

**Among Ourselves**

**The Asian Family  
Toward a Culture of Life**

We are devoting this first issue of the INFO on Human Development 2004, on the theme of the Family. This is our contribution to the on-going study and preparations for the 8<sup>th</sup> Plenary Assembly of the FABC to be held in August this year.

We believe that the Working Paper is very exhaustive and comprehensive and has attempted to address some of the fundamental issues affecting the family and clarified some of the approaches to the Ministry to Families. Bearing in mind the spirit of the Working Paper, we hope that the guide questions that have

been developed in consultation with a team will enable all of us to take more participatory role in preparation for the final stages of the Plenary Assembly. The paper entitled Contextualised Theology and the Family, presented at the Consultation-Meeting on Contextualized Theology, Sources and Perspectives organised by the Center for Contextualized Theology and Ethics of the University of Santo Tomas on December 3 – 5, 2003, we hope will serve as further food for thought in our deliberations at the Assembly.

We have therefore included in this issue the following:

1. The Working Paper for the 8<sup>th</sup> FABC Plenary Assembly – The Asian Family Toward a Culture of Life
2. The Guide Questions for Personal Reflection and Group Discussion
3. Contextualised Theology and the Family

We will be glad to receive feedback and reflections from all individuals and organisations so that we can make our 8<sup>th</sup> Plenary Assembly as a watershed for a greater commitment to our Ministry to and with Families.

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**C O N T E N T S**

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# THE ASIAN FAMILY TOWARD A CULTURE OF LIFE

## INTRODUCTION

1. For the Bishops of Asia to come together for the 8<sup>th</sup> FABC Plenary Assembly and reflect on “The Asian Family toward a Culture of Life,” is truly a great blessing from the Lord. [Since its inception in 1974 the FABC in plenary session seems to have simply presumed the major role of the family in evangelization. Only the 4<sup>th</sup> FABC Plenary Assembly on the Laity in 1986 gave more than just a passing mention of the family, devoting 10 paragraphs to the challenges confronting the family, its central role in evangelization and in the formation not only of the laity, but also of the Church as a whole.]. For the past two decades of rapid cultural, scientific and technological developments in the world are impacting heavily on human society. At the very center of this social ferment is the Family, the cellular receptor of emerging cultures as well as initiator, for good or for bad, of influential cultural forces. Even today we refer to the family as a point of reference for social, political, and economic ideal relationships.

2. Responding to these developments, the universal Church has consistently insisted on the paramount importance of the Family as the way by which all history passes and as the *domestic church* or the church that is the home [*Lumen Gentium*, 11; *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 11; *Familiaris Consortio*, 21. From *domus*, home, the term *domestic church* shall be used throughout the paper although it may be less than felicitous, since related words such as “domesticated,” “domestic worker” can evoke images of inferiority, passivity, submissiveness, and timidity]. Pope John Paul II has already convoked four World Meeting of Families in order to underline the indispensable role of the Christian Family in charting the destiny of humankind in the light of faith and the Gospel. The Acts of the Apostles reminds us that the faith spread “from house to house” (Acts 20:20).

3. It is in the background of world developments and the general response of the universal Church that the reflection of FABC on the Asian family takes on both universal and local meaning. There is no doubt that global developments have an impact even on the remotest rural Asian family. We begin our reflection on the pastoral challenges that the Asian family confronts.

## I. THE PASTORAL SITUATION OF THE FAMILY IN ASIA

### 1. *Family Traditions and Values*

4. In the midst of swift, sweeping, and even revolutionary changes in the world, Asian families generally remain close-knit. The closeness of relationships in the nuclear family is also true in the extended family. The elderly, retired members of the family, parents and grandparents still receive respect and care *within* the family setting, notwithstanding the many difficulties and sacrifices involved. Children are cherished as treasures and gifts of God. To show their love for their children, parents are willing to undertake all kinds of sacrifices in providing for their health, their education, their general welfare. Such family values are part of the Asian tradition.

5. But strong kinship and family-centeredness has also its downside. Because their role is almost always seen traditionally and narrowly as *domestic*, wives and daughters bear the heavier burden of caring for the elderly and the children at home, a task that should be the responsibility of all members of the family. Moreover, we also observe that graft and corruption, nepotism, political and economic cronyism in Asia is often due to inordinate overly concern for family, in the dominant and selfish desire to serve the interests of the family, of kin and cronies — at the expense of the common good.

6. Today, however, pervasive realities, some old, many others quickly emerging are making Asian families vulnerable to profound social changes – especially under the impact of globalization - that are reshaping moral and religious beliefs, self-concepts of individuals and families, even the very structures of marriage and family.

While we need to be aware of the different cultural situations in Asia, we can recognize major commonalities in the situation of Asian families.

### 2. *A Variety of Family Forms*

7. Almost common now in Asia are family situations that are certainly different from what Asians used to call the “traditional” and perhaps even “ideal” family. Inter-

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faith families and inter-cultural families abound. So are families with single parents and families with separated parents. Some parents are separated permanently while others temporarily because of work. No longer rare are children whose parents are divorced and children living with grandparents. There are homes with only the father or only the mother is around, homes where parents only come once or twice a year and homes where children do not have common fathers or mothers. There are also many homes where the parents are not married and are not able to offer stability to their children. With the advance of new liberation movements, other forms of “families” are slowly beginning to emerge in more secularized and liberalized Asian countries, albeit, with great disapproval, such as so called “inclusive” families, e.g. families with same sex parents. Some of these family forms are disturbing. They challenge our traditional understanding of the “Christian family” where the sacramental marriage between man and woman is the norm as well as the beginning of the family. We may also raise the question whether couples really believe in marriage as a sacred covenant or merely as a legal contract? We might also wonder about a common practice of having a civil marriage first and at a later time a church marriage. In some societies this is due not to lack of available funds for families but due to clan law or *adat*.

8. How to consider in the light of faith this varied situation of families, how to help married couples and families reflect on these situations in the light of their commitment to the Kingdom of God, how to assist families in order to be pro-active, and thus generally how to provide pastoral guidance – these are challenges of great magnitude to every parish in Asia.

### 3. *The Poverty of Asian Families and Economic Globalization.*

9. The first major challenge confronting Asian families is massive poverty. It is the tragic reality of poverty that the majority of Asian families must contend with everyday and are unable to escape from. But today’s Asian poverty has a new dimension. This is the process of globalization, the new world order to which every country must be oriented lest it be left behind on the road to economic progress as defined by developed countries. But globalization is ambivalent at best. Yearly UN Human Development reports regularly observe that economic globalization has *aggravated* the situation of poor people and of poor countries - and particularly of the poor in poor countries. The effect of globalization on the poverty situation may be noted in at least three areas:

a) 10. **The Poverty of Rural Families.** Slowly many farm products of agricultural families are less in demand as economic liberalization and deregulation – the twin requirements of economic

globalization – enable the freer entry of imported farm products, sold at even cheaper prices than local products. Unable to be competitive, deprived of government safeguards or safety nets to shield such farm products from unfair competition, rural families experience a new economic poverty-causing factor beyond their control. Similarly, the great majority of Asian farmers do small-scale farming. They cannot compete with the increasing trend of big business venturing into corporate farming, even as the technology of Genetically Modified Organism or GMO is increasingly becoming widespread, making Asian small farmers dependent on corporations and technology often beyond their understanding and financial reach. Moreover, often saddled with problems of land ownership, rural families find their land truly unproductive in the light of such emerging conditions. In situations of poverty, families are sometimes driven to the extreme of selling bodily organs so as to survive.

b) 11. **The Poverty of Urban Families.** In Asia the phenomenon of urbanization is not recent. But the rapid migration of the rural poor to urban settings has never been as numerous as in the past few decades. Globalization has not only caused in poor countries an inability to compete even in the agricultural field. It has also increased an exodus of the poor from rural areas to search for jobs that are scarce because of the level of economic development in most Asian countries. The growth and proliferation of slums in urban centers attest to this. Poverty conditions of the urban poor are even harsher in terms of habitat, family living conditions, family space and privacy, sanitary drinking water, sanitation and hygiene. These are inducements to criminality, abuse in the family, and family break-up.

c) 12. **The Phenomenon of Asian Migration.** In the light of the economic situation of Asian families, literally millions of Asians leave their families behind to look for jobs that often are not commensurate with their knowledge and skills. Often they labor in circumstances of grave discrimination and exploitation. Asia is the great exporter of cheap labor. Admittedly, salaries they earn abroad are significantly much more than they can earn in their home countries, but at the price of the stability of their families, the proper education and maturation of their children, who are deprived of the presence, the guidance, and love of both parents at their most formative and impressionable age.

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13. Moreover, indigenous peoples who migrate for purposes of work face a greater cultural dislocation than do other groups of the population. They lose many of the positive values so cherished by their own indigenous communities. They experience great difficulties as well in re-entry. Thus we see a close link between the two priorities of FABC VII, namely migrant workers and indigenous peoples.

#### 4. *Landlessness and Loss of Ancestral Domain*

14. Compounding the poverty situation of Asian families is the fact of landlessness. Millions of families in Asia do not own or till their own land. Large estates owned by the few show the great imbalance in the distribution of Asia's resources, one more sign of the social injustice that deprives the many poor of a real chance for a better future. Land reform in many Asian countries remains a problem, especially where wealth controls political power and prevents legal opportunities for a more balanced land distribution.

15. Land is life – this axiom is especially true for the indigenous families. They have from time immemorial considered the land, the rivers and the forests as their own even without any legal ownership paper to show. Exploiting this indigenous understanding of ownership as well as the law, loggers, miners, farmers from lowland areas encroach into the ancestral domain of indigenous peoples and reduce their boundaries year after year. Often indigenous communities have to uproot themselves and retreat farther into the mountains to avoid conflict. But certainly their rights to land and to their own economic and cultural development are violated. Moreover government development projects in indigenous ancestral domain sometimes work against the integral development of indigenous peoples.

#### 5. *Cultural Globalization*

16. Economic globalization is also bringing cultural globalization in its wake. Since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Western secularism has been strongly influencing Asian societies. But at no time has the secularizing process, now with a significant post-modernist spirit of individualistic sense of freedom, been more rapid and effective in reshaping the value systems of Asian families than in the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The bearers of this change are economics, as we have seen, and the on-going revolution in mass global communication that has truly made the world a global village.

17. There are many positive features of this technological revolution. It brings into Asia a deeper awareness of individual dignity, autonomy, and human rights so characteristic of the West. It makes global solidarity in

times of great disaster almost an instant reality. Knowledge has grown by leaps and bounds, and the sharing of that knowledge has significantly improved human life.

18. But in the light of our faith, there is terrible downside to this process of cultural globalization. A technological culture is rapidly emerging that is uprooting families from their traditional cultures and creating anonymous societies in urban areas. Its spirit, informed by neoliberalism, secularism, materialism, hedonism and consumerism, is alien to the religious-oriented cultures of Asia. Many of its values run counter to Asian family values. A growing techno-mindset is eroding marital and familial relations that are eminently bonds of intimacy and love. So pervasive and enticing is this spirit in the tools of social communication, especially mass media, that it has managed subtly and insidiously to capture the souls of many Asians.

19. Since families are both the repositories and channels of culture, the impact of the emerging secular culture in Asian families is, indeed, very disturbing. Frequently it is the elite of Asian families that are the first receivers of such secular culture, for it is among them that the tools of social communication are most available. But the emerging culture also reaches down to the grassroots since local TV, radio, and cinema ape the media programs served by the West whose values and portrayal of family and life gradually become normative for viewers and listeners.

20. The emerging global culture is establishing value gaps between old and young. Often without the guidance of parents, the young themselves experience a crisis of values. They are torn between the values treasured in their traditional homes that may themselves not always be positive and the secular values in the extra-domestic fora that may not always be negative. Given the intrusiveness of information technology and mass media, there is no doubt that the emerging and ambivalent post-modernist culture is seeping into the family sanctuary.

21. Moreover, cultural globalization is also creating a new form of poverty. The new forms of technology and the ways by which they are improving learning and even ways of modern living are simply beyond the reach of poor families. Thus in addition to material poverty, a new form of poverty, a poverty of knowledge and of access to knowledge, is further marginalizing poor families. Pope John Paul II has called this phenomenon the poverty, not of the "have-nots", but of those who do *not know*. If the wealth of industrialized nations is based much more on "*the possession of know-how, technology and skills*" than on natural resources (see *Centesimus Annus*, 32), then

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the poverty of other nations may be construed as due largely to the absence of this new kind of wealth.

22. We also have to note that one of the responses of some sectors to the unsettling cultural changes made by globalization is a recourse to fundamentalism that seem to provide for their adherents clear and definite answers to the problems of life, such as complex issues of justice and love, marriage, the family, inter-faith relationships, politics and governance. In its extreme form, fundamentalism has given rise to intolerance and even terrorism, increasingly a source of tension in Asian societies.

### **6. *Patriarchy in Asian Families and Societies***

23. With regard to the roles of women and men in the Asian family and in the wider society, patriarchy remains sadly the determining factor. As a social attitude patriarchy has created social structures, has fundamentally determined gender inequality and the superior role of men. The world view of patriarchy lies deep in the cultural and religious subconscious of Asia and dominates politics, economics, human relationships, childrearing views and practices, stereotypes about men and women, community roles, etc. Patriarchy defines man in terms of prowess, brawn, authority and domination. It is at the basis of male chauvinism in society and of men's authoritarianism in the family. On the other hand patriarchy defines woman in terms of meekness, gentleness, and submissiveness. It relegates women to the home and gives her the exclusive burden of ensuring the unity and psychological happiness of the family. It regards women as subordinate human beings and generally establishes a double standard to govern the behavior of men, women, boys and girls. For instance, based on such patriarchal world-view the infidelities of a husband against his wife and his irresponsible behavior to his children are more likely to be condoned and tolerated than those of the wife.

24. In some countries patriarchy reveals its evil features in sex selection procedures during pregnancy. In those countries, the preference for the male child has created a tremendous imbalance of sex ratio in the population. Science has tragically assisted this evil feature of patriarchy through pre-natal sex identification and selection resulting in the abortion of thousands of female fetuses.

