrounds, adjustment problems are bound to arrive. There may be some case, where partners find it easy to adjust. But to my knowledge and as per the information I could gather from our parish priests, many inter-religious marriages end in failure, mainly because of problems connected with adjustments.

Hence from the pastoral and practical point of view, I would suggest that we discourage such marriages. Properly conducted

marriage preparation courses which should include individual counselling sessions can go a long way in this. If inter-religious marriages are to be officiated, they may be conducted without any kind of solemnity.

Low Priority in Spiritual Life

In many families, sufficient care is not being given to spiritual life. Heavy demands of work, influence of media, secularization, etc. may be some of the important factors behind this state of affairs.

As committed Christians we should be able to give topmost priority to the Holy Eucharist. Then come other devotions like Rosary, Novena, etc. Social gatherings could either begin or end with a prayer.

In addition, youth and children should be made familiar with daily family prayer, rosary devotion, remembrance of the dead, fasting and abstinence during Lent, etc.

Social Media

We get a lot of information through social media. But some get addicted to social media with the result that they spend a good amount of time in the social media. This is especially the case with youngsters.

There is no use in advising them to do away with social media. The youngsters should be trained to use them with responsibility. Catechetical instruction could be a good focus to carry out such a conscientization program.

Alcoholism and Drug Addiction

Both have turned out to be very serious problems the society is facing today. This not only disturbs family relationships, but in some cases at least lead to break up of family too.

Counselling can go a long way in addressing these issues. Serious cases will have to be treated in de-addiction centres.

Youth Distancing from the Church

The present-day youth find it difficult to understand, internalize and accept many of the traditions, customs, rituals and ceremonies of the Church. The Church cannot do away with them either.

This problem could be addressed through on-going formation for the youth. Such programs should be encouraged in such a way that they are able to attract the youth.

Non-Catholic Christian Denominations

Quite a few non-Catholic Christian denominations especially Pentecostal groups seem to be attracting many catholic families during sickness, crises, etc. This issue may be addressed by establishing personal contacts through family visits.

Court Interventions and Scandals within the Church

Recent Supreme Court judgments legalizing homosexuality, lesbianism and extramarital relations are serious threats to the stability of family and marriage. People may question the very existence of marriage which is envisaged to be a stable relationship between persons of either sex in which they can have sexual gratification and procreation of children without loss of social status.

Recent scandals within the Church have also led to a lot of confusion in the minds of our people.

All these could be addressed through study classes and discussions during family unit meetings.

Family is the basic unit of our society. It is through marriage that family is established. In this scientific and technological era changes are bound to take place in both these institutions. Such changes lead to sexual challenges some of which I have presented above together with possible response of the Church. Let us hope that we will be able to face all such challenges whereby we will be able to lay strong foundation for our families.

“In the Beginning was the Human Relation”

CHALLENGES TO THE FAMILY AND THE RESPONSE OF THE CHURCH

Bishop Jose Puthenveetil♦

In the beginning was the Word. The Word was not in isolation. The Word was in the bosom of the Father. It means that there was relationship. There was relationship in the beginning. Trinity is a Mystery of relationship. The crisis with family is fundamentally a crisis with relationship. The response to the crisis too should be along the same line. As it was in the beginning, it has to be now and forever, which means, there should be a restoration of human relationships.

Social, analytical and empirical studies have confirmed the following causes as central to marital breakdown: lack of dependency among partners or children, social security provided by states, financial stability, emergence of new reproductive technologies that do not require a male partner, changes in laws of divorce, laws of abortion, rise of secularisation, decline of the power of religions, feminist agenda, employment of women and their financial stability and independence, changing status of women and the lack of preparedness by men and the lack of accommodation by women, assertion of the right of woman, poor communication skills among partners and the resultant emotional problems, ambivalence towards the concept of marriage, feminists’ presentation of divorce as a liberation from oppressive structures, etc.

♦**Bishop Jose Puthenveetil** is the Auxiliary Bishop of the diocese of Faridabad. He holds a doctorate in Systematic Theology from KU Leuven. From 2000 to 2011 he was professor of systematic theology at Paurastya Vidyapitam, Kottayam, and from 2011 to 2013 he served the Archdiocese of Ernakulam–Angamaly as Pro-Vicar General, and from 2013 to 2019 as the Auxiliary Bishop. He has authored and edited a few books, and has published articles.

Puthenveetil, Jose. “In the Beginning was the Human Relation’: Challenges to the Family and the Response of the Church.” In *Vocation and Mission of the Family: Reflections on Chavarul and Amoris Laetitia*, edited by Shaji George Kochuthara, 527–534. Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2020.

Mono-Existence as Sin

Today the cause of problems in family and marriage is due to the breakdown of intrinsic relationship between the partners. Philosophically speaking, the basic problematic underneath the causes for the breakdown in marriage and family is an epistemological crisis. Today a paradigm shift has taken place in human relations from *being together* to *being alone*; a shift from *being-with* to *being-me*; from *coexistence* to *mono-existence*; from *being-related* to *being-to-be*. The emphasis on the individuality of *being* at the cost of *being-with* is the basic conceptual factor for the modern crisis with family. Emmanuel Levinas has attacked the entire Western metaphysics for the discovery of the very central concept of philosophy that is, 'being.' According to him, being is an individual notion. It ignores the other who is in my skin, who is ever appealing to me. Thus, we have individual human rights at the cost of the collective rights of the human family. Today we have the individuality at the cost of totality. As a result, today, as St John Paul II observed, we speak of the first world and third world within a single world.

This shift towards the individual is a deviation from the perspectives of wholeness and oneness that has been rooted in the ancient mythological cosmologies and anthropologies where interconnectedness and interdependence was the primary focus. Accordingly, an activity at one end of the cosmic chain was said to have caused results at the other end of the chain.¹ There is a saying: If you disturb a flower, it will unset a star in the sky. Studies on divorces have revealed that many couples enter marriage with the belief that individual rights and needs should override the good of the marriage relationships.² Generational change in attitude to marriage and commitment and strong move towards commitment to self and individualism are serious setbacks to the perennial values of human relationships embodied in marriage and family. In fact, a claim for mono-existence independent of God and others is the sin. Hence, today there is a clarion call for a deeper understanding of marriage as a communion based on a covenantal relationship in order to overcome the crises in the contemporary families.

¹See Richard Desmet, *The Fundamentals of Hinduism* (Pune: Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth, 1978), 129.

²https://www.aphref.aph.gov.au_house_committee_laca_famserv_chap4-1.pdf. Last accessed November 8, 2018.

Existence as Communion

Theologically existence is a relation and a communion. God has created Adam the first human person in His own image and likeness and Eve, his life partner, was formed from one of his ribs. This creation narrative reveals the intrinsic and intimate relation between God and human person, and between man and woman. Seeing Eve at the first sight, Adam transcends himself and exclaims: "This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gen 2:23). This inter-relation, interconnectedness and communion is the core of human and cosmic existence.

The self that is bound to 'I' becomes limited with little transcendence, which is the consequence of original sin. The face of the other provokes me, challenges me for a response. It demands me to go beyond myself and it transcends me to a deeper communion. The self 'I' can be awakened not by another neutral being but only by a call from the 'Other.'³ In inter-subjective existence, the other person addresses me, calls to me. At this state, the other does communicate even without language, without words, and I *feel* the summons implicit in his/her approach. In the encounter, the 'I' first experiences itself as called and liable to account for itself. It responds. The command or summons of the other is part of the intrinsic relationality.⁴ Ontologically, human existence, therefore, is a relation and extends to a communion.

Levinas comments on family in his *Totality and Infinity* as follow: "A commitment to family is simply a special case of ethical relationships in which family members are constantly drawn outside of themselves in response to one another. To have family connections is to have a future, i.e., a commitment to what is unknown, unknowable, and ever-unfolding."⁵ Without fixing the foundational relationality of human existence as communion, a counselling aid of mere communication improvement does not suffice for rebuilding broken families.

³See Bettina Bergo, "Emmanuel Levinas," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta, ed., <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/levinas/>

⁴Bergo, "Emmanuel Levinas."

⁵Lora Duhan Kaplan, "Eros and the Future: Levinas's Philosophy of Family," *Philosophy in the Contemporary World* 6, 9 (1999): 9.

Communion as Communication

Once Pope Francis asked the audience gathering in Vatican square: "Do you give alms to the poor?" People said 'yes' to him. He further asked: "When you give alms, do you look at the eyes of the poor?" to which there was no big response. He continued: "When you look at the eyes of the person, you will notice that the eyes speak to you and express deep feelings of life." Inter-relation demands a response from the Other. Real communion between the 'I' and the 'Other' brings forth communication. Thus, with the response comes the birth of language as dialogue which gives experience of 'transcendence' and 'fraternity.'⁶ The depth of relationality is the decisive factor for communion and communication.

In the married relationship, the real communication comes from a deeper communion. Genuine and deeper communication between the partners takes place not merely in their love expressions, rather when the face of the weaker partner calls and challenges the other to transcend oneself in order to extend help.⁷ The sincere response to this call of the weak would reveal the depth of communion between them.⁸

Communion as Consistency

Real communion makes the communication meaningful and communion deeper. It is observed that if a person enters into married life with the option of the possibility of another marriage if the present one would not work, there is more chance for a breakdown in marriage. On the other, if one enters into married life with the intention to live with the same partner till death, one would overcome all the hurdles in the married life building a deeper communion between the partners. It should be noted here that empirical surveys have shown that, years later, the happiness rate of couples who thought of divorce but did not actually get divorced was much higher than those who actually got separated. It underscores the primacy of long-term commitments in human relations than mere temporal contractual engagements.

⁶Kaplan, "Eros and the Future: Levinas's Philosophy of Family," 11.

⁷Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, Trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 66.

⁸Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*. Trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 89.

Modern neurological studies have shown that human chemistry is built in such a way that nature has a mechanism for consolidating and stabilizing individual relationships than floating over the surface. As for nature, love, even though it springs forth from external factors and is associated with sexual desires, it is more authentic when it gets internalised and consolidated. US-based neuro-physician Dr Fred Nour thinks the reason why many partnerships dissolve is that their notion of love as they enter marriage is founded on unrealistic expectations and fantasies.⁹ Dr Nour explains why we experience love in the first encounter. This is on account of the evolutionary origin and development of the human brain. According to Nour, love consists of four distinct phases that are determined by changing chemical interactions within the brain. His study shows that nature has a distinct preference for stability than excitement.

Totality as Individuality

There is a criticism that in the family totality erases all individualities. According to many social philosophers the fundamental problematic underneath the modern western societies is a profound confusion about how to be in the world; how to think critically and respectfully; how to think individually as well as collectively; how to think subjectively and inter-subjectively. Consequently, individualism dominates among the family members disregarding the totality of human relations.

In fact, the family is a set of relationships that incessantly draw the family members out of themselves to reach out to others. Familial intimacy does not breed familiarity. Rather the responsibility embedded in family intimacies is a reminder that life without the goodness of the ethical responsibility is a life that takes us nowhere. The secular value system of relations put challenges to family. In a relationship that is devoid of commitment, there is no fulfilment of the authentic human possibilities. Without responsiveness, there is no actualization of authentic human relations. Mere living together in this sense is something that binds us only to ourselves, to the here and now, rather than drawing us out of ourselves.

⁹Fred Nour, *True Love: How to Use Science to Understand and Find Love* (California: Niguel Publishing, Inc., 2017).

Spiritual Union as Communion Par Excellence

In marriage, there are three types of union: (1) Physical union, (2) Mental union, and (3) Spiritual union. In the first phase, there is an attraction for physical union based on external factor of beauty, education, finance, etc. The second phase of mental union going beyond the external factors, they look for deeper understanding of the other through mutual communication and contacts. The third phase is deeper level of spiritual wavelength between the partners. It is observed that if the partners have union only in physical level, there is a possibility of separation if one comes to know after some time that the other partner is affected with cancer. On the other, in the same situation, if the partners have spiritual union, the unaffected partner would remain with the sick revealing their deeper communion. Today, since many of the married relations remain in physical level, there are more breakdown in families. The sacrament of matrimony enables the partners to build up the spiritual union based on covenantal relation demanding for deeper communion and commitment between the partners.

Today, discarding the sacramental value of marriage and the reduction of it into a mere social contract create more breakdown in marriage relations. We have a good biblical example for the spiritual union in the couples Joseph and Mary who are the pillars of Holy Family. After the engagement with Mary, Joseph came to know that Mary is pregnant. He has two options in mind. One is according to the Mosaic Law, which allows him to stone her to death. This is a radical form of mono-existence disregarding the dignity of the other, which is sinful. Since Joseph was a righteous man, taking the second option, unwilling to expose her to shame, he decided to leave her quietly (Mt 1:19). Here the face of Mary calls him to come out of himself and transcend. But surprisingly, as a third option, he gets a message from God during his sleep that their marriage is part of the divine plan, and he accepts Mary. Joseph realizes that this is a great plan for the whole world where the face of sinful humanity appeals to him to respond. The total, unconditional and consistent commitment of both partners created a perfect and lasting communion and communication between them, which resulted in the birth of the Saviour of the world.

Further, the futuristic dimension of the relationship is also seen in the potential to bring forth a child. To have a relationship with a woman is to have a future, that is, a commitment to the unknown, unknowable,

and ever unfolding. There is a beautiful saying: "Living with husband/wife is part of living. But living with same partner for years is the art of living." The ideal and genuine couple is not those who look to each other, but those who look to same direction and same destiny. The reservations of the couples against having children or excessive birth control for the sake of self-comforts of the couples damages the futurist dimension of human relations in general and man-woman relationship in particular. The contemporary psychologists and family councillors focus on building and stabilising families by communication among couples as equal partners, long-term commitment in life than short-term merits, well-being of the children over the interests of the individual couples, the concern for the partner along over the self-interest of the party, etc.

Church's Response

Second Vatican Council speaks of family as the domestic Church, which is an integral part of the Universal Church. How the families thus the Church is. The origin and development of the Church is from the family-Church and from a family-koinonia. In the present, it is observed that the Church has not taken families seriously and thus is unable to provide support to families faced with numerous problems and breakdowns. At present, the Church focuses on the administration of marriage with its preparation and celebration, which are very nominal and minimum. The pastors are unable to accompany the married partners during their crises and thus fail to extend assistance to them. The lack of pastoral care for the married leads to breakdown in families. St Kuriakose Elias Chavara, by his pastoral letters and care used the renewal of communion and commitment in family as tool to renew the Church and the society. Our institutions, especially that of educational institutions, must focus on family-centred formation where the values of life-long commitment, communion and real freedom in life, are to be instilled.

Today the teachings of the Church on family are no longer obsolete, rather this is the time that these teachings really get substantiated. We need to reinstate the teachings on family in secular language; in scientific language; and in a language comprehensible to the modern human. In the context of India, the recent court verdicts on homosexuality and extramarital sex are more opportunities for the

Church to sell its teachings on the uniqueness of marriage in a secular forum as well. The court verdicts only underscore the legal legitimacy and not the moral legitimacy. The legal legitimacy only upholds the individual human freedom in deciding on the moral issues. In fact, the same is a major component of the Christian understanding of the human person. The essence of human being is that we are created in the image and likeness of God. Image and likeness of God means we humans too share the divine nature, that is freedom and love. As such the court verdicts, rather than being contrary to our theology, only call for a reinforcement of our fundamental moral perspectives.

It is important to notice that recent studies have shown that the economic problems of the nations are rooted no longer in exchange rates, but in deep moral issues. There is a deep intuition that the success of the market-based economy depends on social morality, personal trustworthiness, honesty, concern for the future generations, service to others, taking care of those in need, preference for frugality instead of greed, concern for community, etc.¹⁰ These findings provide a secular conceptual paradigm for the Church to translate its moral theological teachings on sex and family onto more acceptable and sensible languages. Positive contributions of family and marriage to economy and health are also to be part of the adult catechism of the Church.

Our whole emphasis on relationship in family is a restatement of the contemporary feminist value of not treating any woman as an object. The naïve feminism of the modern day that regards marriage as enslaving the freedom of the woman needs a radical conceptual refinement. We need a new hermeneutics that shows how the best in a dignified woman is brought out in marriage, marital sex, childbirth, and family. A re-appropriation of the Christian doctrine of human dignity for the contemporary times will be the best prelude and postlude to the contemporary feminist philosophies and theologies.

¹⁰David Metaloro, "Causes of Family Breakdown and its Effects on Children," <https://www.slideshare.net/MetaloroDavid/causes-of-family-breakdown-and-its-effects-on-children-by-david-metaloro>. Last accessed November 8, 2018.

Homily

CHAVARUL—150 YEARS

Archbishop Antony Kariyil, CMI♦

We are gathered around this Eucharistic table to celebrate the 150th Year of the publication of *Chavarul* by St Kuriakose Elias Chavara. In the *Chavarul* St Chavara has given us directives for an ideal Christian family life. The model of Christian family according to St Chavara is the Holy Trinity where we have the most perfect example of giving and receiving, which are the most important dimensions of a family.

A family consisting of parents and children could be considered a “natural” family. A religious community like Dharmaram College could also be considered a family. Such a family evidently is not a “natural” family, nor an “artificial” family, but a “supernatural” family.

The role model for our “natural” families, according to St Chavara, is the Holy Family of Nazareth—consisting of St Joseph, St Mary and Jesus. This family had to go through a lot of crises, which started with Mary conceiving Jesus in her womb before the marriage between Joseph and Mary had taken place. There were other difficult moments too like the birth of Jesus when the couples did not have a proper place where Mary could give birth to Jesus, presentation of Child Jesus in the temple when Simon told Mary that a sword would pierce through her soul, when Herod decided to kill the Child Jesus and when the parents missed Jesus for three days when he was 12 years old.

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Kariyil, Antony. “Homily: *Chavarul*—150 Years.” In *Vocation and Mission of the Family: Reflections on Chavarul and Amoris Laetitia*, edited by Shaji George Kochuthara, 535–537. Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2020.

The role model for “supernatural” families is the first “supernatural” family consisting of Jesus and the 12 disciples. The characteristic feature of this family was that it consisted of 12 members, all of whom were unique in their own ways. Let us look at some of them. Simon Peter, their leader, was a person who was not able to contain anything within himself and was considered an imprudent man. James and John seem to be people who were over-ambitious for power. We remember both of them meeting Jesus with recommendation of their mother seeking Jesus’ permission to be seated on his either sides. To put it in today’s terminology, they thought that Jesus would establish a material kingdom where he would be ruling as the President and James wanted to be the Prime Minister and John the Deputy Prime Minister. St Thomas who had brought faith to our country was the first historical person to have challenged the resurrection of Jesus. And Judas Iscariot, after being with Jesus for three years, betrayed the Master just for 30 coins.

The Holy Family, the model for our families, was able to transcend all the difficult moments it had to confront with Jesus. Similarly, the first “supernatural” family, the role model for the present supernatural families, also was able to overcome angularities and peculiarities of its individuals, some of which were scandalous with the presence of Jesus. No doubt, it was Jesus who had taken initiative in this process. As members who co-operated with Jesus, they were able to enter into communion with Jesus. Peter, James and John had the experience of this communion at Mount Tabor during the Transfiguration. It is from that experience of communion that Peter told Jesus “Master it is good that we remain here. We shall make here three tents—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” St Thomas had the experience of communion. It is from that experience that he said, “My Lord and my God!” All the 12 disciples had the experience of communion during Last Supper when Jesus gave His body and blood as their food and drink. They could understand this symbolic gesture as a reality on the next day at Calvary when Jesus really broke his body and shed his blood for them.

Both natural and supernatural families are facing a lot of challenges today. Hence our natural families are facing problems like small size of families, excessive freedom given to the children, addiction to social media among the youth, alcoholism and drug addictions among the

adults and the recent interventions of the Supreme Court legalizing homosexuality, lesbianism, extramarital relations, etc. Supernatural families—our religious communities—too are facing problems like deviations from vows of chastity, poverty and obedience, greed for power and money, secularization and the consequent disinterestedness in spiritual matters, etc.

As in the case of role models of the present families all these challenges could be addressed with the assistance of Jesus. Let me remember here an anecdote. A certain man had 19 horses which he wanted to divide among his three sons. He had specified in his last will the method of dividing the horses, but they were permitted to read the last will only after the father's death. After reading the last will of the father, all the three of them got confused as their father had given a peculiar method of dividing the horses! $\frac{1}{2}$ to the first son, $\frac{1}{4}$ to the second son and $\frac{1}{5}$ to the third son. As they could not find a solution, they sought the help of a priest in the nearby monastery. The priest asked them to wait for a few days. After a week he came to their house with a horse which he put along with the other 19. The number of horses now had become 20. $\frac{1}{2}$, that is, 10 were given to the first son, $\frac{1}{4}$, that is, 5 were given to the second son, and $\frac{1}{5}$, that is, 4 given to the third son. One horse was still remaining. That was the horse the priest had brought which he took back to his monastery.

This no doubt is a symbolic story. The 20th horse represents Jesus. Without Jesus the problem seemed to be unsolvable. But with Jesus, the issue was easily settled. Similarly, we will be able to solve any problem we confront in our families—be it in the natural or supernatural families—with the help of Jesus. As we celebrate the 150th Year of *Chavarul* let us ask St Chavara's intercession so that we will be able to follow the directives given in the *Chavarul* by accepting the Holy Family of Nazareth and the community of 12 disciples of Jesus as our role models.

EPILOGUE

REINCARNATING THE *CHAVARUL*

A Self-Examination on the Reception and Transmission of the 'Imperishable' Message of the *Chavarul*

Saju Chackalackal, CMI♦

"This script will not perish..." was the hope with which Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara bequeathed his handwritten copy of the *Chavarul* to his kith and kin in Kainakary village in the backwaters of Kerala. In our collective attempt to recapture the imperishable message of *Chavarul* (1868) in relation to *Amoris Laetitia* (2016) and the contemporary family reality in India and elsewhere, I am happy to recall that the whole conference was conceived during a conversation I had with Fr Paul Achandy CMI, Prior General, and I am grateful to him for his wholehearted support and proactive encouragement and guidance he offered in the whole process of getting it to its full realization. In the context of the 150th year of the *Chavarul*, apart from the popular level celebrations and circulation of more than three hundred thousand copies across the globe, we thought that it is necessary to initiate a serious theological investigation of its teachings,

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Chackalackal, Saju. "Epilogue: Reincarnating the *Chavarul*: A Self-Examination on the Reception and Transmission of the 'Imperishable' Message of the *Chavarul*." In *Vocation and Mission of the Family: Reflections on Chavarul and Amoris Laetitia*, edited by Shaji George Kochuthara, 541–550. Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2020.

oriented to the generation and upkeep of God-fearing and ordered families, which we believe is the cornerstone of our ecclesial life and the spiritual blossoming of every Christian family. Accordingly, when the discussion was opened up with Fr Shaji George Kochuthara and Fr Benny Nalkara, the directors of the Centre for the Study and Research on Chavara at DVK, it was Fr Shaji who proposed that it would make much theological sense if we could study it along with the most recent teaching on family life offered in *Amoris Laetitia* and, thus, this conference idea was finalized. So, while primarily we wanted to facilitate substantial theological investigations on *Chavarul* by prominent theologians from India and abroad, we wanted also to ensure that our analysis and synthesis on the *Chavarul* would ultimately boil down to the contemporary realities of living family life and the role of the Church, in general, to offer pastoral assistance and accompaniment to those families in need, and, in particular, by the consecrated communities—with special reference to the CMI and CMC—in facilitating a retrospective and prospective review of their vocation to accompany families through which “the sanctification of self and salvation of all” could be ultimately attained.

Strengthening Familial Bonding

In any consecrated community, the legacy of the founder gets crystalized in the form of its charism; while we take pride in the charism bequeathed to us by Saint Chavara and other founders and carried further forward through the attempts of subsequent generations to realize it by responding to the signs of the times, it brings upon the members of the present generations a huge responsibility to get it translated into the present lifestyle among the people of the time. Family and the pastoral concern for its welfare form a significant part of the legacy of St Chavara. While he defined family as a place where “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” (*Chavarul*, Introduction), Saint Chavara addressed his confreres in consecration as *koodapirappukal* (children born and nursed by the same parents); in fact, the latter is an original insight of St Chavara in conceiving the loving bond within a community of consecrated religious, which tells upon the fact that he did cherish and

cultivate a very positive attitude towards the relationship in his own family and the families known to him. In the process of examining our own lives with a clear focus on the ministry to families, it is essential that we recapture the core of our communitarian existence as *koodapirappukal*, facilitating an experience of being with our fellow brothers or fellow sisters. Imbibing the charism in favour of families cannot be realized without our conscious efforts to be brothers or sisters who cultivate “the bond of affection” and seek to be part of a family that is “a ... school for deeper humanity” (GS 52).

Matrix of Virtues

Just as modern medicine identifies that most of the diseases are lifestyle diseases, a closer analysis of modern families and the challenges they face indicate that most of the issues they face originate from the lifestyles adopted in varying contexts. This calls for resetting families on the right track, which would mean that lifestyle of families must undergo drastic change along the lines opened by St Chavara in *Chavarul* and by Pope Francis in *Amoris Laetitia*. However, as prescriptions are generally rescinded to by the modern generations, the only positive approach that we can adopt is to offer them with positive alternatives by way of living models. Indeed, this is a fundamental challenge to the clergy as well as consecrated men and women to ensure that their own personal and communitarian lifestyles offer creative alternatives as to how to lead a mature Christian life established in virtues stemming from the Gospel and oriented to the good of others or the common good. As ‘values are not taught but caught’ in real living contexts, and knowing that ‘it is easier to build up a morally upright person than repairing a morally broken person,’ we need to personally examine ourselves with the following: Have I been instrumental in leading an exemplary life founded in the Gospel principles? Has my life been virtuous enough to nurture more lasting intimate familial relationships? Or, as a member of my own family, even if I have moved out to a community through consecration, have I been faithful in living the virtues of family life in such a way that families that come to know me would find in my own life the life of a model Christian and, thus, to intentionally and confidently decide on a specific virtuous mode of leading Christian life in the contemporary society?

Experiencing Christian Life through Exemplars

Indeed, children must be able to identify models in good and virtuous life in different walks of life. As both *Chavarul* and *Amoris Laetitia* conceive of a Christian family as an abode of virtues, it is time to review whether we the grown up members in our families, communities, and institutions have been effective in providing them with our own lives as models. Do we exercise enough care, for example, in our conversations (avoiding gossips and unbecoming communications on all platforms) and actions so that as parents, care givers, or as teachers and pastors, we take our responsibility of grooming virtuous children our own responsibility and carry it out through our own life example?

Virtue-Driven Intimate Familial Relationship

St Chavara, an epitome of the *Darsanabhavanam* (house of vision), cultivated a spirituality, which was so much inspired by the intimate communion and relationship in family. For example, his fascination and dedication for the *Thrittvakudumbam* (Family of the Holy Trinity) and *Thirukudumbam* (Holy Family) were at the core of his spiritual upbringing and realization. Accordingly, he took every possible step to inculcate the same attitude and devotion towards the Holy Family and the Holy Trinity and to emulate the intense and intimate relationship both in the consecrated communities and in the families that he animated. This fetched good dividends as his efforts were fruitful in initiating and sustaining them in virtue-driven intimate relationships, especially within families. If heaven is where God reigns, an ideal family as an imagery of heaven (*Chavarul*, Introduction) would demand that all family members make attempts to reclaim the central importance accorded to God in all contexts and that would be the source of practising virtues or in being virtuous. In this process, even if one or all members of a family were to be found limping, as consecrated persons or ordained ministers in the Church, instead of being more authoritarian, paternalistic, and judgmental, we have to realize our vocation to accompany them, especially to those who strive and even struggle to make progress in their path of virtuous living. Such situations call for more pastoral persuasion, as carefully done by St Chavara and Pope Francis.