### **7. *Woman and the Girl-Child.***

25. However, the acknowledgement of equality in fundamental dignity, the achievement of parity in educational advancement and attainment and in supporting

the family have slowly challenged the traditional authority role of husbands in Asian families. Indeed in recent years the role of women has slowly and gradually shifted. For women from the poorer sectors of society, professional education is not so much the psychological choice but the result of economic pressure to seek work outside the home in order to help the family care for the children or assure their family's survival especially in situations when husbands or sons do not earn enough for their families. Hence much of the traditional home-role and child-rearing role of mothers and daughters has been passed on to others. Unfortunately such changing roles often simply involve a mere transfer of the traditional home role responsibility to persons at a lower economic level, such as domestic helpers or poor relatives. This is the case of mothers who work full time in schools and in government offices. This shift in women's home-role responsibilities is especially demonstrated in urban settings where nurse-maids, domestic helpers and even grandparents take care of the children and the home while wives do full time work in their chosen professions as doctors, nurses, engineers, teachers, lawyers, business managers, etc.

26. However, the slow shift toward egalitarianism in husband-wife relationships has not prevented cases of battered wives and other forms of discrimination and oppression against women at home and at work. In a few Asian countries tradition sadly justifies violence against wives and girl children especially in rural areas. In such countries, in addition to the onerous and oppressive dowry tradition, wives bear the added burden of trying to prove themselves truly worthy of becoming part of the immediate and extended family of their husbands.

27. We note the positive developments that various forms of women's liberation movements have achieved in Asia. They have drawn public attention to the issues of violence within the family, female fetus abortion and to the need for more egalitarian relationships between men and women, husbands and wives, sons and daughters. In all countries of Asia are women, especially mothers, working for social emancipation through social and political advocacy, cooperatives, Grameen banking, appropriate technology, literacy and health programs, etc.

### **8. *Child Labor***

28. Yet another phenomenon affecting Asian families is the widespread practice of child labor. Driven by poverty and social inequalities, millions of children are engaged in labor. The phenomenon might even stem from a cultural view that parents consider their children as "properties" to be used for the welfare of the whole family. Thus, parents themselves allow or even encourage their children to pick up odd jobs in the streets, in factories and shops in order to

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supplement the family income, provide more food at the table, and help support their own education. But the necessary consequences of child labor are the lack of integral growth and development of children, high illiteracy rates, malnutrition, the phenomenon of “street children” without their parents and homes and high incidence of crimes by children.

## **9. Ecology**

29. Environmental degradation in Asia also impacts negatively on Asian families. The long term ecological balance is sacrificed for short term economic gain in the systematic and sometimes unbridled destruction of forests and water resources. Droughts and floods often result from such destruction and soil productivity is altered. The agricultural efficiency of rural families is thus significantly reduced. In the sprawling urban areas of Asia, environmental degradation takes another form. Air pollution and inefficient waste management are major problems and cause many illnesses, especially respiratory, particularly for the urban poor families, reducing further the quality of their lives.

## **10. Population Programs**

30. Moreover, government population programs are especially targeting poor families. The over-all objective, it is usually claimed, is a healthy population and the reduction of population to meet decreasing food production. The Malthusian doomsday thesis is still very much a part of official government thinking despite the scientifically valid alternative views of economists who see the thesis as basically a myth that has been regularly disproved by population and food production trends in the past three decades. The political and economic agenda of developed countries with regard to the populations of poor countries do not seem to be well known. Yet it is clear that for developing countries foreign aid for development has conditionalities that require developing countries to legislate population reduction measures that emphasize artificial contraception. It is also true that the migration of many Asians to other countries for the proverbial greener pastures is considered an economic and sometimes security threat. Many observers in Asia believe that in targeting the poor the population reduction programs of governments conveniently de-emphasizes the more difficult task of social and structural reforms toward poverty reduction, required by a more just distribution of resources and more equitable access to the fruits of development.

31. Through government population programs and other means, powerful lobby organizations with linkages to official international organizations and to private and semi-government organizations in Asian countries are influencing

governments and public opinion to accept secular and liberal ideas about human life, family, children, and marriage. Thus the moment of the conception of human life, the termination of human life, the nature of marriage as that of man and woman, the meaning of woman’s health, the notion of human rights over the human body in relation to human choice – all these are being redefined. These philosophical ideas now introduced into all Asian countries through certain strands of various emancipation movements in the West with their local counterparts, through mass media and legislation run counter to some of the most fundamental doctrines of the Church.

## **11. Families in the Midst of Conflict**

32. In many parts of Asia hundreds of thousands of families are affected by armed conflicts of various origins. Thousands of families are regularly displaced from their homes by sporadic or sustained military skirmishes. Fears, tensions, anxieties, insecurities are often the lot of parents concerned about the safety and future of their families. The education of their children is seriously interrupted. Diseases prey on displaced families trying to fend for themselves in the miserable conditions of many evacuation camps. At a more profound level, displaced families bitterly harbor in themselves the prejudices, biases, viewpoints, attitudes, and values that are at the heart of political, economic, ideological, ethnic and religious conflicts in Asia. Communalism and fundamentalism are dimensions of these conflicts. Children of war grow up with the real possibility that they would be bearers of future wars, carrying into the future the roots of conflict that their fathers and mothers had borne in their own minds and hearts. It is heartening that in some conflict-ridden countries, mothers who are the most vulnerable to the burdens and sufferings of conflict have organized themselves as peace advocates. Strongly nurturing and caring, sensitive to in-depth needs, keenly irenic, women – indeed, mothers – have played a special role in waging not war but peace.

## **12. Families and Basic Ecclesial/Human Communities**

33. A truly positive development in Asia is the growing awareness of the place and role of the family in the building of Basic Ecclesial/Human Communities toward a new way of being Church. Even as the family is the basic cell of society and the fundamental ecclesial community, the Church that is the Home, so today in Asia there is a growing realization that the family has to be the focus of integral evangelization and the essential building block of BEC’s/BHC’s and even of the local Church as a whole. In other words, the Church begins in the home, not in the parish. In the light of this perspective a rethinking of programs has to be done. Already in many approaches to

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the building of small communities that make up the parish, much attention is given to the family and to clusters of families, such that all the pastoral programs of parishes are focused on the family.

### 13. Summary

34. On the over-all pastoral situation regarding the Asian family, we have noted the following:

- (a) Many traditional Asian family values based on culture and social structures are gradually changing. Some of these values and social structures are quite negative, such as patriarchy, caste-ism, discrimination and oppression of women and girl-children, the relegation of women's role exclusively to the home.
- (b) Many other traditional family values are very positive and may be in danger of being lost, such as the close knit and united relationships within the nuclear and extended family, the love and care for the elderly and for children. It has also been noted that such family centeredness might, on the other hand, be reinforcing unjust structures in society that enable graft and corruption to remain relatively unchecked.
- (c) A great variety of family forms now abound in Asia. Some family forms are expected in a pluralistic cultural and religious environment. Many more are products of failed relationships and broken marriages. Some emerging forms clearly run counter to our doctrinal understanding of marriage and of the Christian family. All these pose a great challenge to the Church's family ministry in Asia.
- (d) Customs and traditions, social structures, patriarchy and gender inequality, poverty, economic and cultural globalization, secularization, urbanization, migration, child labor, land problems, ecology and social conflicts are the major basic forces that are influencing Asian families for better or for worse.

35. Almost 20 years ago the Asian Bishops said:

Perhaps the greatest challenge to the Church in Asia is that posed by the Asian family. The Asian family is the cellular receptacle of all Asia's problems, poverty, repression, exploitation and degradation, divisions and conflicts. The family is directly affected by the religious, political, economic, social and cultural problems of Asia, by the problems relating to women, health, work, business, education, etc. [Final Statement of the 4<sup>th</sup> FABC Plenary Assembly, Tokyo, 16-25 September 1986, no. 3.4.1, in *For All the Peoples of Asia*, Rosales and Arevalo, eds., 1992, p. 184].

Can the Church in Asia respond adequately to the pastoral challenge so described? Can the Church be effective through relevant pastoral programs for the Asian family?

## PART II: THEOLOGICO-PASTORAL REFLECTION

### A. *A Culture of Integral Life*

36. We have discerned many forces in the pastoral situation. Some forces are distinctly positive in the development of culture. However, other forces, facilitated by the process of globalization, threaten not only the quality of life but also the very survival of many Asian families. Such threatening forces lead to the devaluing of positive values that have traditionally characterized Asian families such as close kinship inclusive of extended families, love of children, respect and care for the elderly, harmony, a deep moral and religious sense, a deep respect for life and care for the life in the womb, a profound reverence for the sacred. They threaten our religious understanding of the origin and nature of life as well as the nature and structure of the family and marriage. They contradict responsible stewardship of human life considered seamless from conception to death, the sacramentality of marriage between man and woman and its God-given purpose. Within Asian societies and families are yet other forces such as patriarchy, caste-ism, and a certain devaluing of the dignity of women that need radical transformation in order that Asian cultures might truly be more in accord with God's will.

37. While the emerging culture has certainly many positive contributions to our world, it is a challenge to Asian families to evangelize it and liberate it so that it may not be inimical to integral human life and thus transform it into a culture of life. In understanding a culture of life and the gravity of the threat against it, the ancient religious and philosophical traditions of Asia would most certainly be helpful. And surely there would be many convergences in the understanding. Our pastoral and theological reflection, however, will be from the perspective of our own religious faith. From this perspective, we need to understand and appreciate human life in a holistic sense, i.e., life in itself and its inherent dignity, life as a gift of God (see Gen. 2:7; Acts 17:25) and a sharing of God's life (see Rom. 6:23; Jn. 4:10, 14; Rev. 21:6), life lived today in unceasing struggle toward fullness which is its eternal destiny (Rom. 6:22), life in its fullness (Jn. 10:10) in the Kingdom of God to come. From this holistic view, with the universal Church we condemn everything that dehumanizes, exploits and oppresses human life. Any situation, relationship, structure, situation, behavior, or action that threatens and diminishes life is death-dealing (see GS, 27) — part of a culture of

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death. A culture of life on the other hand respects, enhances, promotes and serves integral human life, from the very finality of the procreative act and the moment of conception, through its earthly struggles for full life, and finally to its return to God in judgment at death and at the end of time (2 Tm. 1:10; 4:1; Heb. 9:27-28).

### ***1. Covenant Love and Life, Communion and Solidarity.***

38. At the basis of the culture of life, according to the Sacred Scriptures, is God's love as the Creator and Giver of all life, and especially of human life (see Gen. 1: 26-28, 2:7; Wis. 15:11). In the Book of Genesis we even find a certain intimation of a Trinitarian sharing of communion with humanity: "Let us make humankind in our image... so in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them" (Gen. 1: 26, 27 – NRSV) Thus human life began, only because of God's love. Formed according to the divine image, life is God's gift. For this reason the life of every person, no matter how poor and degraded, remains precious and sacred. Undoubtedly, the Scriptural creation stories place the creation of the human person as the climactic point. But we need to acknowledge that by virtue of God's creative act the whole cosmos is truly a web of interdependent relationships over which the human person exercises a royal duty and honor of stewardship, reflecting God's own *dominion of loving care*. Indeed, at the pinnacle as well as at the heart of all creation is Christ, "the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created...all things were created through him and for him" (Col. 1: 15-16). Through him "all things, whether on earth or in heaven" and all broken relationships are reconciled to himself, "making peace by the blood of his cross" (Col. 1: 20).

39. The covenant between God and the chosen people in the Old Testament is one definitive moment of the culture of life. It is most significant that the covenant relationship is often described in terms of intimate family, even spousal, relationships. Thus the most tender and ineffable affection with which God cares and provides for the chosen people: "I took them up in my arms....I led them with cords of compassion, with the bands of love and ... I bent down to them and fed them" (Hos. 11: 3-4); "As one whom his mother comforts, so will I comfort you" (Is. 66:13). Even the language of communion between bridegroom and wife is used (see Hos. 2: 16, 19-20). The following words exemplify the tenderness of God's life-giving love for the people: "I have called you by name, you are mine...you are precious in my eyes and honored, and I love you" (Is. 43: 1, 4). God's covenant familial relationship with the chosen people is characterized by limitless patience, kindness, calls to renewal, mercy and forgiveness.

40. Because of God's loving providence over them, the covenant people are told to be in active solidarity with everyone, but especially with the needy, the orphan, the widow, and the stranger (Ex. 22:22-23; Dt. 24:17-22; Is. 1:17; Jer. 22:3; Zech. 7:10). Finally, when the covenant relationship seems to be radically broken because of stubborn infidelities, God's life-giving love promises a radical transformation in terms of a "new heart" that is malleable to God's re-shaping (see Ez. 11:19; 36: 26).

41. For the Old Testament integral human life and the culture of life clearly include these four major emphases: life as God's gift of love, communion and solidarity with God and with others, especially with the poor and the needy, as covenant demand, and God's promise of full life.

### ***2. Jesus the Life: Shared Love, Communion and Solidarity.***

42. When finally viewed, as it should be, in the light of the mystery of Jesus, life takes on its full revealed meaning as a sharing in the very life of God. The love of God is nowhere as overwhelming and surpassing as when he sends his only begotten Son to assume our humanity except its sinfulness – in order that we might have eternal life (see Jn. 3:16). We believe that Jesus Christ is the Word of Life (1 Jn. 1:1). With total mastery of life, he can lay down his life for the sake of others and can "take it up again" (Jn. 10: 17-18, see also Jn. 5: 26). In ultimate self-disclosure, Jesus declares, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (Jn. 14:6). He then speaks of believing, of keeping his word, and of intimate communion of love. "Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him" (Jn. 14: 23). He who is life itself describes his mission on earth as life-giving, as salvific solidarity with others, "I came so that they might have life and have it abundantly" (Jn. 10:10).

43. It is at Baptism that this new life is given. By baptism the believer passes from death due to sin to life in Christ (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12). From Christ comes "living water" that becomes "a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (Jn. 4:14). He is moreover "the bread of life" (Jn. 6: 34, 48) that has come "from heaven and gives life to the world" (Jn. 6: 33). Jesus speaks here of Communion in the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, his own body and blood: "I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh" (Jn. 6:51). "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life" (6: 54). "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him" (6:56). That is why the apostle Paul would exult: "For me to live is Christ" (Phil.1:21). In his turn the evangelist John would

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proclaim: “And from his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace” (Jn. 1: 16).