Pro-Family Approach in Educational Institutions

In the context of the dioceses and consecrated communities in the Catholic Church heavily involving in institutionalized educational apostolate, there is a serious call in *Chavarul* to ensure that the children are accompanied and nurtured in blossoming into mature and integrated personalities. As our educational institutions in the contemporary society are largely oriented to offer market-driven education, it is time for us to examine whether we have been successful in translating the injunctions of *Chavarul* to the advantage of children and youth, who come from families and would be the bedrock of future families. Are we ready, personally and collectively, for a strategic change in the institutional setting that would be pro-student and pro-character formation while we continue to pursue excellence in academic formation and prepare students for a successful career in life? Can we prioritize the integral growth of children in view of resetting the ministries of the Church more and more pro-family? In this regard, *Chavarul* implies that each educational institution should be made into a nurturing ground and support system for families (embracing families from all communities) both as a nursery that nurtures relationships and also as a “field hospital” (AL 291) that can offer therapeutic interventions in the lives of those families that are subject to various forms of casualties in familial relationships.

Interreligious Openness

Given the interreligious and intercultural socio-religious matrix of the Indian society and families, both *Chavarul* and *Amoris Laetitia* implicitly call for developing a healthy outlook and orientation towards families of all religions who are reached out within the Christian institutions where access to the services remains open to all, crossing the boundaries of caste, creed, and culture. Thus, instead of being sectarian and exclusivist in offering assistance to Catholic families, going beyond the traditional religious boundaries, these institutions become more inclusive and pro-family centres where families from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds are animated and empowered.¹

¹It is heartening to note that Chavara maintained a very good rapport with members of other religious communities, although he did caution Catholics not to

Sensitivity to Conscience and Necessity of Accompaniment

Chavarul and *Amoris Laetitia* take a very firm stand on the necessity of accompanying children, as they come of age, in their vocational discernment (*Chavarul* 2:14; see also AL 291–312). St Chavara is very clear in insisting that it is neither the prerogative of the parents nor of the other elders including the teachers; however, they have significant roles to play in ensuring that children are groomed in exercising their conscience so that they would learn to enjoy their freedom with responsibility, especially in making fundamental choices in their lives. St Chavara and Pope Francis call us to review our policies, especially in the context of education imparted both in the school and catechism settings. Along with training them in prescribed syllabus, they should be made to understand the value of freedom and their capacity to exercise it with responsibility by providing them ample opportunities within the context of instruction itself. In this context, it is imperative that we examine ourselves as to understand whether we have taken steps to cultivate a right conscience with the help of available resources in the form of teachings and examples of virtuous lives. Moreover, personally, I need to check as to whether I have been an effective catalyst in prompting and supporting others, especially children, youth, and families in their fundamental vocation to identify and follow the voice or the promptings of the conscience, which may get bypassed in the course of growing up unless they are helped to fine tune themselves and to cultivate sensitivity towards its promptings.

Formation of Conscience and Discernment

Assisting and preparing youngsters to make proper Christian discernment is the responsibility of both parents and the Church and society at large (*Chavarul* 2:14; AL 307). Both school education and catechism classes should be designed in such a way that children and

fall prey to the teachings of non-believers (*kavyar* as he used it in the *Chavarul* 1:21). In fact, from the very inception of the first monastery at Mannanam, members from both Hindu and Muslim communities were also his collaborators. When a school was opened at Mannanam, for example, the teachers as well as the pool of students came from a cross-section of the society. He not only availed the services from all those who had expertise, but also offered services to cater to the integral development of the whole society.

youth are closely accompanied and empowered to personally undertake the discernment in the family and the Church. Cultivation of an informed and responsible conscience, which would be pivotal in the formation of healthy families is a prerogative of all those involved in the grooming of children and youth, particularly those involved in education and catechism. Along with the imparting of formal prescribed content, they must be helped to identify best models and to emulate them in the course of growing up. As living examples offer a vibrant medium to transmit genuine values and virtues, we must ensure that every possible step is taken in this regard so that those youngsters who associate with the consecrated persons and ordained ministers would be helped in cultivating an informed and responsible conscience among them.

Accompanying Nuclear and 'Irregular' Families

Accompanying new or young families should occupy a significant place in the pastoral plan of the Church; this is more significant in the context of increasing number of nuclear families, especially in the townships and cities. As these families strive to anchor themselves in a newly set up family, the stress and strain of their professional life as well as the challenges stemming from the very limited ambience of a nuclear family life will be tougher, particularly in keeping their Christian faith alive and dynamic. While offering updating programmes in the diocesan or parish context is adjudged to be fruitful, better fruitfulness can be facilitated by a mentoring system in which both elderly couples and consecrated religious and those who have professional expertise from within the community engage in an on-going manner. It calls for a one-to-one engagement with the members of young families so that they could be helped to overcome the initial stress in relationships and to mentor them towards better and more effective familial relationships. This may be supplemented by regular programmes in parish and diocesan levels with guidance and updating programmes for families. However, as the parish context may not offer an ideal and open opportunity for couples in crisis to seek assistance, it is of paramount importance that dioceses and consecrated communities establish centres that can offer both nurturing programmes as well as therapeutic interventions in view of

building up healthy Christian families. As many trained persons are already available within the Church who can offer professional support to families in need, the need of the hour is to fine-tune their services and availability in favour of families and to promote them in prioritizing pro-family investment; if qualified personnel are already engaged in alternative ministerial contexts, they should be prompted and animated to share their resources to serve the needs of families. In this context, it is worth recalling that the family apostolate of the Catholic Church should not be restricted exclusively to its own faithful; rather, in trying to be genuinely *catholic* in the true spirit of *koodapirappukal* of St Chavara and the universal outlook of Pope Francis, the services offered by the Church to mentor families should keep an inclusive approach such that any family in need could access the resources shared through its portals.

Compassion towards Failures in Family Life

Everyone may not succeed always in his or her life; there could be setbacks and unexpected (or even *predicted*) failures. However, both St Chavara and Pope Francis advocate inculcation of an attitude of compassion especially towards those who fail in their attempts to lead a life based on the Gospel. Compassionate nurturing of those who make sincere efforts to live up to the Gospel ideal, especially in their family life, is essential. This calls for a personal and proactive approach towards persons and families in our parish contexts, especially those couples living in 'irregular' situations. Indeed, this invites our attention to the fact that pastors should be able to devote more quality time not only for sacramental and temporal administration, but greater focus should be placed on the necessity of personal accompaniment of families and members in families, even if they are leading an estranged life at one stage or another. Review of the proceedings of this conference insistently calls for a paradigm shift in our pastoral approach and allocation of time and resources in favour of reaching out to persons and families who mostly need a compassionate attitude and readiness to reach out with the heart and mind of the Good Shepherd. As Pope Francis repeatedly reminds us, if I wish to be merciful, all my pastoral involvement would demand that I am willing "to enter into the chaos of another." If not in the families,

where else should the Church address the chaos and conflicts and make room for the Spirit to hover over, and to usher in the creation of families ordered after the Gospel paradigm?

Pastoral Aspirations for More Effective Institutionalized Support System

In our attempts to stabilize the pastoral aspirations we have shared on *Chavarul* and the *Amoris Laetitia*, a couple of institutional interventions or initiatives could be recommended:

1. Along with the existing institutionalized support system offered at the diocesan and parish contexts, consecrated communities and charismatic couples should be encouraged to offer alternative systems to personally accompany couples and families, whether they are in regular or irregular status; maybe, a compassionate approach along the line of Jesus would call for engaging more with the imperfect or irregular couples and families.

2. As most of the existing pastoral initiatives are primarily animated by ordained ministers and consecrated persons, it is important that more married couples are trained and inducted into the ministry to families. Diocesan and parish institutions should be reset in such a way that there will be predominant or significant presence (and leadership) of trained or initiated lay persons to fulfil their mission. Further, theological institutes should offer more pastorally oriented programmes in view of equipping lay persons who would be more effective in reaching out and to offer better therapeutic interventions in favour of families.

3. Given the complexity of problems faced by families and the interdisciplinary approach of the required solutions, it would be ideal that the Church sets up a new institute at the national level as well as at state levels to undertake critical study and research into the family life in India and to offer scientific as well as pastoral solutions to families. Given the proximity of both ecclesiastical and public higher education institutions on Dharmaram campus (Bangalore), I am inclined to propose that a joint effort of Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram and Christ (Deemed to Be University) under the administrative umbrella of Dharmaram College would offer an ideal teamwork and institutional

network the Church can afford and aspire. If the successors of St Chavara could take a lead in addressing the needs of the families in the contemporary times, I am sure that they would be responsibly responding to one of the most crucial tasks at hand.

As “joy of love experienced by families is also the joy of the Church” (AL 1), the challenges faced by families offer innumerable opportunities for creative pastoral involvement, which, if fulfilled with the compassionate attitude of Jesus, would orient all Christian families towards becoming “the image of heaven.”

APPENDIX

CHAVARUL

Testament of a Loving Father¹

Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara

Dedication

My beloved children

In flesh and blood, I am the son of Kuriakose Chavara of the parish of Chennamkary. The omnipotent God most kindly brought me into this world. As I have been born in this family and from these parents, it is but natural that, in the order of charity and justice, I am bound to be grateful and to serve you. However, other than the few good deeds that have been done in general, there is nothing noteworthy enough that I have done for you. Hence, I bequeath to you this document in my own handwriting. This script will not perish even when I am dead and gone. So, I entrust this cherished treasure to you, my children of the Kainakari Church.

This is my last testament (will) given to you, my siblings and family members, and children both in the order of spirit and flesh. Let this be a mark of the fact that you are my successors. The countless favours God has bestowed upon you are not entirely due to your meritorious lives, but earned also by the true love and trust of your forefathers. Hence, you must ensure that you do not lose it! Do remember that I came into this world and that I left it by copying this testament by as many as possible to preserve and perpetuate it in your homes. Keep the original locked in a box in the chapel. On the first Saturday of every month, all of you shall come together and read it; this shall be a commemoration of my death anniversary; there is nothing else you need to do to remember me.

Lastly, every month, after you have read this testament, you may whisper a short prayer on my behalf: "O! Lord, keep the soul of thy servant also in the abode of the just."

¹English Translation by Saju Chackalackal, CMI (Chavara Hills, Kochi: Chavara Central Secretariat, 2018 [150th Year Revised and Updated Edition]). Reprinted with permission.

Introduction

A good Christian family is the image of heaven. The *raison d'être* of family is that the members live together by the bond of blood and affection, with children duly obeying their parents, and respecting them and one another, walking peacefully before God and each one, seeking eternal salvation according to his or her proper state of life. The only sweet consolation for a person experiencing trials and tribulations in the sorrowful valley of this world is to belong to and live in a family where love, order, and peace reign. Likewise, it is most distressing for members to live in a family where order and peace do not prevail and where no one is concerned about the service of God and their own eternal salvation.

How sad and unfortunate are the families that have no concern about orderliness in their homes? How many of such rich, famous, and respected families have been ruined? How often have the behaviour and attitude of these families led to quarrels, commission of sins, destruction, and death? Praying for divinely inspired clarity and peace of mind, I have framed these rules of conduct for families with the intention of their avoiding sin and destruction resulting from disorderliness. May I appeal to everyone to wholeheartedly follow and carefully enforce these precepts as a counsel coming from your revered ancestors!

Part 1: Precepts for Families

Love

1. "Love one another" (Jn 13:34). Forgive the mistakes and shortcomings of each other. If you do so, you will experience peace on earth and eternal reward in heaven. How lamentable it is to find a home where there is discord and acrimony between brothers and sisters. Our Lord himself has stated that every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined (Mt 12:25). A family that experiences discord and fight among its members will soon perish. If you are not ready to forgive the mistakes and wrongdoings of your family members, how will they forgive you? If they should forgive you for mistakes you may make in future, shouldn't you forgive them today for theirs? If you love only those who have not harmed you, then you are doing what people of other faiths and total strangers, who do not know each other, do. Should you voluntarily create more woes and difficulties than what our great father Adam has bequeathed already? Woe unto those who cause quarrels in families!

There is an instance of an old woman who incited several quarrels in her home. The devil appeared before her and offered her a bag full of gold and

took her to the hell as his counsel, saying that she had successfully accomplished in three days what he had been unable to achieve in three years!

The honour and blessing of a family lies in coexisting without any quarrels and to be on good terms with everyone. Even animals retaliate against those who resent them. The ability to overlook faults in others and to forgive them is possible only for those who are really strong, prudent, and honourable. Once, while Emperor Constantine was walking along the road escorted by his royal troop, a man from the street came up and slapped him. Immediately, his people sought permission to retaliate and kill the offender. The Emperor, however, replied: "If I do what even my lowest officer can do, what merit is there in it? I, however, forgive him and that is the mark of the great might I have as an Emperor."

2. Civil litigations ruin families. Even in the most just case, many a litigant has come to rue the fact that it would have been better not to have gone to court. No one has been happy or better off by having gone in for civil litigation.

3. Celebrating family festivals and other commemorations on Sundays and days of obligation is an evil practice that, finally, leads the soul to ruin. Sunday is the Lord's Day. Such devious habits and practices are the inventions that turn the Lord's Day into devil's day. Moreover, it is a deplorable custom, forbidden by God and the Church, for the bereaved family members not to attend the Church and to participate in other spiritual services on Sundays and days of obligation.

4. Don't make it a habit to borrow money, except for any urgent necessities; try to repay your debts as quickly as possible. Don't lend money to anyone except on the ground of charity. The wealthiest family is the one which is not in debt. If there are outstanding Mass obligations or any other debt left by parents or forefathers, hasten to fulfil them with zeal, as it is most perilous to ignore them. For, Divine wrath befalls on families burdened with such unfulfilled obligations.

Humility

5. Don't show off the status of your wealth. He who displays all his wealth is considered to be of lower status. Very often, the one who styles himself as rich will soon go begging. King David, being proud of his might and superiority, once ordered a census of his people; soon Divine wrath befell his people in the form of an epidemic throughout his kingdom wiping out a major portion of the population (2 Sam 24).

6. Be frugal in spending, and don't spend beyond your means in celebrating anniversaries and festivals. For, no one knows how long one can keep up such a style. The light of a mini lamp that burns longer is preferable to a torched haystack that blazes for a while and gets extinguished instantaneously. When Democritus, a renowned philosopher, was once asked as to who is the best among human beings, he answered: "The one who least exhibits oneself is the greatest." A scholar once counselled a distressed man who had spent all his wealth on extravagant feasts and marriages and had become a pauper: "Brother, if you had not burnt away your lamp during the day, you could have lighted it at night."

Relatives and Friends

7. Don't go from door to door seeking news about others. For, if you were to discharge your own duties well, you would not have time to peep unnecessarily into the affairs of others.

8. Don't contract relationship with families that lack order and fear of God. For, it is not the rich who bring goodness and delight into your family, but the orderly and God-fearing relatives. How many families have been distressed and ruined due to their regrettable association with rich relatives.

In France, a certain man had an only son. He made strenuous efforts to marry his son off to the daughter of an aristocratic woman. The marriage was, finally, solemnized on condition that all his ancestral wealth would be bequeathed to his son. After a while, his own son along with the bride's family began to resent his lower status and, hence, he was dismissed from the household. He went begging and was forced to feed himself on the remains of the food thrown out of his son's house during feasts and commemorations.

9. Don't entertain all sorts of people in your house, but receive only those who are well-mannered and God-fearing. As the old saying goes, "show me your friends and I will tell you who you are."

10. Let everyone know that your house is not a place for indecent talk, unchristian conversations, grumbling and uncharitable criticism of neighbours or anyone else. You must know that punishment will befall upon you for entertaining discussion on the shortcomings and evil deeds of others in your home. There was a man who habitually went around speaking ill of others. He ended up mad and began to bite his own tongue which was infested with worms and boils; he eventually died an unfortunate death due to the resulting infections.

Industriousness

11. Don't become too materialistic and keep acquiring novel items; instead, try hard to improve the holdings you already possess. The wealth of a family does not lie in amassing innumerable possessions, but in their quality. An industrious man lived happily with a limited number of assets. Some envious people accused him of hiding some priceless treasures, and took him to court. The king immediately ordered his assets to be catalogued and assessed. He was, however, acquitted honourably when he informed the court that his treasure was a small plot of land, which was transformed into gold as he had worked hard on it and shed his sweat on its soil.

12. Labour according to your status in life. Refusing to work is not the style of a respectable person, but would fit only the indecent, who do not have a family and progeny. Laziness is the mother of all vices; it ends up in inculcating bad habits such as drinking. Alcoholism is a reprehensible evil in the society and the worst act before God. Kathon, a Roman chieftain, not only ordered that everyone desirous of living in Rome should show his or her toughened hands resulting from hard work to merit the disposition but also decreed that the Nobles and the Lords carry on their person the tools of their respective trade when they are out on the streets.

13. Business is not only risky for your soul but also for your wealth. If there is no other option to make a living, you are not forbidden from pursuing business. It should, however, be carried out with due care, honesty, and justice. No unjust trader has been found to make steady and continuous progress in life. Riches amassed by fraud and deceit will melt away like snow.

There were two tradesmen who never prospered in their business despite adopting many tricks and frauds. One day they approached the confessional and confessed their tricks and frauds. The confessor advised them to desist from fraudulent and dishonest practices. When they acted accordingly, with God's abundant blessings, they prospered within one year.

Act of Charity

14. Days on which you have not rendered any good to others will not be reckoned in the book of life. Be desirous of others' love and respect than they becoming fearful of you. Let no beggar leave your home empty handed; likewise, don't hesitate, as much as you can, to give alms.

A man performed at least one charitable act on a daily basis as he was convinced that God the Creator has decreed it obligatory to render others

some good every day. One day, while at supper, recalling that he had not rendered any good to anyone else on that day, he first attended to the matter at hand before having his supper.

15. Extravagance and miserliness are both sinful. Worms will devour the wealth of a miser. The luxuries of an extravagant will vanish like smoke. There was a man who spent generously on his household needs and gave alms according to his state and means. As he prospered well, he began to neglect charity and focussed more on amassing wealth for himself. In course of time, he developed an infectious wound on his leg; he consulted many physicians and spent a lot of money on various treatment procedures. Then, an angel appeared and told him: "Know that those who amass wealth by refusing to do charity will face inordinate instances of spending money."

16. You don't require many friends; but choose one carefully from among a thousand. Those who do not love God will not truly love you either. David and Jonathan loved each other; united in one mind, they loved and helped each other genuinely till the very end of their lives. Their love did not diminish due to any trivial circumstances; instead, their close friendship grew stronger in times of danger and hardship.

Desire for Justice

17. Don't allow to keep stolen goods even for a short while in your house. The Holy Spirit has warned that a house harbouring stolen goods will go up in flames. Don't mingle with those who steal; for, certainly, they will not hesitate to steal your possessions. Moreover, you will have a share in their sin as well.

There was a man who became rich by stealing and indulging in other dishonest means. While on death-bed, he invited the will-writers on the pretext of partitioning his assets, and dictated to them the following: "I leave my soul to the devil." His children were shocked by this, and they enquired of him whether he was in his senses or affected by delirium. The sick man, however, replied: "No my dear children; I am in my senses. Let them write what I dictate: 'I leave my soul as well as that of my wife, who encouraged me to embezzle the properties of others, to the devil. I surrender your souls too to the devil; for, it was for you that I misappropriated these goods that belonged to others.'" Saying this, he unfortunately breathed his last.

18. Don't deny or delay just wages to labourers; for, it is a grave sin crying out before the throne of God. Don't humiliate or trouble the poor; for, God will seek retribution from you on account of their tears.

It is reported from the city of Leuven that there was a householder who was very rich. A poor widow and her four children were tenants on his estate. As he oftentimes harassed and saddened them, one day, having reached the end of her tether, the mother prayed on her knees: "Oh Lord, deliver us from this unfair and sad state." Instantaneously, the rich landlord dropped dead.

Fear of God

19. The most valuable possession of a family consists in fear of and devotion to the Lord. A family in which the fear of the Lord pervades will enjoy the fruit of divine blessings in this world as well as in eternity. Blasphemous language and vulgar conversations will fade away the brightness of a good family like dark clouds. As much as possible, participate daily in the Holy Mass. If it is difficult, take part in the Masses on Mondays for the souls in purgatory, on Fridays in commemoration of the passion and death of the Lord, and on Saturdays in devotion to our Lady of Sorrows. If all members from a family cannot attend daily Mass together, let them take turns, ensuring that one or two attend Mass every day. Confess your sins and receive Holy Communion at least once a month. If you cannot participate in the Novena prayers associated with major feasts and the feasts of our Lady, and the monthly devotions in honour of the Blessed Virgin and Saint Joseph in the church, you must recite them at home.

Be exceedingly careful to be chaste and modest in all your postures, whether sitting or walking, lying or playing. Immodesty is reprehensible both before God and the world. We would learn only on the day of judgement about how many souls have been lost in hell due to boys and girls roaming around immodestly dressed and their unchaste body contacts, which their parents do not forbid.

There was an extraordinarily modest boy in France, who, even when he was alone, kept his whole body, including his arms, wrapped under the dress. When he was told that, were he to be punished to the hell, he would be naked there. On learning this, he was awfully horrified and cried. Through the example of this boy, we understand how much he treasured modesty in his life.

Patience

20. Entrust yourself to the Divine Providence when you are faced with trials and tribulations, diseases and difficulties. He is not a strong person who is patient only when he is delighted. A devotee used to say: "In this world,

everything happens according to my wish; for, I wish only that which is willed by God.”

During a house visit, when Saint Ambrose was told that the family had never experienced any illness or agony or sorrow, he hastened to leave the house observing: “Let us leave this house; for, Divine Wrath will soon befall on this house.” Immediately, the house collapsed killing everyone inside. For, punishment is a sign of God’s love for us and it helps us to seek God during trying times.

Good Books

21. Scientific books of the non-believers spread ignorance and erroneous knowledge. Collecting pagan or heretical books or those containing lewd songs in the house is identical to hiding fire in haystacks. Parents shall procure for their children the treasure of books packed with wisdom and philosophical knowledge that enhance piety. As much as possible, you shall buy and build up a collection of such books in your household.

There was a beggar who was illiterate. Yet, he bought books out of the alms he received; he managed to get them read out to him by those who could read and conformed his life to the noble way of life enshrined in them. Thus, he gave an edifying example to many.

Days of Obligation

22. One should not be complacent with only participation in the Holy Mass on days of obligation; instead, most of the day shall be spent in virtuous acts such as listening to sermons, reading good books, and in performing charitable acts such as visiting and caring for the sick, especially those who are very poor.

23. Appoint only those who fear the Lord for any service at home. Ensure that their numbers are restricted to the minimum. Many are the homes in which the sway of the devil is established through the appointed caretakers. Masters should know that they are responsible for keeping track of their servants’ conduct and in assisting them in their spiritual welfare.

Daily Routine

24. Ensure that you go to bed and get up in the morning punctually. Everyone shall abide by the following timetable strictly: At least by six o’clock in the morning, ensure that every member is up and recites the morning prayers. Then, all those who are able should attend the Holy Mass. Have breakfast at eight o’clock in the morning and lunch at twelve noon. In the evening, after praying the Angelus, all shall commonly recite the family

prayers, which shall be followed by half an hour of meditation upon a theme based on what is read from good books.

Don't interrupt the routine of family prayer even if some important guests or visitors turn up at your house at that time. For, while, on the one hand, you feel attending to the people visiting your home, you also feel the call of God, on the other; in fact, God is closely watching your choice. Hence, you should not fail in observing the virtuous act of family prayer; by strictly adhering to it, you set a good example for others. If they ridicule you, consider it to be a blessing. After supper at eight o'clock, you shall make an examination of your conscience and say the night prayers, following which you shall go to bed.

The head of the house shall ensure that these precepts are followed strictly. Read out these precepts before the members of the household on every Sunday and on the first day of every month.

Part 2: Upbringing of Children

1. Parents, you ought to know that bringing up your children is the most important thing and your primary duty in life. Children are sacred treasures entrusted to you by God Almighty. You should also remember that these are the souls that Jesus Christ has entrusted in your hands to sanctify them with His most precious blood and to make them His servants and, thus, to offer them back to Him on the Day of Judgment. If any of the children were to be lost in hell due to the fault of their parents, what a serious hindrance will it be for their salvation! Origen, a great theologian, has stated that, if the parents have been condemned to hell on the judgment day, due to the evil acts of their children, it is because God holds them responsible for the acts of their children. If you desire your children to be with you and be helpful to you in your old age, ensure that they are trained to be good Christians in their tender age. If they do not fear and love the Lord when they are young, they will neither love nor respect their parents. Parents should offer their children to the Lord repetitively and submit them to the intercession of the Holy Family and pray for them often. God will receive a mother's petition as that of her baby.

2. As the children grow up, teach them to devotedly call on the names of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Let the children familiarise and kiss the image of the Holy Family and teach them to honour and venerate them. As they begin to speak, teach them to recite short prayers such as Our Father, Hail Mary, the Angelus, etc. How commendable it is to nourish their souls by these means along with the nutritious food that you provide for their body.

3. Don't let your children move around naked even inside the house. Don't engage in unbecoming conversations and gossiping in the presence of children. Don't even wrongly assume that they don't follow what you say. Children in Christian countries are not even told that they are born of their mothers; instead, in their tender age, they are told that the baby was sent from the heavens during a rain or that the baby was found in a well.
4. Out of respect for the elders, don't let children sleep in their parents' bedroom. Moreover, don't let boys and girls sleep in the same room; for, the devil will teach them what they don't know by nature.
5. When the children are too young, don't permit them go out of elders' sight to play with their friends. Don't trust servants who are careless with the children; very often these careless servants spoil them.
6. As soon as the children come of age, they should be sent to school. From time to time, parents should enquire about their progress in studies and also about the type of friendships they cultivate. Every Sunday, parents must review what they have studied.
7. Don't permit children to stay in the houses of relatives; for, although they leave as angels, many a time, they return as devils.
8. When children are seven years old, facilitate their confession after instructing them what they should know about it. Instruct them especially to be devoted to the Blessed Mother.
9. Both extreme strictness and too much leniency towards children are evil. While too much affection will make them proud, excessive anger and punishment will lead to lack of trust, shamelessness, and intellectual incompetence in them. Before inflicting corporal punishment, prudently make the children understand why they are being punished, and honourably advise them along with rationing their food and, occasionally, making them kneel down. Pouring out abuses in the process of correcting the children will not only have any positive effect on them, but will only make them repeat the same to their children when they grow up. The mother should set an example to the children in respecting and honouring the father; so shall the father teach the children by his example to love and respect the mother. If the parents don't love and respect each other, their children also will not respect them.
10. Don't train children in lying or cheating, or other shadowy tricks, saying that it is normal and that they need to be cunning to survive in the world. When you come across their mistakes, rebuke and correct them. Teach them to hold truth and justice in high esteem.

11. Ensure that all children are at home by the time the Angelus bells ring. Train them to greet and kiss the hands of the elders and parents as soon as the family prayers are over.