## **B. Covenant Life in the Spirit: the Family of God, the Church**

44. Yet there is more to the life-giving love of Jesus than just a personal relationship between believers and Jesus. Once again covenant love and life, now “sealed by the Blood” of Jesus, is at the core of a new relationship between God and a new people of faith who are given a new commandment: “A new commandment I give you: Love one another as I have loved you. By this shall people know that you are my disciples.” There is no deeper communion of love and life than this – the sharing of Jesus own Body and Blood, his whole life, with believers. His sacrificial love gives rise to a new community, a family of faith born in the Spirit. “But when Jesus dies and ‘gives up His Spirit’ to God, He ‘hands on’ his Spirit to the Church in the same act” [*Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed., Xavier Leon-Dufour, updated 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1982; Jn. 19:30]. Thus the Church comes to be as a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17), God’s “household”, his own family (Eph. 2:19; 1 Tm. 3:15) born of the Spirit of Jesus, the Spirit of Life [The church as the family of God was the special focus of the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa. See Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 199].

45. Life in Christ then is life in the Spirit (see Rom. 8: 1, 9-10). Only faith knows of such a life. But there are certain signs a life of the Spirit is, indeed, being lived. These signs are the “fruits of the Spirit” – “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Gal. 5:22). In contrast to the life of the Spirit is life in the flesh which is demonstrated by “works of the flesh” - “immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like” (Gal. 5: 19-21). Avoiding these “works of the flesh” is a fundamental requirement of the new covenant. Paul summarizes the covenant relationship in terms of love of neighbor:

For you were called to freedom brethren: only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’ (Gal. 5: 13-14).

46. To live in the Spirit, therefore, is to lead a life of communion and solidarity with and for all. This communion and solidarity becomes even more awesome when Paul speaks of the Church as the Body of Christ where every member is important and complementary. There are different members but the Body is one. In the Body is unity in diversity, complementarity amid differences, and

co-responsibility for the building up of the whole (Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor 12:4-7; 12:12; Eph. 4:16).

47. As in the Old Testament, so in the New Testament the major realities that emerge are God’s gift of Life, God’s promise of Full Life, Love, Communion, and Solidarity. They are fundamental dimensions of a culture of life. God is Life. God is Love. Because God is love, we live. If we live, then we have to love. If we love, we have to act toward communion and solidarity. In the light of the above reflection, we can understand why the Gospel of Jesus may be called the “Gospel of Life” and why the Kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus as “now here and yet to come” is the Kingdom of Life in its fullness.

### **1. The Family: Sanctuary of Love and Life, Covenant and Communion**

48. The life of God’s family on earth, the Church, is both a gift that anticipates the full life that is to come and also a task that is to be done on the journey to full life. It is at the juncture of gift and task that the family as the “*domestic church*” takes on a deeper significance. Pope John Paul II has said, “In the face of the so-called culture of death, the family is the heart of the culture of life” (CA, 39). Deeper reflection tells us why this is so. If the Church is, indeed, the privileged dwelling place of the God of Life, then the domestic Church, the family, has likewise to be the sanctuary of the God of life, the sanctuary that welcomes every life. As in the Church so also in the family, there should be co-responsibility, complementarity, mutual caring, a covenant partnership of two persons equal in human dignity, and co-responsible stewardship of the covenant and everything that the covenant implies. The family, as the Church that is the home, is clearly a community of faith, prayer and fellowship (Acts 2:42-47).

49. “The Christian family springs from marriage, which is an image and a sharing in the partnership of love between Christ and the Church; it will show forth to all men Christ’s living presence in the world and the authentic nature of the Church by the love and generous fruitfulness of the spouses, by their unity and fidelity, and by the loving way in which all members of the family cooperate with each other” (LG 48). At the beginning of the family is a sacred covenant between man and woman, mirroring the covenant between God and people. It is a covenant of love and life between husband and wife whereby they “give themselves to each other and accept each other” (GS, 48; see Gen. 2: 24), hold on to each other lovingly and faithfully until death (Mt. 19: 6) in a total reciprocity of self-giving.

50. “Christ’s own union with the Church” is the model of conjugal communion (LG 48). The love of the husband needs to be like Christ’s own love for his bride,

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the Church, faithful and sacrificing covenant love. So must the love of the wife be for her husband. Husband and wife are sacraments to each other of Christ's love as well as of the love of the Church. This means that their mutual conjugal love embodies Christ's love-union with the Church. Christ's love becomes an inner presence in their love, relationships, and family life as well as the source of their spiritual sustenance and growth. This is the "great mystery" (see Eph. 5: 21-33) of love and life that is signified by the nuptial vow that husband and wife pronounce to each other and is symbolically expressed by the nuptial rings. When St. Paul admonishes the husband to "love" his wife, the full meaning of such spousal love is revealed when he instructs the wife to "respect" her husband (Eph. 5:33). For in its full semantic meaning to *respect* is "to look deeply into" the true good of the other. It is "a search for all that constitutes the good of the person who is loved" (Salvatore Fisichella, "The Christian Family in a Time of Cultural Change," Acts of the International Theological-Pastoral Congress [AITPC], The Christian Family: Good News for the Third Millennium, Fourth World Meeting of Families, Manila, January 22-24, 2003, p. 46).

51. Thus the mutual love between husband and wife in the sacred covenant of marriage is patterned after the covenant love between God and the chosen people of Israel, between Jesus and the Church. Such love spills over to the rest of the family and is marked by patience, kindness, respect, trust, forgiveness, and mercy. By loving and respecting each other, husband and wife grow together towards human and Christian maturity as they live their family life and face the challenges of their responsibilities. Truly, because of its divine inner riches the great mystery of the family is Good News.

## 2. Covenant Love in Marriage: Parenthood and Children

52. As "the author of marriage" (LG, 48), God mandated marriage from the very beginning to be indissoluble (Mt. 19:5-6) and radically open to God's gift of procreated life. Motherhood and fatherhood are gifts implied from the beginning in the complementariness of male and female as image of God. "By its very nature the institution of marriage and married love is ordered to the procreation and education of the offspring and it is in them that it finds its crowning glory" (LG, 48; see also 50). Inseparable, therefore, from the gift given by God for husband and wife to become "one body" (Gen. 2: 24; Mt. 19: 3-9) is their unity of love and of life, not only of their own life together but also of any new life that God creates through them. Indeed, they have to be radically open to any new life, because God's love does not discriminate and does not exclude anyone, a boy child or a girl child, a handicapped baby or a totally healthy baby, rich or poor.

Every child is a gift of God. This does not in any way stigmatize infertile couples for in the physical inability to have children the radical and fundamental moral openness to any life that God might give is already a blessing and a grace from God.

53. Husband and wife have to work together to educate their children in the ways of God. They are the first catechists of their children. In this regard they seek ways to grow in their faith through the varied opportunities offered by the Church. In the pluralistic societies of Asia where Christians are a small minority and where religious education in schools may not be accessible, this mission of husband and wife to educate the children for God is absolutely necessary.

54. Clearly God sows into the very nature of the family the seeds of the future through children as well as the grateful memories of its past through the elderly. Gratitude, hope, awe and reverence are the responses of both old and young for the transcendent gift that God gives in marriage when husband and wife share in the awesome creative act of God. Thus truly the family is a trove of concern and respect, of care and love, of God-given treasures old and new.

### C. Vocation and Mission: "Family, Become What You Are!"

55. Built into the very nature of the family is a divine vocation and mission. God calls men and women to family as a divine vocation, even as God calls some to live in the single state. Married couples and families have been called to search for the Kingdom of God above all else. Drawn together by this unconditional love of God, they are likewise impelled by it to mission. In the family, it is the mission of husband and wife to minister to each other. In a process of mutual evangelization in the ordinariness of their everyday lives, they proclaim to each other the Gospel of Life and Love that is rooted in the hearts of those who believe, particularly through the sacraments of Baptism and Matrimony. But not only to each other do husband and wife proclaim the Good News. They are likewise called to do so to others. It is above all by authentic witnessing that the family proclaims the Gospel of Love and Life. This is the reason that the universal Church through Pope John Paul II urges the domestic Church, "Family, become what you are!" (FC, 16). These famous words are a summons to integral renewal, an urgent call to fidelity, fidelity to the God-given identity of the family as a covenant of love between husband and wife, as a sanctuary of life, as the Church in its most fundamental cellular community form.

56. From such identity flows the mission *ad intra* of the family. "Family, become what you are!" Mutual evangelization takes place first in the family through the

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mutual loving, caring and serving of husband and wife, mutually inspiring and encouraging each other to fulfill their responsibilities in faithful love, through loving and caring for their children as well as through the love and obedience of their children. Family members evangelize one another through anxieties and joys, the cross and resurrection in daily marital and family life, as they come to know and accept the truth about themselves even as they are accepted and loved for who and what they are. Home is the place where people can be themselves and grow integrally. Hence, seen in the light of faith the daily interaction of family life can be an unceasing process of witnessing to the death and resurrection of Christ the Good News of salvation. This is truly a catechesis of life.

57. The community of married couples is called to illustrate in a unique way the reality that is the Church. Marriage is a way of being and becoming church. By fostering human intimacy and commitment to the personal well-being of the other, married couples promote in word and deed both the reality and importance of loving, life-bringing relationships within the Church and its structures. They provide flesh and blood to the Christian conviction that God is Self-giving Love. They sacramentalize the gracious goodness of God, particularly so in the context of excessive and widespread human suffering. Committed, faithful and nurturing love (intimacy), not simply in the area of sexual fidelity, but also in the broader context of not betraying love by selfishness or exploitation, or pettiness or dishonesty, or disinterestedness or insensitivity, makes more credible the human as well as Christian trust in God's unflinching concern.

58. Likewise from the very identity of the family comes its mission *ad extra*, a mission still of evangelization. When God said of creation, "It is good," God did not only refer to the physical beauty of creation. There is necessarily a moral and spiritual dimension to the judgment that God made of the goodness of creation. The whole world is good because it came from his design and images his goodness and love. Such moral and spiritual dimension may be specifically applied to the words that God addressed to Adam and Eve, the first husband and wife and our first parents. "Go forth and multiply and fill the earth." More than just the physical implications of the command, they were also to people the earth with the goodness and beauty, justice, and love of God. The awakening and experience of our first parents of the reality of sin and human limitation made them understand the painful process of human growth and maturity. Human limitations and failures are no obstacles to the fulfillment of family vocation and mission because of God's promise of continual fidelity (Is. 38:19; Jer. 31:3). It is thus in the midst of challenge that the original moral and spiritual brilliance of humanity be spread throughout the earth and fittingly, even if finitely, mirror the divine.

59. If the family is, indeed, the Church that is the home, then the first and primary involvement of the people is their families. This is very important given the growing incidence of breakdown in marriages and of broken families. Driven by economic, psychological and social concerns, people are unwittingly causing family bonds to weaken or die, a phenomenon that impacts society as a whole. This raises the question as to what church leadership can do to strengthen family presence and relationships – that is, to build the Church that is the home.

### 1. Mission and Economic Globalization

60. As we have already seen, the task of every family to reflect the goodness, justice, and goodness of God is nowhere more urgent and imperative than in the social sphere of life. Our pastoral and reflection on the mission of the family thus brings us to address the phenomenon and process of globalization and its host of problems. Indeed, globalization has made more actual the buzzword of two decades ago that the world is a global village and its various peoples are becoming less isolated and more united, that the family of nations is more reflective of the various peoples and tongues united on Pentecost than of the disorder and disunity at the Tower of Babel. We might even say that globalization could be a principal tool by which the various peoples, races and cultures of the world are to live together in peace and harmony, that the rich and the poor in this world are to share fairly and equitably the goods of creation and the benefits of development, that the whole world is one harmonious human family under God where there is no room for war and divisive conflict, prejudice, discrimination, exclusion, oppression, isolation, and marginalization.

61. However, the present results of globalization are sadly far from the theological utopia that is envisioned. Social justice and peace, stewardship of creation, being responsible for one another, the common good of the one human family remain illusions. In many instances globalization has even aggravated injustice, poverty, exploitation, oppression and the destruction of the environment in most Asian countries. The drive toward competitiveness has left hundreds of millions of Asians behind in a global economic and cultural Darwinism where the mighty prevail. The Tower of Babel continues to mock pristine Paradise. Reflection on the situation in the light of faith tells us that the current path that globalization is taking is terribly wrong for the human family and that an alternative must be sought.

62. Pope John Paul II has rightly pointed out that for globalization to work toward world social justice, it must be "globalization *in solidarity*, a globalization *without marginalization*" [Message for the World Day of Peace,

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1 January 1998, no. 3]. This would demand the just regulation of free market forces that are now effectively in the control of the better off and powerful economies of the world. Globalization must be regulated by international juridical norms and universal ethical principles that govern the use and development of the goods of creation and the distribution of the benefits of development. Certainly in the light of the Church's social teachings among such principles would be: the preservation of the integrity of creation, universal destination of the goods of creation, human development that is integral, equitable distribution of the benefits of development, and option for the poor, and their participation in development. These principles have been insistently taught by the church in Asia especially through the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, particularly by the various Bishops' Institutes of Social Action and Faith Encounter Institutes of Social Action.

## **2. The Family and Cultural Globalization**

63. We should also come to grips with the issue of cultural globalization and the growing onset of a culture of post-modernism. Rightly today individual autonomy and individual human rights are fostered and defended. These fundamental values are indispensable for the common good. Thus in the face of a prevailing culture of patriarchy it is necessary to emphasize and promote the rights of women in Asia. On the other hand, we might perhaps perceive that there is today less emphasis on the family as "a community of love and life" and perhaps an overemphasis in some instances on certain individual rights at the expense of the community, more emphasis on the individual rights of spouses and children over against the good of the family and community. In every case virtue would urge a right balance between poles in tension.

64. However, at stake is the very nature of freedom regarding marriage. Instead of being a "capacity for realizing the truth of God's plan for marriage and the family" freedom is understood in its post-modern sense "as an autonomous power of self-affirmation, often against others, for one's own selfish well-being" (FC, 6). Such understanding of freedom is seen today in various attempts to legislate new practices and values that are directly contrary to the tradition of our faith, such as divorce, same-sex union as marriage, abortion, and many of the ideas that the ambivalent term "reproductive health" implies as understood in various conferences of the United Nations. Thus it is necessary to be profoundly discerning regarding new "rights" that the emerging culture might press for universal recognition.

65. The rise of a new world culture because of globalization imposes on the Church in Asia a new

dimension of evangelization. Evangelization of culture involves different dimensions. We need to evangelize our own cultures and purify them of traditions, beliefs, customs, and practices that diverge from the Christian faith. We need reciprocally to understand our own faith in the light of the Spirit-given seeds of the Word in other religious and faith-traditions. We have to forge a symbiosis of these gifts of the Spirit so that our faith may be expressed, understood, and celebrated in the language and ethos of Asian cultures. Finally we need to confront the new cultural threat posed by globalization that seeks to impose a new materialist and relativist ethical code.