As the children reach twelve years of age, a period of extreme caution in their development, instead of sending them to various celebrations such as anniversaries, feasts, marriages, etc., care should be taken to ensure that they are trained at home in some occupation proper to their age. Dressing up girls for festival celebrations or as bridesmaids for weddings is an insidious custom that originated in hell.

12. Proudly showing off the daughters by dressing them up in expensive costumes and ornaments beyond their status and means, as it is apparently the way of the rich and aristocratic families, ignites hellfire for many a soul. The most desirable adornment for a girl lies in her modesty, piety, silence, and control of eyes.

13. Fight between children should not lead to quarrel among elders. Those elders, who cannot accept their children being slighted or hurt by someone else, are also childish in their reaction.

14. When they come of age, children should be given full freedom to choose their state of life. For, it is God who resolves on their state of life and it is the responsibility of the children to make the right choice; it is not the prerogative of the parents. Many are the parents and children who wail in hell owing to their mistakes in this regard. Hence, decision about the state of life should not be delayed for boys beyond sixteen and eighteen and for girls beyond fourteen and sixteen years of age. Their consent must be specially ascertained before marriages are arranged. Seek in every alliance courteousness and noble qualities of conduct than wealth and social status. Otherwise, instead of joy and happiness, it may result in incessant grief for children as well as parents.

15. Parents shall not be indecisive or show undue regard for their children even when they are grown up and have become erudite and competent. As far as possible, don't entrust them the management of the household affairs. For, many a parent has ended up in disappointment after having transferred the authority of the household.

16. Parents, ahead of their own demise, should take steps to settle their children in their own homes. Apportion the properties among the children when parents are in their good senses. For, discord may arise among the children on account of property division and the parents will be held responsible for the sins from such dissensions and conflicts among them.

Finally, dear children, you are bound by the commandment of God to respect your parents and to ensure that their minds are not burdened or

aggrieved. For, you shall remember that violating the fourth commandment of God would bring down God's curse not only in afterlife but also in the present.

In Japan, a heathen kingdom, there lived a mother with three children. They could not take care of their mother the way she deserved, as they were extremely poor. In this kingdom, there was a rule that thieves should be invariably hanged and that those who capture and hand over thieves to the state shall be suitably rewarded. Being motivated by this rule and with the hope of providing better facilities for their mother, one of the children pretended to be a thief and the other two handed him over to the authorities for which they, in turn, collected their reward. When one of the wardens in the jail saw the two brothers compassionately bidding farewell to the thief and encouraging him to be brave in facing death for the sake of their mother, he enquired of him the reason for such kind behaviour. The warden came to know that the person facing the gallows is the brother of the other two, who decided on his own to die for the sake of their mother's welfare. When the king was informed about this fact, he not only set the brother free, but also decreed to offer maintenance to the mother till her death. My dear children, remember this incident always!

*Father Kuriakose Elias of the Holy Family
Prior of the Mannanam and Other Monasteries of the TOCD
13 February 1868*

A BRIEF LIFE HISTORY OF SAINT KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA

Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara was born on 10 February 1805 in Kainakary, a small village of Alleppey district in the Travancore state. After his primary education he joined the Pallipuram seminary attached to Saint Mary's Church, Cherthala. Father Thomas Palackal was his malpan (professor of sacred sciences). He received his sub-diaconate in 1827 and diaconate in 1828. On 29 November 1829, he was ordained a priest at Saint Andrews Church, Arthunkal. From a very young age, Kuriakose was instructed to chant the name 'Jesus', as a result of which he eagerly wished to live a life dedicated to Jesus and the Church.

After his priestly ordination, he joined Father Thomas Palackal and Father Thomas Porukara, his malpans, and laid the foundation for a spiritual movement at Mannanam. They were joined by Brother Jacob Kiananthara who shared their lofty ideal of life in seclusion, away from worldly pursuits. They established a residence at Mannanam in the year 1831 and named it '*Beth Rauma*' (house on the hilltop). *Beth Rauma* had a humble beginning and grew into a dwelling place for a group of religious priests who, later, came to be known as Servants of the Immaculate Conception. This religious community at Mannanam laid the foundation for the congregation of Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI). Father Thomas Palackal and Father Thomas Porukara died in 1841 and 1846 respectively.

With the demise of his malpans, Father Kuriakose was entrusted with the responsibility of this new congregation, which he led until his death. In 1861, Archbishop Bernardinose of the Archdiocese of Verapoly appointed Father Kuriakose the Vicar General of the Syrian Catholics, and he fought against the schism arising from the arrival of Bishop Roccas, which did disturb the unity of the Malabar Church.

From 1831 onwards Father Kuriakose engaged in various spiritual and welfare activities, such as starting a Sanskrit school at Mannanam for the educational development of the area, establishing the first wooden press in Kerala, renewing the Order of the Liturgy, popularising Sunday sermons and organizing annual retreats in parishes to facilitate

the spiritual renewal of the people. In 1866, he founded the first Indian religious congregation for women, the Congregation of Mother of Carmel (CMC).

Saint Kuriakose spent the last seven years of his life at Koonammavu, Kerala, where he died on 3 January 1871 and was buried in Saint Philomena's Church, Koonammavu. Later, on 24 May 1889, his mortal remains were transferred from Koonammavu and reinterred in the Saint Joseph's Monastery Chapel at Mannanam, the mother house of the CMI congregation.

Saint Kuriakose Elias was well known for his sacrificial life and continues to be a model of Christian virtue and a solace for many in their trials and tribulations. Many favours have been received through his intercession. Saint Alphonsa, the first saint of India, sought the intercession of Saint Kuriakose and was instantly cured of her illness. She had certified this cure by her own handwritten testimonial.

The canonization process of Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara began in 1956 and, on 8 February 1986, he was beatified by Pope John Paul II at Kottayam, Kerala.

The miraculous cure of the crippled feet of Joseph Pennaparampil from Calicut, Kerala, through the intercession of Saint Kuriakose was approved for the beatification. The miraculous cure of the alternating convergent squint eyes of Maria Jose Kottarathil from Pala, Kerala, was approved by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, Vatican, for the canonization of Saint Kuriakose. On 18 March 2014, Pope Francis signed the Decree approving Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara to be declared a saint.

On 23 November 2014, Kuriakose Elias Chavara was canonized at Rome by Pope Francis. The tomb, where the mortal remains of Saint Kuriakose are interred, is situated in front of the main altar of Saint Joseph's Monastery Chapel at Mannanam.

Milestones in the Life of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara

10-02-1805	Born at Kainakary, Kerala
18-02-1805	Baptized at Chennamkary Parish Church
08-09-1805	Dedicated to Blessed Virgin Mary as her servant at Vechoor Church
1810-1815	Primary education at Kainakary
1818	Joined the parish seminary at Pallipuram
29-11-1829	Ordained priest at Arthunkal Church
11-05-1831	Foundation of the first Indian indigenous religious

- congregation for men, Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI), along with Father Thomas Palackal and Father Thomas Porukara
- 1831 Popularized Sunday Homilies and introduced Retreats for priests and laity in the Kerala Church
- 1833 Establishment of the first Syro-Malabar Common Seminary at Mannanam
- 1838 Introduction of 'Way of the Cross' devotion at Mannanam
- 16-02-1844 Appointed Malpan (tutor of sacred subjects) and examiner of Scholastics with the authorization to issue patents to the newly ordained priests to hear confession and to preach in the Church
- 03-07-1846 Foundation of the first printing press and publishing house of the Syro-Malabar Church at Mannanam
- 1846 Foundation of the First Catholic Sanskrit School at Mannanam
- 1849 Appointed official preacher for the Church in Kerala by Bishop Ludovico Nartini
- 1853 Foundation of the First Syro-Malabar Catechumenate at Mannanam
- 1855 Religious community was named 'Servants of Mary Immaculate'
- 08-12-1855 First priest to profess as religious in the Indian Church (along with 10 other members)
- 1856-1857 Wrote 10 Eclogues (Shepherd Plays) on the nativity of Jesus Christ
- 1859 Started the arrangements for the convent at Puthenpally
- 27-07-1861 OCD Affiliated the Congregation as Third Order of Carmelites Discalced (TOCD)
- 08-06-1861 Appointed as the First Vicar General in the Syro-Malabar Church after the time of Archdeacons
- 1861 Fought for Syro-Malabar Church against the intruder Bishop Roccas
- 1862 Wrote the First Malayalam Narrative poem, *Anasthasiayude Rakthasakshyam*, an inspirational story of a martyr
- 1862-1869 Edited the Divine Office for priests, compiled and composed Liturgical Rubrics, Liturgical Calendar, Office for the Dead, Little Office of Immaculate Mother, etc., in the Malabar Church
- 1864 Introduced the 'May Devotion of Blessed Virgin Mary' at Mannanam
- 1864 Implemented the concept, 'A School for a Church' (*Pallikkudam*), in the Syro-Malabar Church as its Vicar General
- 13-02-1866 Foundation of the Indian Religious Congregation for women, Congregation of Mother Carmel (CMC), at Koonammavu

- together with Father Leopold OCD, an Italian missionary
- 15-02-1866 Introduced 40 Hours Eucharistic Adoration in Kerala at Koonammavu
- 02-01-1868 Started the first boarding house and school for girls in Kerala at Koonammavu together with Father Leopold OCD
- 13-02-1868 Wrote the first instruction manual, *Testament of a Loving Father (Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul)* for Christian families, the first of its kind in the Church
- 1869 Foundation of the first lay charitable organization, the 'Confraternity of Saint Joseph for Happy Death' at Kainakary
- 1869 Foundation of the first Home of Charity, *Upavisala*, for the sick, old, and destitute at Kainakary
- 1869 Initiated Catholic reunion movement
- Monasteries and Convents established:
- 1831 Saint Joseph's Ashram, Mannanam
- 1857 Saint Joseph Ashram, Koonammavu
- 1858 Saint Mary's Ashram, Elthuruthu
- 1859 Carmel Ashram, Vazhakulam
- 1861 Saint Sebastian's Ashram, Pulinkunnu
- 1866 Saint Teresa's Convent, Koonammavu
- 1868 Saint Teresa's Ashram, Ambazhakad
- 1870 Saint John of the Cross Ashram, Mutholy
- 03-01-1871 Slept in the Lord at Saint Philomina's Monastery at Koonammavu
- 04-05-1889 Mortal remains reinterred at Saint Joseph's Monastery, Mannanam, Mother House of the CMI Congregation
- 21-12-1936 Canonization process started at the congregational level
- 09-12-1955 Official permission to start the process of Canonization
- 03-01-1958 Diocesan process started with the title Servant of God
- 07-04-1984 Declared Venerable by Pope John Paul II in Rome
- 08-02-1986 Beatification at Kottayam, Kerala, by Pope John Paul II
- 20-12-1987 Release of the postal stamp by the Government of India in recognition of the social commitment of Saint Chavara
- 04-05-2006 Portrait of Saint Chavara unveiled in the Literary Academy Hall of Thrissur by Government of Kerala for contribution to Malayalam literature
- 19-10-2014 Publication of Eclogues by Kerala Sahithya Academy
- 23-11-2014 Canonization of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara at Vatican by Pope Francis

INDEX

- Abortion, 35, 166, 200, 256, 257,
260, 262, 303, 500, 527
- Accompaniment, 14, 17, 18, 28,
44, 45, 47, 48, 65, 93, 199, 200–
202, 205, 210, 215, 217, 266, 268,
273, 276, 279, 281–291, 419, 440,
444, 460, 462, 468, 471, 481–483,
489, 502, 542, 546–548
- Addiction, 204, 376, 430, 456, 525,
536
- Adolescence, 105, 377, 382, 393,
472, 514
- Africa, 197, 220, 227–231, 233, 235,
242, 244, 249, 252, 254, 255, 262,
327, 353, 381
- AIDS, 220, 228–231, 357, 361
- Alcoholism, 200, 206, 209, 274,
307, 308, 456, 509, 510, 525, 536,
557
- Amoris Laetitia* (AL), 11–20, 24, 26,
27, 29, 32–34, 45, 46, 48, 83, 89,
90, 106, 107, 109, 112, 116, 127,
132, 136, 137, 145, 155, 162, 171,
175, 183, 189, 190, 192–194, 200–
220, 223–228, 231–235, 237, 240,
242, 243, 245, 246, 248–250, 253,
257, 260–270, 272–284, 286–291,
293, 329, 330, 341–345, 363–367,
369, 370, 372, 374–387, 406, 407,
410, 412, 413, 417, 421, 422, 426,
428, 430, 431, 434–454, 456, 457,
460, 461–467, 469–473, 475–481,
483–485, 488–502, 541, 543–546,
549, 550
- Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae*, 83,
157, 175
- Aristotle, 37, 38, 97, 167, 425
- Asia, 23, 233, 235, 241, 244, 249,
252, 254–256, 262, 272, 277, 327,
336, 339, 342, 343, 346–348, 354,
410, 412, 415, 416, 420, 459, 466
- Augustine, St, 19, 69, 131, 142,
143, 183, 187, 188, 213, 309, 311,
363, 452
- Benedict XVI, 23, 124, 169, 171,
189, 190, 220, 251, 272, 372, 465
- Birth Control, 35, 73, 165, 197,
226, 262, 270, 303, 313, 533
- Body, 31, 59, 104, 108, 113, 129,
134, 144, 153, 165, 174, 181, 214,
223, 225, 250, 321, 322, 339, 367,
373, 400, 405, 421, 424, 432, 459,
499, 500, 523, 536
- Buddhism, 331, 332, 333
- Cahill, Lisa Sowle, 142, 144, 145
- Care of the Elderly, 72, 298
- Carmelite/s, 48, 61, 67, 81, 125,
259, 469, 541, 565, 567
- Caste System, 54, 55, 57, 61, 62,
76, 78, 79, 99, 151, 297, 351, 360
- Casti Connubii*, 139, 161, 175, 176,
181, 187, 188, 221
- Catechism of the Catholic Church*,
88, 119, 127–129, 131, 133, 135,
141, 142, 144, 145, 154, 189, 191,
396, 399, 401, 405, 406, 447, 448,
463, 496
- Catholic, 15–18, 23, 34, 38, 42, 46,
55, 60, 61, 63, 64, 67–70, 73, 74,
77, 79–83, 87, 88, 90, 92, 94, 95,
96, 100, 104, 115, 116, 119, 120,
127, 128, 129, 131, 133, 135, 139,

- 141, 142, 144, 145, 149, 154, 155, 157, 159, 160, 162, 166, 168, 171–174, 176–180, 182, 183, 185–193, 196, 197, 205, 213, 225, 229, 232, 234–240, 243, 246, 249–252, 258–260, 266, 270, 274, 275, 279, 281, 295, 301, 309, 313, 316, 318, 327, 329–331, 333–335, 341, 342, 371, 374, 378–380, 388, 395, 396, 399, 401, 402, 405, 407, 408, 410–416, 419–421, 434, 444, 446, 447, 457, 458, 463, 469, 476, 481, 483, 485–489, 496–498, 505, 508, 512, 514, 526, 545, 548, 567, 568
- Catholic Church, 23, 60, 69, 70, 77, 88, 95, 100, 104, 115, 119, 127–129, 131, 133, 135, 141, 142, 144, 145, 154, 159, 160, 173, 177, 180, 189, 191, 235, 240, 318, 327, 329, 334, 341, 342, 395, 396, 399, 401, 405, 415, 447, 463, 483, 487, 488, 496, 545, 548
- CBCI Gender Policy, 410
- CDF, 189, 395, 396, 398, 399, 400
- Chan, Lúcas, 39–41, 43
- Charity, 19, 36, 43, 70, 89, 98, 108, 118, 131, 133, 134, 138, 141, 142, 147, 148, 154, 212, 217, 226, 267, 283, 364, 380, 441, 449, 452, 463, 476, 480, 495, 557, 568
- Chaste Love, 485, 497
- Chavara, Kuriakose Elias, St 11–13, 15–17, 20, 23–30, 32, 33, 51–53, 55, 56, 58, 60, 61, 63, 64–67, 70, 75, 77, 78, 80–104, 106–127, 130–139, 146–154, 173, 223, 232, 233, 259, 260, 280, 350–352, 358, 364, 374–378, 381, 384, 386, 387, 399, 422, 426, 427, 429–431, 435, 436, 454, 456, 464–466, 485–487, 490, 491, 493–496, 498, 502, 522, 533, 535, 537, 541–546, 548, 550, 553, 564–566, 568
- Chavarul*, 11–20, 23–26, 29, 30, 32–35, 38, 40–45, 47–49, 51, 52, 60, 66, 67, 75, 78–85, 87–96, 100–106, 109, 112, 114–127, 130–137, 139, 146–154, 173, 223, 293, 350, 352, 358, 363–369, 372, 374–378, 380, 383, 384, 386, 387, 399, 400, 422, 426, 427, 429–431, 435, 436, 454, 456, 464, 469–471, 473, 475, 477, 479, 480, 483–485, 487, 490, 491, 493–495, 498, 499, 502, 522, 535, 537, 541–546, 549, 553, 566, 568
- Chennamkary, 25, 553, 566
- Child Abuse, 103, 109
- Child Labour, 241, 242
- Child Marriage, 54, 247, 248, 251, 351, 352, 358
- Childhood, 45, 91, 96, 105, 108, 110, 113, 148, 248, 257, 378, 380, 382, 389, 391–393, 495, 514
- Children, 12, 13, 16, 17, 19, 25, 27, 28, 30, 31, 37, 43–45, 57–59, 63, 68, 71–76, 79–81, 84, 85, 88–92, 101–103, 105–118, 120–123, 126, 134–137, 140, 145–149, 151–154, 160–162, 164, 165, 167, 176, 183–185, 187, 194, 195, 198, 204–206, 208, 211, 240–243, 247, 248, 250, 253, 254, 257, 259, 260, 272, 274, 298–301, 303, 304, 306–310, 315–317, 321, 325, 327, 330, 335, 337, 338, 340, 342–345, 348, 351–355, 357–360, 366–368, 370, 372, 374–387, 393, 399, 403, 404, 410–417, 420, 422, 427, 429,

- 430, 436, 454, 456, 460, 461, 463, 465–467, 470–472, 476, 477, 479, 481, 483, 486, 487, 489–495, 497–499, 505–512, 520–527, 533–536, 542, 561, 562
- China, 256, 331, 334, 336, 337, 339, 340
- Christian Family, 11, 16, 20, 25, 27, 28, 42, 51, 56, 66, 68, 80, 83, 85, 86, 88, 90, 95, 97, 100, 101, 103, 104, 106, 108, 118, 121, 125, 132, 134, 139, 141, 142, 144–149, 151, 152, 205, 211, 212, 261, 363, 367, 371, 372, 427, 455, 456, 463, 464, 485, 535, 542
- Chrysostom, John, 141–143, 191, 385
- Church, 11, 13–16, 18, 19, 20, 23, 24, 26–30, 34, 42, 45–47, 51, 56, 59, 60, 62–70, 72, 74, 78–81, 83, 85–90, 93, 95, 100, 101, 104–106, 115, 118–120, 123–125, 127–135, 137, 139–147, 151, 152, 154, 157–161, 163, 164, 167–169, 172–181, 185, 186, 188–204, 206–219, 222, 223, 229, 232–236, 238, 240, 244, 246, 249, 255, 260, 261, 263–277, 279–281, 283, 284, 288, 289, 291, 302, 303, 309, 311, 312, 314, 316–330, 334, 335, 341–343, 346, 351, 368, 371–373, 387, 395–401, 404–408, 410–422, 427, 435, 437, 440, 441, 443, 447–450, 453–464, 466, 467, 469, 470, 472–474, 479, 480, 482–484, 487–489, 496, 497, 499–502, 506, 507, 509, 512, 514, 519, 521, 522, 525–527, 533, 534, 542, 544–547, 549, 550, 553, 555, 565–568
- Church Fathers, 139, 140, 142
- Cohabitation, 12, 19, 209, 262, 270, 308, 312, 316, 328, 349, 402–408, 463, 464
- Compassion, 11, 26, 86, 128, 199, 201, 207, 210, 243, 264, 268, 272, 362, 364, 373, 380, 396, 399, 440, 444, 445, 502, 548
- Confucianism, 331–333, 336, 338, 341, 342, 345
- Congar, Yves, 453, 455, 457, 458
- Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), 169, 189, 318, 395, 396, 398–400
- Conjugal Love, 164–166, 181, 183, 185, 189, 191, 212, 214, 219, 222, 225, 227, 271, 342, 343, 345, 498
- Conscience, 17, 19, 45–48, 69, 70, 81, 89, 105, 152, 153, 201, 215, 216, 264–266, 277, 279, 281, 283, 285, 286, 318, 368, 376, 378, 381, 400, 434–437, 441, 442, 444–452, 462, 483, 501, 546
- Consecrated Life, 68, 133, 190–192, 542
- Consumerism, 93, 194, 274, 424, 520
- Contraceptive, 222, 499
- Conversion, 279, 399, 400, 436, 437, 487, 513
- Covenant, 128, 132, 133, 140, 164, 176, 178, 179, 191, 343, 371, 496, 497
- Dalit, 100, 232
- Decalogue, 128, 370
- Demmer, Klaus, 47, 170
- Deus Caritas Est*, 189, 190, 220, 372, 465
- Development, 6, 18, 23, 26, 34, 38, 41, 46, 53, 77, 86, 91, 94, 99, 105, 107, 125, 131, 153, 157, 159, 162,

- 168, 170–172, 177, 189, 209, 222, 224, 232, 233, 235–242, 246, 248, 249, 251–255, 257–259, 273, 283, 300, 305, 313, 329, 336, 340, 347, 348, 353, 356, 357, 361, 375–378, 380, 389, 390, 391, 393, 395, 402, 405, 434, 441, 442, 451, 457, 462, 469, 472, 474, 475, 486, 491, 492, 496–498, 510, 521, 531, 533, 546
- Devotion, 26, 58, 64, 69, 74, 81, 83, 96, 97, 100, 103, 104, 112, 136, 142, 146, 321, 358, 367, 369, 370, 381, 465, 479, 491, 492, 495, 525, 567
- Discernment, 11, 14, 17–19, 26, 45, 46, 79, 80, 85, 93, 167, 195, 201–203, 205, 215–217, 264–266, 272, 275, 281, 283, 284, 287, 288, 291, 379, 381, 396, 407, 434–438, 441, 445, 448–452, 459, 461, 462, 471, 494, 502, 546
- Divorce, 68, 71–74, 158, 161, 163, 173, 179, 195, 199, 205, 209, 210, 216, 230, 234, 235, 260, 262, 270, 275, 316, 317, 319, 339, 341, 359, 405, 456, 481, 497, 527, 530
- Divorced and Remarried, 14, 172, 195, 209, 215, 217, 234, 262, 265, 270, 276–278, 280, 410, 412, 419, 421, 440, 461, 496, 497
- Domestic Church, 18, 19, 25, 28, 89, 90, 97, 123, 124, 127, 132, 139–146, 151, 153, 154, 366, 368, 371, 453–457, 459, 460, 463, 464, 466–468, 477, 505, 506, 533
- Domestic Violence, 195, 200, 204, 206, 209, 214, 226, 230, 247–250, 260, 262, 274, 308, 356, 361
- Dowry, 42, 58, 71, 200, 206, 279, 305, 350
- Drugs, 274, 305, 376, 381, 456, 525, 536
- Dulles, Avery, 454, 455
- East Asia, 330, 331, 336, 339, 342, 343, 345, 459
- Economic, 12, 16, 18, 53, 54, 55, 72, 73, 86, 102, 129, 163, 194, 197, 209, 222, 232–237, 239–243, 245, 250, 253, 259, 260, 273, 301, 307, 309, 312, 335, 337, 340, 342, 343, 353–356, 359, 375, 403, 470, 471, 492, 520, 521, 534
- Education, 13, 24, 27, 28, 52, 55, 57, 60–62, 74–78, 81, 85, 110, 112, 120, 121, 125, 143–145, 160–162, 164, 176, 183, 185, 194, 199, 204, 205, 216, 227, 239, 240, 248, 252, 253, 259, 277, 295, 299, 300, 302, 309, 332, 335, 336, 339, 340, 342, 344, 345, 354–356, 358, 361, 376, 378–384, 387, 388, 417, 420, 428, 432, 436, 446, 453, 469–471, 473, 480, 485–492, 495–502, 512, 521, 532
- Elderly, 59, 133, 134, 152, 194, 244–246, 306, 335, 339, 340, 354, 359, 495
- Enlightenment, 69, 72, 74, 131, 158, 173
- Ethics, 15, 17, 34–42, 97, 142, 144–146, 151, 157, 162, 163, 170, 171, 187, 208, 213, 219, 221, 232, 261, 273, 277, 281, 282, 284, 285, 287, 333, 338, 363, 374, 380, 388, 402, 407, 434, 444, 469, 485, 530
- Eucharist, 14, 63, 68, 69, 70, 81, 130–134, 138, 195, 209, 238, 266, 278, 317, 367, 368, 372, 401, 411, 419, 476, 477, 478, 513, 525
- Euphrasia, St, 81, 259

- Europe, 17, 23, 64, 67, 68, 71, 82, 158, 173, 177, 178, 180, 187, 235, 244, 249, 260, 311, 314, 403, 420
- Evangelii Gaudium* (EG), 193, 208, 224, 259, 281, 290, 324, 329, 397, 413, 437, 445
- Evangelization, 24, 90, 112, 234, 272, 273, 279, 346, 384, 419, 449, 466, 467, 484
- Extramarital Relations, 262, 499, 526, 533, 537
- Extravagance, 12, 43, 102, 558
- Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences/FABC, 172, 453, 458, 459
- Facebook, 425, 426, 431
- Familiaris Consortio*, 89, 107, 127, 132–134, 137, 139, 141, 142, 144, 145, 175, 200, 205, 206, 212, 215, 217, 222, 271, 272, 317, 364, 366, 440, 449
- Family, 11–20, 23–32, 35, 42–44, 48, 49, 51, 52, 56–60, 63–68, 71–76, 78, 79, 81–97, 99–109, 111, 112, 114–127, 129–132, 134–155, 157–167, 171, 181, 186, 188, 190, 193–201, 203–218, 222, 223, 225–230, 232–235, 237, 238, 240–243, 246, 248, 250, 253, 255, 257, 259–262, 265, 266, 269–280, 284, 286, 293, 295–302, 304–316, 319, 325–330, 332, 334–345, 347–375, 380–390, 393, 402–405, 410–420, 422–431, 434–437, 443, 444, 453–500, 502, 503, 505–513, 517, 519–537, 541, 542, 544, 545, 547, 548, 554, 561, 564
- Family Prayer, 17, 26, 27, 44, 81, 111, 124, 127, 135, 138, 148, 153, 367, 372, 373, 386, 429, 465, 477, 493, 506, 508, 509, 525
- Fear of God, 41, 43, 88, 89, 90, 118, 121, 126, 136, 146, 380, 559
- Fidelity, 31, 73, 75, 201, 220, 222, 290, 406, 436, 442, 443, 475, 493, 496
- Forgiveness, 89, 90, 110, 132, 145, 147, 149, 150, 223, 318, 364, 369, 373, 401, 444, 460, 496
- Formation, 15, 17, 19, 25, 27, 40, 57, 64, 70, 78, 85, 87–90, 92–97, 100, 102, 103, 105–107, 111, 112, 131, 151, 161, 201, 206, 278, 289, 300–302, 304, 331, 346, 374–378, 381–383, 387, 392, 394, 434–437, 444–447, 449, 451, 452, 469–484, 487, 501, 505, 507–511, 526, 533, 546
- Fortitude, 36, 66, 99, 100, 103, 360, 362
- Francis, Pope, 11–14, 17, 20, 23, 24, 26, 27, 29, 32, 45–48, 51, 58, 82, 83, 86, 106, 107, 109, 112, 115, 116, 118, 119, 127, 129, 132, 133, 135–137, 145, 149, 172, 175, 183, 185, 190–193, 200, 201, 203, 205, 206, 208–211, 213–221, 223–226, 228, 231–235, 238, 242, 243, 245, 248, 250, 251, 253, 255, 257, 259–261, 263–269, 271, 272, 275, 276, 278–281, 283, 284, 290, 315, 319, 324, 329, 330, 342–345, 364, 375, 383–386, 395–397, 407, 421, 422, 426, 434–439, 441–445, 448–451, 453, 454, 456, 459–462, 465–467, 480, 484–487, 489–495, 497–501, 519, 521, 530, 543, 544, 546, 548, 566, 568