66. For we hold that God is the Absolute Truth and all truth emanates from God. What God reveals in the pages of Scriptures and interpreted through the Spirit by the Church as necessary for our salvation regarding life, love, marriage, family, etc., is universally true. Moreover, what God unmistakably imprints on human nature is true and is verifiable by reason. Hence, the Church has perennially held that there are some universal truths, though admittedly expressed with the limitations of language and culture. On the other hand, doctrinal and moral relativism devalues such truths and holds that truth changes with the times. Consequently, critics deride as "outmoded" Church doctrines that affirm marriage as sacrament and that reject same-sex unions, divorce, contraception, abortion, etc. They declare ironically with dogmatic certainty that Church doctrines must change with the times, "if the Church were to remain relevant." It is this doctrinal and moral relativism of the emerging culture that we need to confront in family evangelization. Indeed, we have to share the anguish of people who suffer the terrible pains of divorce, of broken marriages, the loss of life in abortion, etc. Therefore, the teaching of the truth has to be done with great humility, compassion and love (Eph. 4:15). This is required of a genuine caring and nurturing pastoral ministry for couples and their families.

## **3. The Family and Social Transformation**

67. By its very nature as the basic cell of society, every family has a social role. But this is especially true for the Christian family. The sacrament of marriage gives "to Christian couples and parents a power and a commitment to live their vocation as lay people and therefore to 'seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them to the plan of God'" (FC, 47 quoting LG 31). The work then of "ordering temporal affairs to the plan of God" or assisting at social transformation is part of the service or kingly mission of the family.

68. In Asia social transformation is most needed in at least three key areas: the quest for social justice and

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peace, integrity in public service, and the integrity of creation. Injustices are often built into the social structures, including the family structure as in the case of patriarchy. Cultural, ethnic, political, and economic differences erupt into violent conflicts. The disease of corruption in public service is not simply attitudinal, it has also become structural as the idealism of young public servants becomes hopelessly eroded and finally trapped by “the system.” The destruction of the environment goes on unabated.

69. Social change must start in the family, through the attitudinal transformation of parents, through the education that they impart to their children, and the parental example that they give regarding the values of justice, peace, personal integrity, and the care of creation. Moreover, families in solidarity with one another can play a strong advocacy role in society through “family politics” (see FC 44) or political intervention in promoting transparency and accountability among public servants, or fostering mediation and reconciliation among conflicting parties.

70. Such family politics should also be exercised in the defense of their own family rights, (see the enumeration of such rights in FC, 46), rights that are sometimes trampled by the State. For this reason Asian families should become familiar with, defend, protect and promote the Charter of the Rights of the Family that the Holy See has proposed to intergovernmental and international organizations (see Appendix). These rights are not peculiar to Catholic belief. They flow from the very nature of marriage and family and can easily be the object of inter-religious collaboration.

#### **4. The Family and Inter-Religious Dialogue**

71. In Asia, the birthplace of the world’s great religions, it is in the ordinariness of daily life that the encounter with peoples of other faiths takes place. It is at this juncture of daily living that witnessing to Gospel values is foremost in the Christian mission of evangelization. The teachings of the Scriptures as interpreted by the Church reflect the values that Christian families have to live in their daily lives. To fulfill the mission of evangelization, Christian families should always keep before their minds their distinct identity as Christian, be faithful to their Christian commitments, and live by their Christian values. For Christian families only through fidelity to the Christian identity and responsibility can dialogue of life with peoples of other faiths be possible and fruitful.

72. Pope John Paul II observed: “Each member of the faithful and all Christian communities are called to practice dialogue, although not always to the same degree or in the same way” (RM, 57). Many indeed are the ways by which inter-religious dialogue can take place at the level of the family. In the first place is the witness to Gospel

values that Christian families must give daily in our times. Among these Gospel values are: the sacredness of life from conception to natural death, the dignity of the human person, the sanctity of marriage between man and woman, family and marriage as divinely instituted, acceptance and love of children, chastity according to each one’s vocation, solidarity with the poor, the sick and the needy (see GS 51, *Evangelium Vitae* 58-67, FC 16). Mutual respect for common values will lead to mutual collaboration to protect and promote them. In particular, solidarity with the poor is a social value that should certainly lead Christian families to act together with families of other faiths in the promotion of social justice, the quest for peace and reconciliation, and in the care for the environment. It would not be farfetched likewise to imagine that at a certain point of inter-religious relationship Christian families could share with others their own God-experience, their religious experience of faith and love of Jesus, not in order to proselytize but simply in order to share of themselves in transparent friendship and unity (see *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 57). Finally, one should not dismiss as impossible that Christian families could bring the Good News of salvation to people who wish to hear and freely welcome it (cf. Rom. 10:14-15). The Christian family needs to do this proclamation at least through the catechism of its members.

73. But it is especially in inter-faith marriages that inter-religious dialogue is both a dialogue of word, of love and life (see the situation given by St. Paul in 1 Cor. 7: 12-16). At the beginning of the loving encounter of man and woman of different faiths, the consideration of religious differences as well as reconciliation already begins. The dialogue of word and of love proceeds through courtship and marriage, matures into a loving dialogue of life in the ordinary and daily events of married life. The values and attitudes of such dialogue flows to their children. Despite religious differences, a bridge of love and reconciliation is built, a reality so significant in societies plagued by religious strife. There is likewise no doubt that in the anxieties, sorrows, joys, hopes, and love of marital and family life, there are opportunities offered by the Spirit for the humble, respectful, silent but eloquent proclamation of Christian faith.

#### **5. The Family and the Basic Ecclesial Community**

74. The *domestic church* is the most fundamental community form of the Church and must be taken seriously as an ecclesial reality. It must be part of the total ecclesial reality of the locality. Pope John Paul II has noted with approval the pastoral emphasis that the Bishops of Asia have given to BEC’s “as an effective way of promoting communion and participation in parishes and Dioceses and as a genuine force for evangelization. . . . and are, therefore,

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a solid starting point for building a new society, the expression of a *civilization of love*" (*Ecclesia in Asia*, 25). There is no doubt that the family has a special place in the pastoral thrust of building Basic Ecclesial Communities in Asia. This is likewise true for the Basic Human Community particularly for Asian multi-faith societies and inter-faith marriages. The *family* is the most fundamental community component of the BEC and BHC. In most cases the BEC is made up of clusters of neighborhood families that come together regularly to pray, read and reflect on the Word of God, and apply it to their daily lives. In like manner clusters of families in BHC gather for inter-faith prayer, reflection, fellowship and common action for the good of the neighborhood.

75. May it not even be said that the family in the BEC should be the *focal point of evangelization*, to which all parish pastoral programs should be geared? The BEC would then be a community of families, and the parish truly a community of communities (cf. Acts 4:32). The solidarity of families in all aspects of human life in the BEC's as well as in the BHC's would, indeed, be the micro-level response to the phenomenon of economic and cultural globalization. It is these communities, at the level of the family, where the "globalization of charity and solidarity" begins [The Pope has often referred to the globalization of charity and solidarity in his World Day of Peace Messages]. This in turn would require a renewal of parish structures as well as a renewal or at least a redirection of priorities in ministry, lay and ordained. Faith formation in the family leading to family empowerment in the BEC/BHC mission toward a culture of life would become the overarching pastoral priority.

#### ***D. Family Spirituality: Communion and Discipleship Toward a Culture of Life***

[Complementing this reflection on family spirituality are the reflections of FABC 4<sup>th</sup> Plenary Assembly on the Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the World of Asia, Tokyo, Japan, 1986, on Lay Spirituality, nos. 4.8.1 – 4.8.11. Their emphasis on a Kingdom of God spirituality applies even more forcefully to Asian families that are inter-faith. See also FABC 5<sup>th</sup> Plenary Assembly, Bandung, Indonesia, 1990, on A Spirituality for Our Times, nos. 9.1-9.7].

76. At the heart of the family is love, God's love drawing man and woman to each other in a union of love in marriage, a love radically open to life in their children. At the heart of the family then is Communion, communion with God, communion of the spouses, communion of young or elderly parents and their children, communion with grandparents and other members of the extended family. Such relational communion goes beyond simply living under one roof, or being physically related by blood. It is a union of hearts and minds (Jn. 17:21; Acts 4:32; Phil. 2:2; 1 Pt.

3:8) that in a human way reflects the communion of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – the triune God from whom the family came to be. By definition a culture of life traces its ultimate roots to the love and life of the Triune God. Hence a spirituality of communion leads the family to become an agent of a culture of life.

77. Communion, however, reaches out to the wider community and impels the family toward a mission of service (Jn. 17:14, 18, 20). This outward movement enables the family to share the Trinitarian communion that it is gifted with. A spirituality of communion infuses vigor and enthusiasm – life – into the dynamics of the family, the relationships between spouses, between parents and children, between members of the extended family. It extends in ever widening concentric circles to include the neighborhood, the whole community. Without this spirituality the family will fail to measure up to its identity and mission.

#### **1. Discipleship and the Way of the Ordinary**

78. A spirituality of communion is a spirituality of discipleship, of belonging to and following Christ. Marital and family discipleship begins with listening to Christ and heeding his word in the Scriptures, in the Church, and in everyday events. What Mary told the servants at Cana at the beginning of the married life of a new couple is likewise addressed to the family: "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2: 5). It is a matter of listening to Jesus and discerning his will in family relationships, at work, or in the everyday events that impinge on family life. Indeed, it is through ordinary events, including the troubles, difficulties and afflictions that the family experiences, that it discovers what pleases God and what does not, what leads to integrity, unity, justice, peace and love and what does not. It is also through the ordinary ways of loving and caring, of serving and of doing one's responsibilities in the family that sanctification is achieved through the grace of God. Done in loving fidelity to discipleship, the ordinary is the way of the family towards the culture of life.

79. In discerning what values or practices need to be espoused and realized, married couples and families need to recall God's intimate presence in their lives. The Spirit speaks to them and through them. Hence, the whole Church has to take seriously the *sensus fidelium* of married couples and their families as a significant component in ecclesial discernment.

#### **2. Conscience Formation and the Grace of Marriage**

80. The role of conscience is indispensable in family spirituality. Married people should not merely follow the current opinion or their own desires and wants. Their lives

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and their behavior have to be ruled by God speaking through their conscience in the light of the teaching authority of the Church as the “authentic interpreter of the divine law” (LG 50). In these days of increasing secularism God is becoming an afterthought and His Church a “voice in the wilderness.” Conscience is God’s gift for men and women to be truly human; it is not in itself formed by polling the views of the public. Rather it has to be “conformed to the law of God” which “throws light on the meaning of married love, protects it and leads it to truly human fulfillment” (LG 50). To form an upright conscience, docile to God’s law as interpreted by the Church, is a necessary dimension of conjugal and family spirituality. This certainly magnifies the work of parents in educating their children and forming in them a right conscience.

81. Always and in all things ordinary or extraordinary, the reliable, gracious and transforming presence of God in their marriage is a sure source of strength in the journey to holiness. Our faith tells us that spouses are “fortified and, as it were, consecrated for the duties and dignity of their state by a special sacrament; fulfilling their conjugal and family role by virtue of this sacrament, spouses are penetrated with the spirit of Christ and their whole life is suffused by faith, hope, and charity; thus they increasingly further their own perfection and their mutual sanctification, and together they render glory to God” (LG 48). In prayer or at work a vibrant awareness of this special grace of marriage will surely bear great spiritual and temporal fruit for the family and will constantly remind the family of the living presence of the Triune God.

### **3. Prayer, the Paschal Mystery, and the Eucharist**

82. Prayer is at the center of this spirituality, “prayer by the family, prayer for the family, and prayer with the family” (Pope John Paul II, *Letter to Families*, no. 4). Families need to be both encouraged and trained to pray, linking in creative ways their present everyday experiences with the values of the Gospel, thus creating new prayer forms in the home as well as renewing rituals and devotions that they have grown accustomed to. Most evocative of the nature of the Church as God’s Family and of the conjugal family as the domestic church is the prayer that the Lord Jesus taught his family of faith. The Our Father is pre-eminently a prayer of the family whose ultimate Father is God.

83. Aided by prayer the family is able to walk with the Spirit, live in the Spirit, remain in the Spirit and follow Christ in faithful discipleship. A spirituality that is laden with prayer makes faithful discipleship possible. Fidelity in marriage, the strength of marriage, the ability of spouses and their children to respond adequately to the challenges of everyday life are graces of the Holy Spirit asked for in prayer, though indeed they flow fundamentally from the

sacrament of marriage. “Outstanding courage is required for the constant fulfillment of the duties of this Christian calling: spouses, therefore, will need grace for leading a holy life: they will eagerly practice a love that is firm, generous, and prompt to sacrifice and will ask for it in their prayers” (LG, 49).

84. Finally we should be deeply aware that while the sanctifying role of the Christian family is grounded on Baptism and Confirmation, it finds “its highest expression in the Eucharist” (FC, 57). For the Eucharist is the memorial of the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Christ, the Paschal Mystery, the font of our salvation. Even as Christ rose from his suffering and death, so through the Paschal Mystery sacramentalized in the Eucharist families are empowered to rise from the daily trials, anxieties, discouragement, even hopelessness — the many kinds of “death” that daily marital and family life is heir to. Certainly joy, hope, forgiveness, reconciliation, and strength for couples and their families come from the Eucharist.

85. The Eucharist represents the covenant of love between Christ and his Church. Thus it is in the Eucharistic sacrifice that husband and wife encounter the source of their own covenant love. For this reason, both husband and wife should not look at the Eucharistic sacrifice merely as a matter of obligation but of celebration, at which they come face to face with the sacramental wellspring of their communion as well as a celebratory event with their children for renewing their spousal covenant love. Pope John Paul II reminds us: “The Eucharist *creates communion and fosters communion*” (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 40). It is at the Eucharist that husband and wife and their entire family celebrate the mystery of their oneness in the Body of Christ, and their oneness with one another. As St. Augustine said: “If you are his body and members of him, then you will find set on the Lord’s table your own mystery. Yes, you receive your own mystery” (*Sermo 272*: PL 38, 1247, quoted in EE, 40). Thus the spirituality of communion and discipleship needed by families is also a eucharistic spirituality, involving everything that the Eucharistic act of Jesus implies: total self-emptying, self-giving love. Holy Mass has to be truly a *family event* with the full participation of all members of the family, including children and infants.

## **PART III. PASTORAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FAMILY MINISTRY**

### **A Vision of Family Ministry in Asia**

86. In the light of the pastoral situation and of the theological-pastoral reflection on the family in Asia, certain directions of ministry to family are imperative.

- Family ministry has to be holistic, both in depth

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and in breadth. It should take into consideration the comprehensive understanding of a culture of life that we have discussed.

- Therefore, in breadth Family ministry should extend beyond the usual concern about contraception, abortion, euthanasia, natural family planning, pre-marriage and post marriage catechesis, and family enrichment seminars.
- In the light of the emerging secular values regarding the family, family ministry should seek the renewal of marriage as a divinely instituted sacrament between man and woman;
- Given the social, cultural, and religious realities in Asia, Family ministry should also aim to prepare couples and families to meet the challenges of inter-religious living, poverty, migration, gender, the young, environment, politics, economic and cultural globalization, etc.
- It has to care for families with special needs.
- In depth, family ministry should make the inner resources of our faith (the sacraments, liturgy, prayer, day-to-day spirituality) available to couples and their families in their struggle toward a culture of life.

87. From what may be observed it would seem that Family ministries in the Episcopal conferences in Asia have strong programs on pre-nuptial catechesis and marriage enrichment. They are also quite well set on programs of Responsible Parenthood with emphasis on Natural Family Planning particularly with the use of the Billings Method. Not quite strong are the deployment of financial resources for family ministry and the training of lay personnel for family ministry, especially at the parish level.

However in view of the above-mentioned directions of family ministry required by the over-all pastoral situation in Asia, we may envision Family Ministry in Asia with the following program objectives, other than the objectives already being aimed at by family ministries in the Episcopal conferences:

88. A Family Ministry that Forms and Empowers:

- (a) The Family as the Focal Point of Evangelization –
  - giving the family the highest priority as the focal point of evangelization which every pastoral program should assist and to which they should be geared;
  - redirecting all pastoral programs so that they may contribute to the strengthening of the family;
- (b) Faith-Formation in the Family –
  - promoting integral faith formation in the family

leading toward a spirituality of communion and mission;

- empowering parents through proper faith formation, family counseling, marriage enrichment, and other means to fulfill their calling as the primary educators and catechists of their children;
- strengthening Catholic values of marriage while remaining open to respectful dialogue with the beliefs and values of other religions;
- on-going faith formation of husband and wife, parents, and children toward a culture of life;
- promoting functional knowledge of the Charter of the Rights of the Family (the Holy See, October 22, 1983) as an essential component of family ministry;

(c) Roles of Husband and Wife in the Family –

- restoring equality of dignity, complementariness, and co-responsible partnership of husband and wife in various roles in the family;
- eradicating the evils of patriarchy and liberating women from oppressive and traditional values and structures that do not recognize their equality of dignity with men;
- providing adequate formation regarding the role of male and female sexuality in human and family relationships;
- ensuring that a program for women empowerment be a fundamental component of ministry at the diocesan and parish levels;

(d) Resources and Personnel for Family Ministry –

- providing the ordinary resources, personnel and finances, necessary to run full time diocesan and parish family ministries, priority being given to the recruitment of lay personnel;
- providing intensive and appropriate training for all personnel in family ministries; particularly urgent is the recruitment and training of women counselors and of “couple counselors”;
- encouraging and recruiting men and women in the various professions related to the welfare of the family to be part of diocesan and parish family ministries;

(e) Family Ministry and Vocations –

- providing the dimension of vocation animation in the family ministry so that families participate not only in supporting vocations but also in discovering, animating, nourishing, and recruiting vocations;

(f) Approaches, Support Groups and Programs for Family Ministry –

- establishing support groups in the parish to help in all aspects of integral mission;

- using the couple to couple approach and family to family approach for mutual assistance, support and encouragement;
- producing materials for sex education, moral issues in conjugal relationships, Christian parenting, and family catechesis for the use of schools, Basic Ecclesial/Human Communities;
- incorporating family ministry in the curriculum of seminaries and other houses of formation;

89. A Family Ministry that Cares and Serves:

Special Programs for the Family Ministry –

- setting up holistic programs for the care of single parents, inter-cultural marriages, inter-religious and interfaith marriages;
- setting up programs for the compassionate care of families in difficult situations – such as divorced parents, divorced and remarried parents;
- setting up programs for families with migrant workers abroad and helping migrant workers before they leave and when they return;
- addressing the problems of violence and abuse in the family, marriage of minors, arranged marriages, substance addiction, and HIV related problems;
- providing counseling to families, including vocational counseling for youth;
- setting up child care programs;
- providing opportunities for families of different faiths to come together in sharing religious experiences toward mutual understanding and respect;

90. A Family Ministry that Promotes Social Transformation:

- promoting the subsidiary role of the State and of church institutions regarding the family;

- setting up integral human development programs for families through Basic Ecclesial/Human Communities, beginning with social awareness enabling them to mobilize themselves for social and political advocacy and action;
- integrating gender perspectives into the task of social transformation in accordance with the “new feminism” that Pope John Paul II has advocated;
- enlisting women in the task of promoting social justice and peace;
- skills training, networking and building family solidarity among inter-religious and interfaith families in Basic Ecclesial/Human Communities for social and political advocacy, including vigilance over the means of social communication and cyberspace (the globalization of family solidarity at the grassroots);
- fostering inter-religious and interfaith family ministry programs in Catholic schools which have a privileged relationship with families because of their role *in loco parentis*;
- setting up competent multidisciplinary group of lay people and couples for social and political advocacy on behalf of Gospel values threatened by media and legislation;
- stopping the use of children and minors in war;
- stopping child and women trafficking for all forms of activity, particularly sex tourism;

91. The fundamental dynamic force of family ministry in Asia has to be a relevant and engaged Family Spirituality of Communion and Mission that is ecclesial, sacramental, and Christocentric. Given the multi-cultural and multi-religious situation of Asian families, this spirituality has to give particular attention to a Kingdom of God spirituality that would serve as a common denominator for mission, that aims at assisting Asian families establish a genuine culture of life in Asia.

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*Catholic Overseas Contract Workers or domestic helpers can be of great help to the families that they are working with, what can the receiving Church do to help them impart Christian values to the children under their care? Do we need more and diverse Ministries to and with Families with Special Needs? How do we go about establishing them?*

*Most of the children of the poor family go to public schools, where there are no religious subjects, what can the Church do, aside from teaching catechism once a week in preparation for the first communion, to help them understand the Word of God? How can Catholic teachers play a more active role in the faith formation of young people and young families today?*

*How can Catholic families promote interfaith dialogue in the context of Asia? How can families be involved in the ministries to the poor and disadvantaged?*

16<sup>th</sup> March 2004

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# The Asian Family Toward a Culture of Life

## *Guide for Personal Reflection and Group Discussions*

### **Introduction**

In order to promote a greater involvement of the National Episcopal Conferences and their Commissions for Family Life and their collaborators, we are herewith attaching some Guide Questions. This we hope will deepen our understanding and provoke more thoughts on the theme of the 8<sup>th</sup> Plenary Assembly of the FABC and lead to a review of other related areas of the life of the Church in Asia.

The questions that have been added are meant to give some insights that may need further study and investigation and will enable the Episcopal Conferences and their Commission to enable them to prepared inputs for the Plenary Assembly. They could choose one question from each of the three Parts for their presentation.

Each of the three parts begins with a brief reflection and questions based on the FABC Working Document on The Asian Family toward a Culture of Life.

The questions are divided into three parts:

1. Overview and review of the reality of the Asian and Catholic Family.(The Pastoral Situation of the Family in Asia)
2. The Vocation of the Asian and Catholic Family (Theologico-Pastoral Reflection)
3. The Ministry with and to Families (Pastoral recommendations for the Family Ministry)

### **Part One**

#### **Review of the Reality of the Asian and Catholic Family**

Our dream and our desire for the Asian Family is to become the agent to promote a culture of life in the context of Asia. We, therefore ask ourselves: *How can the Asian family contribute to a culture of life?* We begin by Looking at the Asian Family and describe the trends and the forces that are moulding the Asian Family.

The Asian Family is experiencing radical changes in the context of the new global paradigm of neo-liberalism and market-driven economics. We have attempted in the Working Paper to describe the numerous trends and identify some of the symptoms affecting the Asian Family today. Our structural-cultural analysis has to lead us to make a holistic analysis. If the “causes” are systemic we have to

paint the total picture that is possible by connecting process of Economic Globalisation that we are experiencing and inner workings of the life within the family and in the Church. The family today, at the service of the market has to regain its fundamental unit for the spread of the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The family, as the basic unity of society is also the producer of the labour needed, the place where consumption begins and families are moved to meet the market needs through migration and labour export. The families beginning with parents are being are made to change their priorities in life, in order to keep up with the market forces. This is the primary driving force and all others seem secondary. In one sense, there is the “commodification of the family”. It is in this context of globalisation of the family that we are being asked to ask some fundamental questions.

*Do you think that the Asian family is seriously threatened both by its changing values within and other social forces or is it undergoing the normal changes that we would have to face when there are social changes in society in general?*

*Do you think we are exaggerating the crisis that the family is facing today? Do you think that as people modernise their values also change, and does the same apply to the family?*

*What would be some of the symptoms of the “culture of death” in the family today? Who do you think is more responsible for this, the parents or the children (especially the youth)?*

*Do you think many adults are conscious that the “modernised world” is the culture that young people have grown up in? How successful have adults been in curbing the negative effects that are so prevalent in society today?*

*Do you think that the lifestyle of parent (their career, the forms of recreation and hobbies, the peers they mix with) have an impact on the nature and quality of the care that they give to their children?*

*Would there be a big difference between the child upbringing habits of Rich and of Poor families? Is there something that they can learn from one another? Do you think that there is a difference between the reasons for the break up of marriages between Rich*

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*and Poor families? What is the reason for the differences, if any?*

*Do you think that the Asian families are still close-knit? Is there still the predominance of the extended family? What do you think is the main reason for the break up of marriages today?*

*Do you think that the elderly are being looked after both by the State and their own families? What about the elderly from low income families?*

*Is there a big difference in the values of children whose mothers are full-time housekeepers and the others full-time employees and part-time mother? What do you think is the impact of Overseas Migrant Workers' Families on their children? Should this be taken as the norm of family life today?*

*What do you think is the main reason for the increase of crime and anti-social behaviour among children and youth today? Do you think that this is related to the general change in moral standards within society?*

*What have you to say about the changing nature of the sexual ethics of young people today? What do you think has been the main factor influencing the norms and values of young people in the family today?*

### **Review of the Asian Catholic Family**

The inclusion of this set of questions on the Asian Catholic Family, is meant to enable us to review the state of the Catholic Family in Asia and thus to enable us to develop new Ministries to and With Families.

*How appropriate is the description of the reality of the Asian Family true of the Catholic Family today?*

*What is therefore the Asian Catholic Family? What is happening to the Asian Catholic Family? What are some of the effects of the changes in society on the Asian Catholic Family?*

*How much support has the Asian Catholic Family been receiving from the Church? Have there been sufficient programmes catering to the young today in the Church? What do you think have been the reasons for this trend?*

*What is the specific role of the Bishops and the Clergy with regards to the Catholic Family? What have been the services that are offered at the Diocesan and Parish levels? What should be the nature of such services?*

*What is the contribution of Religious who run independent services in the areas of education, health, communications and social concerns for the Catholic Family?*

*What is the specific contribution of the laity – parents,*

*youth, children in bridging the gap between the problems faced by families today and the attempts made to overcome them?*

*There is a growing trend where more members of the laity are being organised in movements and organisations both international and local that are not territorial but are able to offer some of their services to families. What can be their contribution to the Asian Catholic Family? How can they work more closely with the Diocesan and Parish structures?*

*Has the Asian Catholic Family moved away from the traditional parishes, to look for their spiritual sustenance in movements and organisation, where their needs as family and of each of their members are being met in new ways and taking new forms?*

*Do many Catholics only see their religious obligations as being nominal in expressing their need for the Official Church at their Baptism, Marriage and Last Rites? What can we do as People of God to reach out to the masses of Catholics who are only nominal members? Are we satisfied with those that only come to Parishes and Churches to fulfil their Sunday obligations?*

*What are some of the emerging new forms of associations, outside the parish for the families to uphold some of their basic beliefs on the family? Are they indirectly calling for the revitalisation of the traditional Diocesan and Parish structures that they think are no longer unable to meet the new emerging needs of the modern family today?*

*What influence has the Catholic Church on the Asian Family? What difference can the Church make – as the People of God to resist the on-slaughter on the family? Does the Church in general have much contact with the majority of Asian Family, the majority of whom are poor and members of other faiths? What is the contribution of the People of God?*

*What is it that the Pastors in the Church want to protect and what is it that they want to promote in the Asian Catholic Family?*

*How many in the Church, especially the laity, are aware of the need to take greater responsibility as citizens of nations to ensure that their rights as members of the family are protected? Do you think that the majority of Catholics are aware of their responsibilities as members of Civil Society today? Do you think they are aware of the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Family?*

*Is it true that lay people often criticise the Church leaders and theologians for not helping them to:*

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(1) understand what is happening to their families. (2) Reflect with them in making judgements in their lives regarding family options. (3) Respond in appropriate ways, to ensure that they bring up children, who will be responsible for the world that has been created for them and for the next generation?

Has the Church enabled them to discover the fundamental purpose of marriage and the Family? Are they aware of the teachings of the Church and how to face the challenges of divorce and separation? What is the relationship between the functions of the parents in the family and the nature of their relationships to their children?

Do you think that many hold the view that marriage is a legal contract that can be broken anytime? Is this becoming an Asian trend that is becoming acceptable? Why is there the trend today, to look upon marriage as a transient contract between two people? Is it reflective of the nature of the values of the world today that are moving at such a fast pace and with the emphasis on the instant and the present? How can the Gospel be more meaningful for people and families experiencing radical changes in all aspects of their lives.

What can Religious Organisations and Church learn from what is happening to the Family? Do you think that the lack of involvement in the promotion of justice and peace in the world has contributed to the escalation of the forces that have had serious consequences on the family? Is it true that we have been for far too long more concerned with “intra-ecclesial” concerns than with our missionary mandate to be salt and leaven in the world? How can we change this attitude within the Church?