- French Revolution, 73, 173
- Friends, 30, 35, 42, 87, 102, 110, 120, 146, 151, 267, 279, 300, 301, 385, 388, 393, 401, 415, 426, 427, 430, 508, 520, 523, 556
- Friendship, 43, 72, 75, 102, 151, 165, 212, 213, 214, 220, 280, 300, 323, 326, 340, 365, 376, 397, 401, 413, 426, 477, 498
- Fuchs, Josef, 170, 309
- Gaudete et Exsultate*, 149, 192, 494, 495
- Gaudium et Spes* (GS), 46, 144, 163–166, 168, 173, 181, 182, 185, 188, 189, 212, 221–223, 253, 271, 364, 371, 409, 427, 462, 497, 498, 543
- Gender, 15, 105, 106, 142, 144, 145, 223, 232, 237, 251–253, 256–258, 312, 313, 338, 339, 342, 347–349, 351–354, 358, 359, 361, 389, 391, 393, 395, 403, 410, 497
- German Bishops' Conference, 266, 309, 312, 322, 404, 405
- Germany, 19, 38, 67, 76, 157, 236–240, 243, 245, 246, 251, 258, 266, 278, 281, 309–312, 316, 317, 322, 325, 327, 329, 330, 402, 404, 405, 434
- Globalization, 27, 195, 353
- Grace, 13, 25, 32, 56, 68, 69, 84, 96, 100, 102, 106, 141, 142, 144, 145, 159, 162, 164, 165, 180, 201, 211, 214, 216, 220, 226, 267, 278, 283, 285, 286, 363, 364, 368, 380, 399, 400, 401, 407, 421, 434, 436–445, 451, 456, 458, 462–464, 479, 492–494, 513
- Gurukula, 64, 76
- Gutiérrez, Gustavo, 289
- Häring, Bernard, 182, 448
- Hinduism/Hindu, 53, 55, 57, 58, 63, 78, 333, 348–351, 353, 354, 356–358, 411, 414–416, 418, 508, 546
- HIV/AIDS, 220, 228, 229, 230, 231, 357
- Holiness, 11, 86, 88, 100, 118, 121, 128, 135–137, 142, 149, 190, 212, 225, 235, 364, 373, 401, 476, 495, 498
- Holy Family, 20, 28, 51, 84, 95, 97, 107, 123, 147, 311, 367–369, 386, 422, 456, 464, 466, 471, 477, 519, 532, 535–537, 544, 561, 564
- Holy Mass, 124, 128, 131–134, 147, 366, 559, 560
- Homosexuality, 19, 35, 169, 196, 206, 275, 313, 388–391, 393–401, 482, 526, 533, 537
- Human Development, 18, 148, 233, 236–240, 246, 248, 249, 251–254, 258, 260, 347, 348, 356, 361, 475
- Human Formation, 15, 474, 475, 481
- Humanae Vitae*, 139, 171, 175, 186, 188, 214, 261
- Humility, 41, 57, 81, 90, 99, 103, 113, 148, 150, 226, 380, 486, 502, 555
- India, 15, 16, 18, 19, 24, 26, 28, 29, 51–54, 56, 57, 60, 63, 67, 76, 83, 86, 92, 94, 95, 125, 187, 193, 194, 197, 200, 207, 223, 232, 233, 236–238, 240, 241, 243–245, 247, 251, 252, 256–258, 260, 270, 271, 273–275, 279, 298, 299, 301, 302, 329, 347–360, 374, 410, 412, 415, 416, 467, 474, 485, 505, 507, 508,

- 510, 512, 513, 533, 541, 549, 566, 568
- Indian Church, 23, 67, 115, 193, 197, 203, 276, 567
- Indissolubility, 74, 145, 158, 179, 199, 220, 274, 313, 318, 321, 323, 324, 452, 496, 497
- Integration, 202, 214, 217, 339, 380, 440, 441, 446, 448, 449, 451, 473, 541
- Integrity, 100, 112, 171, 383, 436, 475
- Inter-Cultural, 19, 327, 347, 359, 360
- Interreligious/Interfaith Marriage, 19, 197, 198, 262, 275, 327, 330, 333, 360, 410, 412, 413–415, 417–421, 524, 525
- Intimacy, 107, 146, 158, 181, 213, 222, 229, 300, 313, 364, 401, 406, 408, 429, 430, 476, 498, 499, 531
- Irregular Situation, 13, 14, 171, 199, 201, 202, 205, 214, 215, 223, 224, 262, 270, 272, 274, 276–278, 280, 438–441, 457, 460, 461, 463, 547
- Islam, 79
- Jacobites, 60, 62
- John Paul II, 86, 107, 111, 127, 131–135, 137–142, 144, 145, 169–172, 175, 185, 191, 192, 201, 205, 206, 211, 217, 222, 223, 225, 251, 253, 271, 272, 317, 318, 364, 366, 367, 370, 405, 442, 445, 473, 474, 476, 480, 528, 566, 568
- John XXIII, 163, 264
- Joseph, St, 51, 83, 84, 97, 103, 108, 136, 147, 250, 315, 367, 386, 466, 532, 535, 559, 561, 568
- Joy, 11, 13, 14, 17, 23, 24, 29–31, 33, 85, 89, 90, 129, 133, 134, 145, 192, 193, 201, 212, 217, 220, 224, 261, 266, 271, 273, 274, 279, 412, 426, 435, 436, 466, 475, 488, 489, 493, 498, 500, 519
- Just Wage, 43, 52, 100, 151, 386, 465
- Justice, 15, 36, 41, 43, 77, 81, 90, 99, 100, 102, 103, 118, 121, 138, 140, 142, 148, 150–152, 170, 226, 233, 273, 351, 359, 360, 364, 373, 380, 400, 471, 475, 486, 558
- Kainakary, 51, 52, 66, 95, 125, 422, 454, 541, 565, 566, 568
- Kasper, Walter, 145, 194, 312, 313, 317, 319, 320, 322
- Keenan, James F. 5, 17, 20, 34–37, 39, 46, 98, 182, 264, 289, 380, 471, 476, 501
- Kelly, Conor M., 45, 46, 216, 284
- Kerala, 16, 23, 24, 29, 51–56, 60, 62, 66, 67, 75–78, 80, 81, 86, 95, 99, 117, 121, 125, 151, 259, 354, 355, 358, 363, 374, 412, 454, 486, 505, 541, 565–568
- Kingdom of God, 139, 151, 191, 380, 387, 511
- Koonammavu, 99, 566–568
- Küng, Hans, 455
- Laudato Si'*, 383
- Law, 29, 42, 62, 70–72, 74, 91, 105, 128, 159, 166, 168–171, 173–183, 186, 214, 215, 303, 305, 308, 315, 317, 319, 320, 324, 325, 338, 339, 341, 343, 357, 359, 380, 385, 400, 412–415, 418, 420, 441–447, 452, 457, 458, 460–462, 464, 471, 480, 481, 519, 532

- Lawler, Michael G., 178, 179, 181, 186, 221, 371, 407, 447
- Leo XIII, 74, 83, 139, 157, 158, 163, 171, 173, 175
- Leopold Beccaro, 99, 100, 125, 330, 567, 568
- Levinas, Emmanuel, 528, 529, 530
- LGBT/LGBTQ, 325, 395
- Liberation Theology, 282, 289
- Liguori, Alphonsus, 69, 70, 72, 73, 143
- Living Together, 101, 122, 194, 214, 215, 217, 278, 312, 316, 403, 404, 406, 407, 417, 461, 531
- Locus Theologicus*, 19, 310
- Love, 11–14, 16–18, 20, 24, 25, 28, 29–33, 36, 41, 43, 44, 57, 67, 69, 72, 73, 75, 79, 81, 84–87, 89–93, 96–98, 100–102, 107, 110, 111, 116, 118, 120, 122, 123, 125–127, 130, 131, 133, 134, 136–138, 140, 141, 145, 146, 148, 149, 152, 154, 158, 162–165, 167, 176, 178–183, 185, 188, 189, 191–193, 197, 200, 203–205, 208, 211–214, 216, 217, 219–227, 229–231, 248, 250, 260, 261, 264, 266, 271, 272, 274, 279, 280, 284, 289, 290, 296–298, 313, 321–323, 325, 337, 340, 342–345, 350, 358, 362, 364–366, 368–373, 377, 380, 383, 384, 400, 406, 408, 410–412, 414, 416, 417, 419, 421, 426–428, 435–438, 440, 441, 444, 451, 456, 457, 460, 464, 465, 467, 468, 470, 471, 472, 475, 477, 481, 485, 486, 488–500, 506, 511, 513, 515, 519, 530, 531, 534, 554
- Lumen Gentium* (LG), 25, 142–144, 163, 191, 324, 364, 371, 455, 459, 463
- Mackin, Theodore, 174, 175, 180, 181
- Magesa, Laurenti/Laurence, 228, 281
- Mahabharatha*, 350
- Malayattoor, 63
- Mannanam, 51, 64, 65, 77, 84, 96, 97, 100, 107, 111, 126, 147, 546, 564–568
- Manusmriti*, 351
- Marital Fidelity, 57, 72, 229
- Marriage, 11–16, 18–20, 27, 29, 45, 56, 59, 68, 71–75, 78, 82, 105, 113, 120, 132, 139, 140, 141, 145, 157–159, 161–166, 171–186, 188–193, 195–201, 203–206, 209–214, 216–220, 222–229, 231, 247, 248, 250, 251, 255, 260–262, 266–280, 284, 286, 289, 296–298, 301, 303, 305, 310, 312, 313, 315, 316, 318–321, 323–325, 327–335, 337, 339–345, 347–349, 352, 353, 355–357, 359, 364, 369, 371, 374, 396, 402–421, 427, 434, 438, 440–444, 449, 452, 456, 457, 464, 471, 472, 475, 477, 479, 481, 483–490, 492, 494–501, 505–507, 511, 513, 522, 524–528, 530–535
- Marriage Preparation Programme (MPP), 20, 485–489, 492, 494–497, 499–501
- Mary, Blessed Virgin, 63, 96, 110, 153, 562, 566, 567
- Mass, 43, 124, 128, 130–134, 147, 153, 271, 353, 354, 361, 366, 368, 411, 416, 429, 449, 555, 559, 560
- Media, 19, 110, 113, 125, 194, 195, 200, 214, 234, 262, 265, 273, 274, 295, 347, 350, 353, 361, 375, 376,

- 383, 420, 422–424, 426, 428,
430–432, 508, 511, 520, 525
- Mercy, 19, 41, 86, 129, 131, 133,
201–203, 217, 272, 273, 279, 280,
288, 290, 320, 375, 382, 386, 407,
419, 439, 442, 444, 445, 448, 449,
451–453, 461, 467, 493, 501
- Metanoia*, 436, 437
- Migration, 12, 194, 197, 253, 262,
274, 312, 354, 456
- Miserliness, 43, 102
- Missionary, 55, 60–63, 65–67, 74–
78, 81, 134, 203, 204, 275, 332,
363, 386, 397, 467, 491
- Mobile Phone, 300, 509, 511
- Modernization, 332, 338–342, 345
- Money, 12, 43, 58, 72, 92, 94, 102,
108, 120, 302, 307, 457, 471, 510,
511, 520, 537
- Moral Formation, 17, 19, 105, 106,
115, 151, 153, 289, 374–376, 378,
382, 387, 471, 476
- Moral Manuals, 38, 176, 177, 184
- Moral Theology, 15, 18, 34, 38, 39,
45, 69, 70, 80, 82, 95, 121, 139,
172, 176, 178, 182, 187, 189, 208,
232, 261, 277, 281, 284–287, 291,
374, 375, 380, 388, 434, 446, 450,
479, 480, 485
- Morality, 59, 69, 105, 161, 187,
189, 271, 286, 312, 387, 388, 405,
408, 447, 457, 461, 475, 479, 520,
534
- Mother, 17, 29, 43, 45, 58, 73, 78,
81, 86, 95–97, 105, 110, 111, 125,
135–137, 139, 153, 154, 212, 253,
259, 264, 270, 298, 299, 314, 322,
344, 348, 350, 358, 390, 393, 394,
411, 414, 418, 491, 500, 508,
512–514, 536, 562, 566–568
- Mundadan, Mathias, 53, 64, 65,
66, 84, 87, 96
- Mutuality, 29, 300, 364
- Mystery, 13, 15, 128, 137, 139, 141,
142, 147, 191, 200, 211, 212, 322,
367, 368, 370, 371, 409, 455, 456,
460, 501, 527
- Narrative, 39, 287, 288, 432, 529,
567
- Natural Family Planning, 186, 188
- Natural Law, 158, 166, 169, 170
- Nazareth, 28, 107, 464, 519, 535,
537
- Newman, Cardinal, 172, 182, 285,
458
- Noonan, John T., 172, 186, 187,
188
- Parenting, 19, 52, 79–81, 91, 92,
103, 108, 110, 115, 116, 152, 154,
197–199, 204, 297, 299, 300, 361,
366, 368, 374–377, 382, 436
- Parents, 12, 13, 16, 24, 25, 28, 30–
32, 43–45, 56, 59, 71, 73, 74, 79–
81, 84, 87–89, 91, 93, 96–98,
101–103, 105–115, 118, 121–123,
125, 126, 135–137, 143, 146–149,
151–153, 164, 166, 185, 190, 194,
198, 199, 201, 204, 208, 212, 228,
243, 250, 257, 259, 260, 271, 297,
300, 303–307, 337, 340, 344, 345,
352–354, 358–361, 366–369, 372,
375–378, 382–387, 393, 399, 415,
416, 419, 420, 429–431, 436, 454,
460, 461, 463, 465, 466, 471, 476,
477, 479, 486, 487, 490–492, 495,
506, 509, 523, 524, 535, 542, 560,
561, 563
- Pastoral, 11, 13–20, 24, 25, 27, 28,
45, 47, 69, 79–81, 86, 94, 96, 139,
176, 177, 179, 183, 193–206, 210,