## **Part Two**

### **The Vocation of the Asian Catholic Family**

The Church in Asia has a very clear and precise understanding of the fundamental dimensions of the Catholic family but at the same time there seems to be a gap between What is being taught about the family and the day to day struggles to live this out. There therefore seems to be the urgent need to link our beliefs with our ways of living as families. We also need to translate our beliefs into alternative ways in which we can express our faith more concretely.

How many Catholics are aware of the vocation of the Catholic Asian Family and what we are being called to? How much of the teachings of the Church on the Family understood by Catholics today?

What are the norms for a good Catholic Family? What have we discovered through our study and reflections

on the challenges to the family today? What is it that the Church teaches about the Catholic Asian Family?

What can the Church in Asia do to the Asian Catholic Family? How is the life of the People of God related to the life of the Family? How is the Catholic Family related to the Basic Ecclesial Community?

What can we do together as People of God for the Asian Catholic Family? How is Church as Communion related to Church as Communion of Families?

What is the meaning of the spirituality of the family? How is this related to the relationships that need to be fostered in the family?

What does it mean to become evangelising families? What can we do make being evangelised part of the Ministry to and with Families?

## **Part Three**

### **Ministries with and to Families**

In the area of Ministry to and with Families today, we are being challenged to adopt a new paradigm. It has been described as an integral and holistic approach that will include all in the Church and all in the family. With the numerous new challenges faced by the family, as a result of the process of globalisation there is an urgent to develop Ministries with Families. This is a prerequisite that needs to be contextualised within an Ecclesiology of Communion. These intimate relationship between what is happening in the world and what has become of the Church is highlighted in *The Coming of the Third Millennium (TMA)* John Paul II – No: 36 thus:

The Church of today needs a serious examination of conscience. Christians must also be aware of the responsibility, which they as People of God (to be read Pastors and Clergy; Religious and Laity) to:

*prevent the increasing indifference to God and religion;*

*act together to stop the loss of fundamental values in respect of human life and the family;*

*arrest the climate of secularism and ethnical relativism;*

*encourage a greater awareness of failure of members of the Church to witness to God and his Truth;*

*reduce the spread of wrongs theological views and disobedience to the Church’s Magisterium and*

*find more creative ways and means to make Catholics aware of the failures of Christians to know and practice the social teachings of the*

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*Church even the acceptance by Christians of 'the violation of fundamental human rights by totalitarian regimes';*

*The most challenging are those related to the need for a more holistic intra-ecclesial renewal that was called for by the Council, namely the failures of Church members to learn and implement in their lives the directives contained in the documents of Vatican II. These include*

- (1) A deeper understanding of the Word of God,*
- (2) the need for an Ecclesiology of Communion,*
- (3) the participation of all the People of God in the Church and*
- (4) the relationship between the Church and the World.*

*We need to find creative ways to make the family, truly the "Domestic Church" and vital engine both, for the renewal of the Church, as well as society. We need to seriously consider the words of Pope John Paul II, in his Apostolic Letter, *At the Beginning of the Third Millennium* No. 57: "With the passing of the years, the Council documents have lost nothing of their value or brilliance. They need to be read correctly, to be widely known and taken to heart as important and normative texts of the Magisterium, within the Churches traditions. Now that the Jubilee has ended, I feel more than ever duty bound to point to the Council as the great grace bestowed on the Church in the twentieth century: there we find a sure compass by which to take our bearings in the century new beginning".*

*It therefore seems relevant that any radically new approach to Ministry to and with Families has to include all the People of God. The main vehicle for the transmission of life is being threatened and we keep insisting that we want to use this vehicle to continue serving it objectives. The family is caught in a vicious cycle and is unable to address the many problems that it is facing today. What is urgently required is a more concerted effort by all in the Church to promote a culture of life in which the family can be revitalised.*

*We need to find new ways of developing more integrated perspectives beginning with the teachings of the Councils at all levels in the Church, as outlined by Pope John Paul II in his more recent documents.*

*What strategies do we have to offer to hold back the "culture of death" that is changing the essential characteristics of the family and its role in society today?*

*How can we promote a greater understanding of the importance of prayer in the family? How can the liturgy be made more meaningful for family participation? How can the family participate in the liturgical life of the Diocese/Parish?*

*What do you think are the main factors that are preventing the Church from being of greater service to Catholic families? What are some new directions that should be adopted? How can we go about ensuring that the more and more Catholic families are kept in touch with the teachings of the Church on all aspects of life?*

*What do you think needs to be done to ensure that the children, the youth and parents find opportunities for dialogue among themselves as families in the context of the Diocese/Parish?*

*What types of formation, do you think the Pastors and Clergy to meet the needs of the new challenges of Ministry to and with Families? What should be introduced in the curriculum in the Seminaries and Houses of Formation? What needs to be done as part of their on-going formation.*

*What can the Church do before, during and after the matrimonial rites to help couples build a Christian family?. Are the current courses in preparation for marriage sufficient for the couple to take up the challenges for the future? What are some of the areas the Church needs to focus on? Beside the setting up of Marriage Tribunals, do you think there is a need for Marriage Reconciliation Services to help couples facing difficulties in their married life? Do you think that the Church should make this a priority for the future?*

*How can the Church help to stop the continuing rising numbers of single parents, separated and divorced? Is there a need to review the Ministry to and with Families? It seems that organisations like Couples for Christ, etc. are not reaching out to the poor families.*

*Do you think we need to review the memberships of the Church mandated organisations, where most of the time only the well-to-do parishioners are members? Are memberships for these organisations exclusively for the elite? What do you think can be done for the poor families?*

*Is it enough for the Church or local parish to ensure that the youth are just members for the choir groups and altar servers? What needs to be done to encourage more youth to participate in the life of the Church?*

*Are we conscious of the need to make all members of the family participants in the formulation of programmes for the Ministry to and with Families? What new structures do we need? How do we go about setting up these structures?*

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# Contextualised Theology and the Family

## *(Integral Spirituality for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and the Family)*

### Introduction

This is not attempt to define or describe Contextualised Theology but to paint a picture of the on-going reflections on theology in the context of the numerous challenges that we are facing as members of the human race today and especially in Asia. This could be the starting point for us as Church to apply these to our personal and communitarian lives. It may be appropriate to express Contextualised Theology as Integral Spirituality. We therefore hope to make a link between Integral Spirituality and the family today and to trace for the Church in Asia some general directions for our way forward in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### 1. The Facets of Contextualised Theology

1.1 Contextualised Theology (Integral Spirituality) is multi-faceted and reflects the diversity of human persons and communities based on our fundamental perspective of God and of life itself. But in order for Contextual Theology to become the common binding force, it is has to have God and the Human Person as the centre of our theologising. For this to be possible, Contextual Theology is a dynamic relationship between Content and Process that are intimately related. It deals with God, the centre of our being and the process that we as Human Persons discover, in order to one with God our Creator. It is our attempt to be one with God and to understand God in and through human experiences each day of our lives in our hearts and in our being. Thus the content is the face of the eternal God and that we through contemplation are involved in a process of being true children of God. This encounter with God, through a process of inner journeying to the core of our beings sees a radical transformation of the self in the image and likeness of God The transformed self is the evidence, the result or the product of Contextual Theology. Thus Contextualised theology is the combination of content, process and inevitable product. Another way of putting this would be to say that contextual theology is about God and the human person engaged in a process of dialogue. This dialogue results in the emergence of new insights and energies with the human person, in order to foster the renewal of the face of the earth and emergence of a renewed human family. These are the concrete manifestations of a God who is alive in the human person and the community. We cannot separate God from the human person and the whole of humanity and from Creation. We cannot separate faith planted

in our hearts from life in God. Life in God is about being alive in God and thus being witnesses to the God of Love in our daily lives. Once true Faith touches our innermost being it seeks to find expression in our lives committed to allowing God to reign through our words, works and witness.

- 1.2 The image that best symbolises this is the seed planted in the soil that grows and matures to become the fruit on the tree. This fruit, in turn becomes the seed, in order to bring forth newness of life in and through it being a part of the tree. The seeds of our faith, planted in our soul at birth finds its own identity and meaning in the being that gives it life and in turn becomes the bearer of the seed in its own new body. Thus, in and through its own existence, it becomes the bearer of new life with its individuality but only in union with its parent. When it reaches maturity, it is removed from the tree but is capable of new and fullness of life because of the transfer of the original constitutive elements within its being. It is the very nature of the seed to bring forth a new life. In the relationship with God, theology is not just seen as knowing God but becoming a co-creator with God in sharing with the whole of humanity the truth planted within our beings. This is the “genetic transmission” that allows us to constantly be true to our being. Each of us, with our own unique charisms and gifts, has something to contribute to the plan of God for the whole of humanity. We are to become life for others. It is also true that the organic link with the mind and heart of the Creator is nurtured through a process of introspection and this determines the ways in which begin to understand God and live God in our being.
- 1.3 Contextual Theology is about the dynamic relationship and encounter between God and the human person seeking expression within the human community. Contextual Theology is about the renewal of the face of the earth and the gradual permeation of the world of human persons reflecting once again the divine fullness as manifested in the ways of Jesus leading us all to the Kingdom of the Father. The whole of the Second Vatican Council is about the initiation of a renewal process that will restore the original vocation and mission of the Church to become the sign and instrument of God’s salvation.
- 1.4 Thus it is obvious that we cannot talk about God and Me without talking of the CONTEXT of God and Me.

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Firstly, the Vision of the Kingdom; the New Heaven and the New Earth that God is inviting us to is what gives meaning to our Vocation as children of God. It is MY BEING in God that makes BEING ME unique and special. Contextual Theology, has thus a return to the process of being able to have a critical and analytical perspective of my inner world and my original self worth and dignity. Secondly, the CONTEXT has to be that of ME and THE WORLD. It is this outer world that determines the nature of the Mission entrusted to each one of us as members of the human family. In my struggles to live in harmony with God has to be related to the harmony with which I have to live in society and carry on my daily interaction with others without losing this personal and intimate relationship with God the Creator. Each one of us needs to know who we are in the eyes of God before we will be able to determine the nature of my relationship with the world of others.

- 1.5 Contextual theology we can say is tri-logical- a constant day to day dialogue of God-Me-World in a dynamic process of awareness and becoming. Without God-Consciousness, as part of My-Self Consciousness my theologising becomes truncated from my very Being as the evangelising me. It is in my life that I experience the fullness of life in God and this overflows into the life of others, as the fruits of my communion with the divine and the sacred. This is the essential, the primordial encounter with God that makes one with God and thus a whole person. Being contextual is thus being integral and whole, so that the fullness of God in Me is expressed as Personal Spirituality, fullness of God Within the community, as Communitarian Spirituality and the fullness of God among us in the world as Spirituality of Solidarity. It is this intrinsic unity with God the Creator in our daily lives that is the foundation of the unity of the human family, as an expression of a new heaven and a new earth. It is this Integral Spirituality made up of Personal Spirituality, Communitarian Spirituality and a Spirituality of Solidarity that is born out of a theology that makes the unity of Creation and the Recreation of the Kingdom of the Father our Vision in life.
- 1.6 It is therefore this initial and integral encounter with God, as an authentic experience of the divine and the sacred that leads to the discovery of the meaning of commitment to the ways of God in our lives and in our world of actions and relationships. Contextual Theology thus deals with the human persons' encounter with God in the day to day realities of the world. It is an encounter because it is more than coming-to-know. It is rather coming face to face with the ultimate ground and goal of our existence, an event that takes

place not so much at the level of sensations, knowing or loving, as it is in the inmost depth of our being. It is in the human heart, the shrine of the divine that feelings, knowing or loving have their common root. To meet God in this sense is to be taken hold of by God, to be uprooted and swept away in such a way that one in no more one's master; when everything other than God is rendered relative. No one can encounter God and remain the same. For the Christian today, Contextual theology understood in the right and fullest sense thus has to be an encounter with God that is born out of the losing of the self and the imbibing of the mind, heart and ways of Jesus.

- 1.7 This encounter is fundamental and a pre-requisite for a life filled with God. The encounter with God is realised in the real, not of cult of religious practices or even a nominal membership in the Church or the recitation of prayers or participation in liturgical events and ceremonies. Life both personal and social has to be constantly subject to renewal in the light of what is happening to us and our awareness of transformative powers in the world around us. In other words, what is envisaged is an encounter that radically transforms us to be counter witnesses to the norms and values of the world and as authentic witnesses to the Good News of Jesus. This is not a passive acceptance of the "man-made world" around us but to have the confidence that this world can be renewed in the light of the Good News if we once again take responsibility as a People of God for the life of the world. Thus to theologise in context is to become a contemplative, capable of reflecting within on this God-encounter cum God-Experience and in turn reflecting to the outside the splendour and might of God calling all to conversion to goodness, kindness and justice. Reflection does not mean a return to the inwardness of one's soul, nor is it an escape from the concrete world. It consists rather in an immersion into the depth of our being-in-the-world. To be ready to Put Out into the Deep calls first for the readiness to Go into the depths of our very Being. It is a return to the centre of each person and thus as persons beginning to relate with others as persons. We can understand today the reason why people are so busy doing so many things but have little time to ask the two fundamental questions: Who am I? And where am I going?
- 1.8 Each person is at the same time, "in-centred" and "other centred" There is longing to reach out to others but there is also the fear of the self. It is for this reason that we recognise the important of the Communitarian encounter with God. We need the family, we need our friends, and we need one another in the school and in the Church where we need to encounter God

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in our experience of love, togetherness and fellowship. Thus the words of love from the parents, teachers and clergy leads us to celebrate this encounter with others in a symbolic way. These words of kindness, gestures of gentleness gradually give children in the family, a whole new meaning to the WORD that is Jesus. When joy takes roots in our hearts, it finds expression in the Worship that becomes our celebration of God's gifts to us, leading us gently to become witnesses to the living God, through our lives of fellowship in justice and peace. Our encounter with God is thus a holistic encounter that cannot be divided. Our wholeness and holiness is rooted in the WORD-WORSHIP-WITNESS that becomes the power of that evangelises and through the work of the Spirit of Jesus making us evangelisers of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

## 2. Rediscovering our Roots in Jesus Christ

- 2.1 Contextual theology has to be process for rediscovering the ways of the Jesus of Nazareth to bring hope to his people only after he had opened their eyes to the world around them. The world around him was the world dominated by powers that kept the law but did not understand the spirit of the laws of God and at the same time of the serious effects it had on the lives of so many ordinary people especially the poor and marginalised. He stood for freedom and hope that was offered to all who were willing to be baptised as he was and thus openly proclaimed his readiness to put on a new mind and new heart for the coming of the reign of God. "Set your mind on God's kingdom and his justice before everything else, and all the rest will come to you as well." (Mt. 6:33)
- 2.2 With the all-absorbing concerns things like what one should eat, how one should clothe oneself and where one should lay one's head are all trifles. It is therefore in the light of Jesus' hope in the reign of God that we should understand his teachings, his controversies with adversaries, his practice of working cures and driving out demons, his conflicts with religious and political establishments and above all his tragic death on the cross. Unfortunately, the all-determining role which the reign of God played in the life and teaching of Jesus was lost from the very early times. The stress came to be shifted from the hope in the future to the past of Jesus' death and resurrection or to his presence as experienced by the community of believers. Worse, the community itself began to be looked upon as the reign of God. From then on what mattered was not so much striving towards the future, as either conserving the past or legitimising the present. We need to take a new path in our theological

reflections. We have to focus on the original thrust of Jesus' hope, which alone can release the creative energies of humanity for the building up of a more human society. This we realise in the midst of all the war and violence, counter-violence and terrorism, injustices, inequalities and dehumanising poverty accentuated by the process of globalisation, so drastically affecting so many members of the human family. Ironically, all these events that reflect the increasing global violence is having a direct impact on the most vulnerable namely, the family as the vital cell of societies and nations today. We are indeed being challenged to look for more creative ways and generate a greater consciousness for the onerous and earnest task of active reconstruction of the human family and its fundamental unit the family. It is inevitable that with our focus on reconstruction, we need to be more vigilant about our relationship with the whole of creation, the cosmos, the land and nature.

- 2.3 This is particularly true of our age in which science and technology have provided us with the means either to create a better future or to destroy ourselves. Never in the past has humanity faced with such frightening options. In this critical juncture of history nothing is less than an absolute, unconditional hope can save man and his creations from chaos and destruction. The attempts of Asian peoples to live constantly and intensively in the presence of God is both the longing of the human heart and the manifestations of these inspirations in the way we live and behave.
- 2.4 There can be no true contextual theology without a return to the theology of Jesus – the profound union of the Son with the Father. "Father, May they all be one, even as you and I are one" and "“Know you not that I am here to carry out the will of my Father? - Are about the essence of the theology of Jesus –Your Kingdom Come, your Will be Done, all point to the locus of the mission of Jesus. The life of Jesus in about the Abba Experience, it is about the need to make the ways of the Father relevant to lives of the human person and the whole of humanity. What should therefore be the theological orientations of the disciples of Jesus in the modern world of Asia? Like many others in Asia, we too meet God in the numerous encounters in lives lived in love, in working for a cause and in the experience of the beautiful and the sacred in our lives. What we know for sure is that we have had the privilege to encounter God as revealed in the life and teachings of Jesus and in Jesus himself, because we have truly experienced a new life in him. It is person of Jesus, whom we have at some points in our lives encountered in a special way. It may have opened our eyes in the midst of our deepest despair

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to see once again the light of the splendour of God reflected in the face of Jesus. It is this same encounter with Jesus that allows us to see more clearly the face of God on the faces of humanity. Conversely, it is in the light of God's revelation in the joys and hopes of our concrete historical situations that we understand Jesus and his message. It is for this very reason that *Gaudium et Spes* (Church in the Modern World) in the Preface invites us to open our hearts to the joys and hopes and the sorrows and fears of the people today in the world.

2.5 It is this intense experience of Jesus that allows us to lift our heads and to open our eyes to face the world before us. The world becomes the place to search for new God experiences as a pilgrim ready to move from the heart of God to the hearts of humanity longing to have God touch them and their lives. We remember things that happened in our lives that has given us some hope this makes our present a moment of joy that also enables to move into the future with confidence. Jesus' presence in the world in the past, his presence with us now as Church surely gives us hope that the ways of Jesus will lead us to the Father. We have thus to recall the ways of Jesus in the past and live consciously our being-in-the-world today. This calls for reflection that has to lead us to putting together the various dimensions of meanings in our lives seen in its totality. This can only come through an analysis that points to where history has led us and where we are at present. It is a deeper understanding of the message of the Gospel of Jesus as lived in his times, that will enable us to read the signs of the times today in every dimension of the globalised world today.

2.6 We encounter God not in a vacuum but as men and women inserted at a particular point in the flux of history, and therefore as conditioned by a particular social system and culture. Chief among the conditioning factors is our social status and position; culture and institutionalised religion as radically transformed by the globalising forces today. It is in the light of our position that we evaluate our own systems of meaning and values that are traditionally handed down to us in the light of which the community as a whole sees and evaluates things, events and the world in general. As one's culture so is one's religious experience, it has to be subject to serious personal introspection and communitarian discernment. Many of us today, use the "Windows of the Pre-Vatican II" and try to develop new perspective and models without a proper understanding the spirit and orientations of the Second Vatican Council. We meet the God of today through the lenses of the creed and cult of yesterday and with the ears that have grown insensitive to the

voice of God and thus unable to hear the prompting of the Spirit of God in our hearts. Our awareness and contemplation of the inner being and the outer world has to give us the total picture that can only from an analysis of the realities around us. What appears before us are the many dimensions of meaning that are implied in God-encounter. Being able to bring to my own consciousness of the ultimate meaning of my life and where I want to go in my life is determined by my understanding of God being relevant to my life.

2.7 The next step of the process of Contextual Theology leads us to make a critical evaluation of what analysis has revealed. The aim of this review is to identify the positive and negative so that we can move to a more adequate understanding of our original encounter as well as dispose ourselves to see new and richer encounters, especially with our brothers and sisters of other religions and cultures, who are our neighbours in the land of Asia. This is not a mere exercise in tearing down the old but in reconstructing the new that will emerge when contrasted in the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In the language of the Pastoral Spiral of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) we refer this to our Review of our Lives in the light of the Gospel. Fear of the new and fear of being just being the few, is often prompted by a lack of confidence in the ways of Jesus that is exemplified in the Beatitudes. Our former catechetical formation has often been on the learning of dogmas and doctrines and the participation in religious practices that have often been devoid of the challenges of the Gospel of Jesus. It is in this context that the challenge of our beloved Pope John Paul II, "To put out into the Deep" is indeed a call to rediscover the face of Jesus in the context of the post-modern world.

"Let us go forward in hope! A new millennium is opening before the Church like a vast ocean upon which we shall venture, relying on the help of Christ. The Son of God, who became incarnate two thousand years ago out of love for humanity, is at work even today: we need discerning eyes to see this and, above all, a generous heart to become the instruments of his work." (Pope John Paul II; At the Beginning of the New Millennium No.58)

2.8 Our understanding of the world around us and the Review of our Lives leads us to articulate with clarity our paths for the future. These new responses that flow from our contextual theologising, have to be based on the levels of meanings that we have discerned. To articulate is to be able to find a mode of communication that will enable all to express in their own words and lives the fundamental meanings that they have

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discovered. All this process of introspection has to lead to a fundamental change in attitude and disposition of heart. This decision to find new expression in the context of our changing time has to be manifested in a commitment in self-surrender to the other. In the context of Asia, theological reflections have also to involve the larger community of believers of other faiths. They have cultural and religious traditions different from ours but we need also to be sensitive to their encounters with God and thus work within this framework.

2.9 How do we think and respond creatively to the challenges of God? How do we make a radical criticism of the past in the light of our present encounter with God? This calls for a commitment to speak with the authority of Jesus that flowed from his unceasing “yes” to the will of the Father because of his Abba Experience. Thus faith becomes a power and theology becomes a force for the changes in the world. It is out of this transforming power that new and creative idea; visions and dreams will be born. Contextual Theology is about freedom in God that manifests itself in our common responsibility for the common good. It is about making God real in our lives so that they will become real to others in the way in which we have been able to communicate the meaning of God and the message of God relevant and meaningful for the people of today.

2.10 It is indeed prophetic and appropriate in this moment of history when humanity is facing some of its greatest challenges in our history as the human family that we take a closer look at the ways in which we can make God more relevant to our lives. It is this theological perspective that and our deep encounter with God that has to influence every dimension of our lives both personal and social. It is faith in God and in the hope that lies deep within the human heart that we seek to find new ways in which we can attain human fullness. This longing for God and the divine is also the same path to enable us to recognise the fullness in God that we are all called to as People of God. We often use human and scholastic theories and approaches to understand the complex and diverse realities in which we live today. Contextual theology would thus be the attempts of human persons to link their faith in God with their day to day life realities.

### **3. Implications of Contextualised Theology for a Renewed Church as the Family of the People of God**

3.1 It is obvious that we need to draw the insights of our Faith as lived in the universal Church and in each of

the Local Churches to continue our reflections on our human and ecclesial experiences in the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We encounter pain, anxiety, despair, hatred, injustices and inequality but at the same time love, goodness, peace, beauty and kindness. The invitation of *Gaudium et Spes* (Church in the Modern World) in its Preface, makes the vital link between the faith that we have and the faces of humanity that we encounter each day in our lives. It is our faith in Jesus Christ that enables us as Church to turn the cries of anguish and faces of despair that we see around us into joys and hopes through the power of God. It is through our human intervention that once again the face of God is made visible once again within the human community.

3.2 The more truly human we are, the more our individual horizons of hope tend to coincide with that of society as a whole. If contextual theology is about understanding God’s workings in the world as manifested by the ways and life of Jesus, it is indeed our fundamental mission to bring into the consciousness of the people of today a certain hope that is manifested in the concrete historical events and situations. The prophets of old interpreted the times for the people of Israel when they were living in confusion and chaos.

3.3 We, as the Church in Asia have thus the responsibility to ensure that the hope that we possess be the starting process for a more critical review of the world around us. Inculcating Integral Spirituality calls us to bring renewal to every dimension of our lives as Christians in the world that we live in. We are beginning to become more and more aware that the Church in the Globalised World has also internalised many of the negative trends and ways of life and can also be reflected in the expression that the “Globalised World is also in the Church”. These intimate relationship between what is happening in the world and what has become of the Church is highlighted *The Coming of the Third Millennium (TMA)* Pope John Paul II – No. 36 thus:

The Church of today needs a serious examination of conscience. Christians must also be aware of the responsibility, which they have for: *The increasing indifference to God and religion; The loss of fundamental values in respect of human life and the family; The climate of secularism and ethnical relativism; The failure of members of the Church to witness to God and his Truth; The spread of wrongs theological views and disobedience to the Church’s Magisterium*

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*and the failures of Christians to know and practice the social teachings of the Church even the acceptance by Christians of 'the violation of fundamental human rights by totalitarian regimes'; The failures of Church members to learn and implement in their lives the directives contained in the documents of Vatican II. These include (1) deeper understanding of the Word of God, (2) the need for an Ecclesiology of Communion, (3) the participation of all the People of God in the Church and (4) The Relationship between the Church and the World.*

3.4 It is interesting to note that many of the above topics need a serious examination of conscience have seldom been the focus of our discussions and discernment processes. We have in the past tended often to be purveyors of theological statements and exhortations on the doctrinal aspects of our teachings rather than address the malaise of society and the root causes of the growing inequalities and injustices in the world today. The naïve indifference to the onslaught of the globalised world and subtle erosion of the sacred dimensions of life and the gradual eclipse of the sense of God in our lives and institutions seems not to have disturbed our complacency and apathy. We have failed to recognise the need for integration of Word-Worship-Witness, as the new paradigm that will usher the emergence of A New Way of Being Church in Asia. It is this integral spirituality that will make our mission of a new evangelisation as our common path for the Church in Asia in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

#### **4. Contextual Theology is a Missionary Theology for A New World of Asia**

4.1 Contextual theology is also the learning and listening process to enable us to articulate the Gospel of Jesus in the specific situations in Asia today. This can indeed be realised by the rediscovery of the unique experiences of the followers of Jesus Christ in dialogue with all peoples of goodwill. Our Catholicity in Asia is also our universality that truly reflects the face of the one and only God the Father and Mother of all the peoples of Asia. This universality is also at the same time our unicity as faithful disciples of Jesus attempting to live in the here and the now our vocation to holiness through faithfulness to the will of God. Our specific contribution in the context of diversity and pluriformity is our unity of vision that we share in the expression "A New Way of Being Church in Asia". In the midst of the numerous divisions and

divides that keep our people apart is the challenge to be visible and credible signs of UNITY. The Unity of God with Humanity as exemplified by the life of witness to the values of the Kingdom and to the firm and persevering commitment to be the fount of compassion to the poor the source of justice that flows from the heart of the one creator.

4.2 Contextual theology in Asia for us is thus the process through which we attempt to understand the meaning of the Word of God, Jesus the Son of Man. He in and through his presence in the world gives history a new meaning for the whole of humanity and a new vision of the reign of God. For us too this same Word takes root in the World of our hearts and the world of social structures and from this is born a new vision of life. Life is not about knowing but about experiencing the love of God that was imprinted in the heart of humanity at creation and for each human person at birth. Contextual theology is about getting back to the roots of our vocation, our initial call and the core of our very being. That can only come about when we are ready and willing to examine our history and to be ready to ask for forgiveness for the wrongs that we have done in the past in not attempting to heal the wounds created by human failure and human pride. This is indeed the story of Jesus that is also tied up with our story that is connected to God our Creator. It is this message that will resonate in the hearts of the people of Asia so that the saving message of Jesus will make sense to a people lost and divided by forces that have mammon and money, power and violence as the only way to peace and harmony.

4.3 If God is Mystery, God is also History and the recollection of our journey as People of God is an important part of the rediscovery of the work of God in our lives as individuals and as a community. We need to look back at our history and especially the way in which we have allowed the contextual theology of the Second Vatican Council to affect every dimension of Ecclesial life that translates itself in a new life for the world. We have allowed history to take its natural course but seemingly far from the ways of the Gospel and the beliefs of the peoples of Asia, who have a deep sense of the sacred and the divine as part of their cultural and religious heritage. We believe that it is this deep and profound understanding of what is going on in our lives, that will allow us to translate our beliefs formulated in words, rituals and rites to meaningful expression in the creation of harmony in the world of those around us. Theology is about understanding God through our human experiences. Unfortunately, most human being lives today in a secularised and materialistic environment

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that is not conducive to nurturing within them that presence of God. The way society moves and the way relationships are fostered leaves much to be desired in enabling us to have a more meaningful encounter with the God of the within. It is often a world that is gradually becoming a world without God. The rise of individualism, materialism and secularism all move us to focus not on the spiritual and the sacred but the materialistic and the hedonistic.