- 215–217, 222, 223, 227, 230, 234, 250, 262–266, 268, 269, 271–273, 275–284, 288, 289, 291, 302, 309, 312, 316, 319–321, 324, 325, 329, 331, 335, 341, 343, 365, 374, 386, 388, 389, 395–397, 399–401, 404, 405, 407, 408, 413, 419–421, 434–437, 439–446, 448–452, 457, 459, 461, 462, 464, 469–474, 476, 478, 480–483, 485, 488, 491, 492, 494, 496, 501, 502, 522, 524, 533, 542, 549
- Pastoral Care, 15, 19, 25, 198, 201, 203, 204, 215–217, 222, 234, 266, 268, 275, 276, 288, 302, 312, 316, 320, 325, 388, 395, 396, 399, 400, 413, 420, 421, 443, 457, 464, 476, 491, 492, 533
- Pastoral Discernment, 13, 14, 19, 201, 202, 215–217, 407, 446, 449–452, 462
- Pastores Dabo Vobis* (PDV), 473, 474, 476, 480
- Patience, 12, 41, 44, 81, 112, 148, 226, 288, 380, 407, 494, 495, 498, 515, 559
- Patriarchy, 29, 31, 58, 59, 71, 73, 75, 88, 198, 222, 250, 279, 298, 299, 331, 338, 341, 351, 411
- Paul, St, 31, 38, 39, 46, 98, 120, 133, 141, 146, 167, 175, 224, 250, 316, 416, 455, 458–460, 498
- Paul VI, Pope, 137, 139, 144, 162, 165, 166, 168–170, 175, 185, 186, 214, 233, 265, 272, 454, 455
- Penance, 317, 319, 476
- Persona Humana*, 189
- Pius XII, Pope, 159, 162, 163, 181, 184, 188, 190, 192
- Pluralism, 19, 135, 285, 310, 313, 326
- POCSO, 109
- Poor, 12, 28, 43–45, 100, 121, 128, 130, 131, 133, 147, 149, 151, 153, 232, 237, 246, 247, 251, 255, 258, 269, 274, 279, 305, 355, 356, 366, 381, 382, 386, 387, 393, 450, 465, 467, 495, 520, 521, 527, 530
- Population, 166, 232, 235–237, 241, 242, 244–249, 251, 252, 256, 301, 311, 332, 334, 335, 337, 338, 347, 348, 352, 354, 356, 404, 519
- Pornography, 308, 358, 432, 508
- Prayer, 16, 26, 43, 63, 67, 78, 79, 81, 85, 90, 96, 98, 111, 116, 118, 120, 123, 124, 127, 132, 137, 138, 148, 154, 165, 198, 204, 229, 363, 367–369, 372, 386, 418, 429, 450, 463, 465, 466, 476–478, 481, 492, 493, 495, 500, 506, 515, 525
- Premarital Sex, 19, 313, 405, 408, 409
- Priest, 23, 25, 28, 64, 67, 86, 132, 192, 219, 276, 295, 317, 338, 363, 374, 379, 388, 408, 411, 452, 462, 463, 474–476, 479, 480, 485, 506, 537
- Priesthood, 56, 154, 301, 473, 480, 482, 506
- Procreation, 12, 164, 167, 178, 183–186, 220–222, 255, 336, 343–345, 487, 498, 499, 526
- Protestant, 71, 76–78, 120
- Prudence, 36, 37, 41, 48, 93, 99, 447
- Psychological, 17, 104, 107, 126, 152, 168, 206, 248, 273, 300, 335, 384, 389, 393, 394, 472, 475, 499

- Psychology, 82, 93, 121, 204, 382, 391, 478
- Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis (Ratio)/The Gift of Priestly Vocation*, 254, 473–476, 478–480
- Ratzinger, Joseph, 318, 319
- Religious, 14, 16, 17, 19, 23, 26, 29, 34, 40, 51, 52, 55–57, 60, 63, 64, 69, 72, 76, 79, 86, 97, 99, 100, 105, 106, 116, 118–120, 125, 129, 139, 142, 143, 145, 158, 160, 168, 175, 178, 190, 192, 253, 259, 277, 281, 301–304, 307, 309, 314, 325, 330–333, 337, 348, 349, 351, 358, 360, 363, 367, 368, 380, 383, 388, 395, 399, 402, 411–421, 438, 453, 467, 469, 470, 471, 475–477, 479, 484, 485, 495, 520, 521, 524, 535, 537, 542, 545, 547, 565–567
- Remarried, 14, 72, 172, 195, 202, 205, 208, 209, 215, 217, 223, 234, 262, 265–267, 270, 276–278, 280, 311, 313, 316–320, 325, 410, 412, 419, 421, 440, 457, 461, 463, 496, 497
- Responsible Parenthood, 115, 188, 482, 489, 501
- Riches, 12, 102, 151, 240, 254, 260, 476, 557
- Rocos, Bishop, 61, 64, 100, 565, 567
- Sabbath, 128, 366
- Sacrament, 13, 14, 68, 70, 74, 81, 110, 131, 132, 137, 140, 141, 152, 154, 158, 159, 161, 162, 164, 165, 173–175, 177, 180, 181, 190, 211, 214, 220, 266, 278, 317, 319, 320, 324, 364, 368, 371, 401, 411, 413, 414, 419, 420, 437, 440, 455, 458, 463, 464, 476, 479, 481, 487, 488, 500, 501, 506, 532
- Schockenhoff, Eberhard, 312, 320, 326
- School, 17, 24, 34, 35, 54, 56, 61, 62, 71, 76–79, 87, 99, 105, 110, 116, 135, 138, 144, 153, 166, 169, 204, 222, 232, 239, 240, 259, 309, 354, 361, 411, 416, 420, 427, 430, 453, 463, 469, 471, 483, 486, 487, 489–491, 505, 507, 508, 512, 522, 535, 546, 567
- Second Vatican Council, 13, 15, 17, 18, 25, 46, 67, 116, 119, 123, 140, 142, 144, 151, 157, 161, 162, 166, 175–190, 205, 212, 222, 261, 265, 271, 272, 291, 311, 330, 343, 364, 427, 439, 455–457, 473, 474, 480, 497, 533
- Seminary, 56, 62, 64, 65, 67, 70, 87, 97, 121, 172, 270, 363, 374, 411, 415, 469, 470, 472–476, 479, 480, 482–484, 564, 566
- Seminary Formation, 65, 469, 470, 472, 473, 476, 480, 482, 483, 484
- Sensus Fidei*, 459, 466
- Sensus Fidelium*, 459, 467
- Sex Abuse, 109, 206, 308, 358
- Sex Education, 200, 205, 361, 376, 384, 387
- Sexual Revolution, 270
- Sexuality, 10, 172, 176, 178, 183, 185, 189, 191, 192, 223, 225, 261, 271, 319, 367, 371, 373, 384, 391, 393, 395, 398, 483, 485, 487, 493, 497, 499
- Simplicity, 92, 486
- Sin, 12, 30, 32, 42–44, 47, 68, 99, 100, 110, 129, 130, 132, 136, 151, 267, 307, 318, 379, 386, 396, 398,

- 405, 412, 438, 439, 441, 464, 465, 471, 497, 528, 529, 532, 554, 559
- Small Families, 275, 301, 302, 309, 345, 522
- Social Justice, 52, 150, 151
- Social Life, 116, 259, 361, 441, 506
- Social Media, 129, 195, 420, 424, 426, 428, 430–433, 509, 525, 536
- Social Networking Sites, 19, 90, 101, 194, 422, 426, 430–433, 496
- Solidarity, 58, 86, 133, 134, 145, 149, 310, 326, 361, 380, 386, 399, 467, 487
- South Asia, 244, 249, 252, 254, 255, 348
- South Korea, 19, 330–342, 345
- Spadaro, Antonio, 284, 450
- Spiritual Life, 131, 349, 451, 476, 477, 478, 525
- Spirituality, 19, 66, 68–70, 73, 78, 79, 81, 82, 91, 121, 124, 150, 198, 279, 363–373, 402, 416, 469, 477, 478, 493, 520
- Saint Thomas Christian, 27, 51, 54, 57–61, 63, 64
- Suicide, 35, 308, 350, 352, 512, 523
- Summa Theologiae*, 35, 36, 47, 379, 438
- Sunday, 63, 64, 127–135, 138, 147, 271, 273, 311, 411, 416, 422, 477, 478, 507, 509, 555, 561, 562, 565, 566
- Sustainable Development, 235, 241, 248, 254, 255, 347
- Syllabus of Errors*, 74, 158, 174
- Synod, 119, 163, 193, 195, 197, 214, 227, 229, 234, 262–265, 268, 270, 272, 330, 414, 415, 419, 454
- Synod of Bishops, 24, 118, 193, 234, 270, 312, 327, 328, 330, 405, 414, 419, 454
- Synodal, 15, 19, 106, 124, 140, 193, 200, 208, 219, 222, 232, 233, 251, 261, 265, 290, 329, 330, 407, 410, 422, 434, 439, 440, 453–455, 459, 466, 467, 485
- Synodality, 288, 289, 453, 454, 458, 468
- Syrian Christian, 55–59, 62, 63, 77
- Syro-Malabar, 24, 29, 51, 56, 70, 95, 118, 119, 124, 125, 132, 422, 567
- Technology, 11, 26, 94, 112, 208, 298, 375, 424, 431, 432, 475, 522, 523, 526, 535
- Television, 109, 300, 423, 424, 426, 429, 430, 508, 511
- Temperance, 36, 99, 100, 447
- Ten Commandments, 41, 126, 127, 138, 418, 471, 505
- Testament of a Loving Father*, See *Chavarul*
- Thomas Aquinas, 23, 35, 36, 47, 159, 170, 183, 203, 213, 217, 378, 379, 438, 439, 446, 447
- Tillmann, Fritz, 38, 39
- Travancore, 17, 51–55, 58–62, 76, 564
- United Nations, 235, 236, 241–243, 245, 247, 248, 253, 254, 256, 359
- Untouchability, 54, 55, 77
- Upbringing of Children, 16, 68, 81, 87, 103, 105, 121, 126, 135–137, 359, 376, 413, 414, 417, 470, 471, 473, 494, 561
- Values, 12, 13, 26, 30–32, 40, 51, 52, 65–68, 70, 75–77, 80, 81, 85,

- 86, 89–91, 93, 94, 96, 103, 105–108, 112, 113, 115, 120, 121, 124, 137, 144, 148, 149, 152, 154, 163, 166, 168, 184, 191, 192, 195, 196, 200, 210, 218, 221, 225, 226, 237, 239, 243, 252–255, 271, 272, 275, 281, 285–288, 300, 301, 303–305, 315, 320, 321, 326, 331–332, 336, 339, 341, 344, 347–351, 353, 358–361, 378, 380, 382, 385, 387, 418, 436, 456, 461, 475, 476, 482, 487, 488, 490, 491, 496, 506, 508–510, 520, 528, 531–534, 543, 546, 547
- Varapuzha/Verapoly, 24, 61, 64, 77, 565
- Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, 362
- Verbum Domini*, 124
- Violence, 12, 112, 194, 195, 200, 204, 206, 209, 214, 223, 226, 230, 234, 247–251, 260, 262, 269, 274, 308, 310, 339, 348, 351, 356, 357, 360, 361, 384, 397, 399, 482
- Virtue Ethics, 17, 34–41, 43, 97, 213, 380
- Virtuous, 19, 36, 37, 39, 42, 44, 48, 95, 97, 98, 101, 104, 108, 154, 366, 375, 376, 379, 380, 446, 447
- Wealth, 12, 42, 43, 59, 101, 103, 113, 120, 126, 136, 146, 150, 151, 167, 237, 239, 326, 350, 380, 511, 555–558, 563
- WhatsApp, 425, 524
- Widow, 43, 72, 191, 243, 312, 341, 342, 357, 360, 363, 411, 559
- Women, 29, 31, 57–59, 62, 68, 73, 74, 78, 79, 88, 96, 99, 105, 112, 113, 125, 126, 140, 145, 158, 159, 161, 162, 164, 166, 167, 169, 174, 179–181, 183, 186, 188, 190, 196, 201, 206, 209, 210–212, 214, 216, 228, 230, 246–255, 257, 259, 260, 262, 271, 277, 278, 297–299, 302, 311, 318, 322, 323, 325, 327, 328, 333, 335, 337, 339, 341, 342, 347–361, 371, 372, 388, 391, 406, 410–412, 414–418, 440, 462, 472, 479, 495, 520, 527, 529, 532–534, 543, 556, 565, 567

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