4.4 The challenge is to search for the seeds of the Word that are rich in the Asian soil and that is surely bearing much fruit but we are not near enough to see them. We are not brave enough to taste and experience the diversity of the fruits of God manifestations present within the hearts of human persons and within the womb of humanity. Our perspectives of life change when we see before our eyes the outcome of the lived experiences of God. Contextual theology is the process of developing a new perspective of life that radically affects that way in which we view our lives and also our readiness to review of our lives in the light of the hidden dimensions of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

4.5 The words of Jesus take on new dimensions and we gain new insights when the Asian psyche unveils itself in the context of our ancient past. From this will flow not just a new relationship between our world of inner beliefs but a gradual deconstruction of the ways in which we look at ourselves, our relationships and our world around us. Contextual Theology is our growth in our understanding of God as experienced in our hearts and expressed in our lives. This affects our basic principles and values, our approaches and methodology and our pedagogy and ways of communicating our belief to others.

4.6 Theologians are not just educators of the faith for the now but persons who see the need to constantly search in their hearts the will of God to be lived in their daily lives. They constantly seek to develop a methodology for daily and with vigour see and perceive for themselves, the ways in which they can take control of their lives and become active agents to transform their beliefs of God into they behave in the world around them. Our challenge today seems to be witnesses to what we believe. Life is about change and as Mahatma Gandhi said, "We must be the change that we envision." Tolstoy said, "Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself. When you change your thinking you change your beliefs. When you change your beliefs you change your expectations. When you change your expectations you change your attitude. When you change your attitude you change your behaviour.

When you change your behaviour you change your performance. When you change your performance, you change your life!"

## 5. Contextual Theology and the challenges for the Family in Asia

5.1 This if we understand contextual theology as the way for all the People of God to be more creatively involved in allowing our basic encounter with God it should radically affect every dimension of our lives. The Gospel of Jesus is the content and the method is the critical insertion of the Word-Made-Flesh into the lives of world of Asia that is longing for a radical transformation. The Word as known to us in the life and teachings of Jesus is not the way to avoiding the world or to be naively assimilated by the ways of the world. Our faith in Jesus Christ is a contextual faith promoting neither escapism, from the concrete realities of our lives nor a superficial religiosity, based on vague traditions of the past. It is a faith that incorporates the vital energies of the Good News of Jesus as salt, leaven and light for the life of the world. It is therefore in the light of the above that the family becomes the womb of humanity and the first place where all human persons are nurtured in the cultures that serve as the environment in which we begin to live as children of God.

5.2 The multi-faceted forces in the dominant global system and the hidden cultural mechanisms are replicating a multitude of problems of colossal dimensions in the world today. We see around us dangerous trends that are not only affecting the traditional family as an institution that is being transformed from within but also gradually dismantled from without. The family today is the victim of destructive socialising forces that are related to the political processes, the cultural system, the media and technological world and the economic forces that are causing a world of affluence on the one hand and a dehumanising poverty on the others. These are symptomatic of a deep malaise that is confronting the whole civilisation of humanity. Many traditional Asian family values based on negative traditional cultures and social structures are gradually changing but at the same time, these are being replaced by new forms of violence, racism, patriarchy that directly affect the family and especially the women and girl-children. The growing divide in the world and even within Asian societies is a reality to which we cannot close our eyes. When society becomes more and more disorganised it is obvious that the family is the first to be affected. We see around us today the drastic increases all over Asia in crimes involving youth, the number of suicides and murders, the rise in

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drug abuse and people living with HIV/AIDS, the numbers of mental patients, the homeless and the elderly, abandoned to look after themselves. Most people will say that these are all social problems that need more welfare programmes and charitable institutions that need to be set up by the State.

5.3 At the same time many other positive traditional family values are gradually being eroded with the advent of modernisation and the market driven economies in all the countries of Asia. The once appreciated close knit and united relationships within the nuclear and extended family that care for the young and the elderly is decreasing with the process of urbanisation and dispersion of the labour force both to the megacities and to foreign countries. Side by side with this are the growth of corruption and nepotism often associated with the affluent ways of life of the rich and their decreasing sense of responsibility for others. The growing individualism and excessive competition makes people less accountable to others and lack a certain responsibility for the well being of the common good and the welfare of the weakest sections of society.

5.4 The radical changes in work patterns in the modern industrial and commercial sectors has also changed not only the family relationships but has made economic activities and the procurement of basic needs the only goal in life, often out of dire necessity. There is no doubt, that economic life both for the poor and the wealthy has become the major concern. It is this shift from the rural to the urban and the increasing poverty within the rural and agricultural sectors and within poorer nations has seen the dramatic increases in single parent families. This is not the place to point to the evidence but the signs seem to be written all over the wall. The pressures of modern day society are definitely having a dramatic impact on family life. The increasing numbers of broken marriages, single parents, orphans and abandoned children seem to be accepted as the price that we have to pay for development and modernisation.

5.5 It may also be interesting to note that with decreasing importance of the Nation State and the role of democratic processes in society today, as a growing influence of the global superpowers and the mushrooming of multinational companies. This is the result of the process of globalisation that allows trade and capital liberalisation and privatisation as the way to promote economic growth and development. People are thus beginning to have less and less faith in the traditional state as a protector of their sacred institutions namely, the family, educational institutions,

and the social services and even religions. Thus we can say that both the cultural traditions of the past and the current social structures, that promote patriarchy and gender inequality are all part of the economic and cultural globalisation that we need to face today.

5.6 It is very interesting to note that our own non-critical acceptance of the dominant trends of the past forty years since national independence is producing the results that we see around us. It is very interesting to note what the Asian Bishops had to say more than twenty years ago:

“Perhaps the greatest challenge to the Church in Asia is that posed by the Asian family. The Asian family is the cellular receptacle of all Asia’s problems, poverty, repression, exploitation and degradation, divisions and conflicts. The family is directly affected by the religious, political, economic, social and cultural problems of Asia, by the problems relating to women, health, work, business, education, etc. [*Final Statement of the 4<sup>th</sup> FABC Plenary Assembly, Tokyo, 16-25 September 1986, no. 3.4.1, in For All the Peoples of Asia, Rosales and Arevalo, eds. 1992, p. 184*].

5.7 The major question for us to ask at this stage is if the Church in Asia responded adequately to the pastoral challenge, in the light of the Contextual Theology that we have discussed at the invitation of the Second Vatican Council? Have we waited for the flood waters to enter our living rooms before we have begun to ask what have happened to our Asian Families and our Christian families? Have all our intra-ecclesial concerns as the Church in Asia opened our eyes only at this seemingly critical moment to speak of the need of a contextual theology to remedy the ills of society that are so adversely affecting the family? Can the Church be effective through relevant pastoral programs for the Asian family if they are not seen within the framework of a contextual theology based on the Asian ethos and Asian mode of mission?

5.8 Our pastoral options that will be the path to the renewal of the family can thus be only meaningful when we see the need for renewal of the Church called to promote the Gospel of Life and the Kingdom of the Father. This is indeed relevant when we realise that what is happening to the family is related to the culture of death that has become a dominant way of life today. The Church too, as a People of God is in need of renewal. All Ecclesial life flows from the family from the womb to the tomb. The Communion

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of the People of God, the Hierarchy, the Religious and the laity have to make the family the focus of their renewal and their ministry. The Family is the Sanctuary of Life, the Church in the Home. The Sacrament of Marriage is the extension of the covenant for Life; caring for one another in the day to day difficulties and challenges of life. The family is the first place where male and female grow into one with their different and equal, distinct and complementary roles totally giving to one in a spirit of being mutually responsible for each other. It is in the family that children and elderly have a place and reflects the paths of the past and the hopes for the future of the family. Once well established in its ways of living in union amidst diversity they are ready to face the world that is experiencing poverty and injustices and being thus invited to participate in the process of social transformation. Peace and social advocacy becomes a way of life.

5.9 The Christian Family, living fully a life of self-giving and sharing is also the womb to mould a new compassionate heart, like that of Christ whose life was one of kindness and compassion. The Christian Family, the first school of evangelisation, prepares one to move from the *“I-First Mentality”* to *“We - Together Spirit”*. Sharing and caring becomes a new way of being family. A listening and forgiving attitude to each other’s needs makes us sensitive to and appreciates the value of each person and their unexpressed needs and even aspirations. This is indeed the foundations of the building a spirituality of communion in the family.

5.10 The world of so many poor in Asia is awaiting the Bread of Life, the Good News of Jesus Christ. The Christian family is being challenged in the beginning of the new millennium to prepare the new Church in Asia that will have the courage to follow the path of Jesus the Good Samaritan to the wounded victims of violence and afflicted, the hungry and deprived, the downtrodden and marginalised in Asia. The Christian Family is being invited to *“Put out into the deep”* and to have courage and without fear on our minds but only love in our hearts, to enter the world of Asia. *“To walk by on the other side”* is to walk away from the opportunity to make Jesus known and loved. The new millennium is the time in Asia, to proclaim aloud and with vigour, the values of the Gospel so that all may live in dignity as human persons and with the inviolable rights as children of God. This indeed is how the poor today, reflect the face of the sorrowful Jesus, awaiting to fully experience the joy of Easter in the Good News that the Church has to offer for the life of the world today. This indeed is

the path of the Christian Family for the Third Millennium.

## 6. Conclusion

6.1 There is no doubt that the family as a social unit has become so vulnerable that it is seemingly becoming dysfunctional. It is not a simplistic projection of negative picture of the state of affairs but the recognition of the need for purification of our perspectives, our perceptions, our pre-occupations and our propositions for the future. So many would claim that they couldn’t afford families both in the urban middle-class and the very poor. They feel that they have no obligations to the young. People seem to have lost the joy of raising up children and have thus become a burden and a chore. What is therefore the family today? What does it mean to be the normal family today? Besides the growing numbers of single parent, the millions of contract migrant workers has torn apart families and this has become a norm. The family is the most vulnerable but at the same time the foundations of any society that wishes to carry forward its ideal and beliefs. We all dream of a better world but at the same time we are deluged with a multitude of forces that we are able to identify but unable to understand it working much less come to a common consensus as to how to address its root causes.

6.2 Imagine a multi-story building that houses many families, is leaking because there are cracks on its flat roof. The water seeps through the floors and walls and every family on that building is affected. All of them are busy when it rains to keep their homes dry and comfortable to live in but yet carry on living in the house. They do not want to be bothered with addressing the cause of all this annoyance and discomfort. They don’t see the need to take more drastic steps to ensure they all have something in common. They are busy with the immediate and curative but not the future and the preventive.

6.3 When it comes to issues relating to the family, there has been gradual erosion of the family because of the basic denial of the centrality of the family, especially the impact of the socialising forces on the younger generation. The world of work, leisure, career and social status have become much more important than the efforts required to look in depth into the radical transformations that the family is undergoing in many of our societies.

6.4 Starting afresh from Christ thus calls us to a process of rediscovering Jesus, the friend who we have

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encountered as a result of an intense experience. It is an experience that is born out of inner struggle that took place in the life of Jesus in the desert and the wilderness given completely to discerning both the Ways of the Father and the ways of the world. It is this commitment to the Will of the father that moves us to be ready to be baptised in the river of purification that can come only through the immersion in the multiple holy rivers of Asia. It is to begin the process of being cleansed from what holds us back from God. From our sense of guilt, insecurity, lack of self-worth we will be ready to hear the voice from the Heaven, that "You are my beloved child, and I am well pleased with who you are and in what you set out to do". It is not just being released from the inside but prompts a movement to the outside ready to walk out of our depths of internal insecurity to missionary encounters in the world of people around us.

6.5 It is this baptism in the baptism of Jesus that serves as our indicator of our inner strength to be in communion with the Will of the Father that prompts reaching out with compassion to the world of the outside. The stages in preparation for the sacrament of marriage seems to entail some commitment to the giving of the one to the other and to the same self-giving to the other is what is life-giving for the family. A critical review of our lives reveals both the lack of a proper formation to commitment to marriage – not as an event associated with the wedding ceremony but the welding of two persons to be permanently united as unified wholes. It is this wholeness and holiness, since it is based on the awareness to return to our ultimate vocation as human persons to translated union with God in the love for the other. It is this union of hearts and minds that becomes the environment in which children are nurtured in the faith that is both meaningful and contextual.

6.6 What is therefore the role of parents as the primary catechists, when they themselves are not yet fully convinced or understand how their faith is related to life? They do not fully understand how the values of the Gospel affect their daily lives – in decision making regarding their involvement in the world of work. in their consumer options, in the areas of academic of their children and in their participation and involvement in the institutions in civil society and in the structures of governance in modern day society. Preparations for the initial sacraments for children, namely the First Eucharist, Penance and Confirmation have been in the past, placed the emphasis on the learning of a few precepts, doctrines but far from being an experience in faith development. This may be largely due to the fact that many parents claim that they do not fully

understand the teachings of the Second Vatican II, much less the teachings of the Asian Bishops or even their Local Bishops and Pastors.

6.7 God as Creator is about Creation, the Family is the essential part of creation that makes male and female co-creators. Thus that nature of the link between God, the family and progress of the human family is also relational. We see around us so much progress and development but we sometimes don't want to acknowledge that side by side with this is also decay and denudation of the essential inner workings of humanity and its core and fundamental values and principles.

6.8 It is in the above context that there is an urgent need for an Integral Spirituality that will affect every dimension of the life of the follower of Christ and the Church as the People of God. The Church needs to become a family, truly caring for each of its members and the Family needs to redefine its identity as Church that becomes the sign and instrument of God's salvation beginning with each parent and each member of the family. The family is the inner womb of spirituality that forms and develops the spiritual and transcendental dimensions of life and prepares one for the role of missionaries to a world longing to experience the fullness of life. Society today is becoming so confusing and everything is disorienting, it is in this context that we need and an anchor in our day to day life in the inner sanctuary of the family. It is this inner sacredness that opens us out to see for ourselves that the sanctuary that God created for us to live in is gradually becoming the desert that is no longer able to nurture the inner life. In the inner world of relationship with God, we derive the energy that enables us to live meaningfully and constantly in perfect harmony with material and the natural. This serves as the impetus to make our lives truly human and fully divine, in order to live life to the full and to experience its fullness in the permanent presence of God and God's creations.

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