

# FABC Paper No. 93

## A Renewed Church In Asia: A Mission Of Love And Service

The Final Statement of the Seventh Plenary Assembly  
of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences  
Samphran, Thailand, January 3-12, 2000

### Introduction

I shall pour out my spirit on all humanity. Your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old people shall dream dreams, and your young people shall see visions (Joel 3:1).

Prophesying, dreaming dreams, seeing visions -- at this moment of the Great Jubilee, the words of the prophet Joel animate our hearts. We, the bishops of the FABC Plenary Assembly,\* stand at the threshold of a new century and a new millennium, the third since the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, born of Mary, an Asian woman. The marvels that we see impel us to give thanks to our loving God, Father, Son and Spirit.

We give thanks because God's own Son has realized for us the dream and vision of full life (Jn 10:10). We give thanks because "the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (Rom 5:5) through the Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops. We give thanks for that great pentecostal event of our century, the Second Vatican Council, and for the fellowship and pastoral creativity that the regular gathering of the Churches in Asia has engendered. At this moment we are filled with gratitude for the ecclesial event of the Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, and the Apostolic Exhortation "The Church in Asia" (*Ecclesia in Asia*, EA).

\* The Plenary Assembly, with 193 participants, included five cardinals, 95 bishops (from 14 episcopal conferences and participants from associate memberships: two bishops, one apostolic prefect and one superior of a *mission sui juris*), clergy, Religious and laity.

We look back on a century that has seen the most phenomenal scientific and technological progress in the story of humankind. In this century Asian peoples have thrown off the yoke of colonialism and taken their place in dignity and freedom, center stage, in the human drama. We look back on a decade of development that promises a new and wonderful world of human solidarity and progress. Women are emerging from their traditional roles and now claim their rightful place in society and in the Church.

Yet, for the poor, and especially for women, freedom, progress, globalization and other realities that now affect Asian peoples are not unmixed blessings. They are ambiguous. Furthermore, as we look back on the century that has passed, we remember it as one of the bloodiest in history with its two World Wars and countless lesser wars. Globalization, unregulated by juridical and ethical norms, increases the millions who live below the poverty line. It accelerates the process of secularization. It brings consumerism in its wake and threatens the deeper values of Asian cultures. Within Asian societies themselves one finds other oppressive structures, such as the caste system, dictatorships, exploitation of indigenous peoples and internal strife. Widespread corruption at various levels of both government and society are facts of daily life.

Thus we gather here in the Year of the Jubilee at Samphran in Thailand to pause and discern. Like Mary, we keep all these things in our hearts. Again, from the depths of Asia's hopes and anxieties, we hear the call of the Spirit to the local churches in Asia. It is a call to renewal, to a renewed mission of love and service. It is a call to the local churches to be faithful to Asian cultural, spiritual and social values and thus to be truly inculturated local churches. The call of the

Spirit is daunting. But what better time to recall the sacrifices of our Asian martyrs who heeded Christ's mandate to his Apostles to go and not to be afraid, "I am with you always" (Mt 28:20)? What better time to recall his words, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom" (Lk 12:32)?

We heed the call of the Spirit coming to us through the Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops in Rome in 1998 and the Apostolic Exhortation "The Church in Asia." We dream of sharing our faith in Jesus. We dream of faith in Jesus through whom God saves. We dream of empowering our communities to be men and women who, indeed, give life by sharing with their sisters and brothers in Asia the abundant life given by Jesus, whom we believe is "the Life." We dream of reconciliation between Asian brothers and sisters divided by wars and ethnic conflicts. We express our solidarity with all our brothers and sisters in China and other countries where they do not experience the freedom necessary for living the faith and fulfilling their mission. With joy we welcome the representatives from the countries of Central Asia which have recently gained their independence.

## **Part I. Renewal of the Church in Asia -- Vision, Meaning**

### **A. A Vision of Renewal**

The dawn of the new millennium is a time of crisis. Yet a time of crisis, as Scripture and the whole history of the Church show us, is a time of new beginnings, of new movements. The thirty-year history of the FABC has been a concerted series of movements toward a renewed Church. We observe eight movements that as a whole constitute an Asian vision of a renewed Church:

1. movement towards a Church of the Poor and a Church of the Young. "If we are to place ourselves at the side of the multitudes in our continent, we must in our way of life share something of their poverty," "speak out for the rights of the disadvantaged and powerless, against all forms of injustice." In this continent of the young, we must become, "in them and for them, the Church of the young" (Meeting of Asian Bishops, Manila, Philippines, 1970).
2. movement toward a "truly local Church," toward a Church "incarnate in a people, a Church indigenous and inculturated" (2 FABC Plenary Assembly, Calcutta, 1978).
3. movement toward deep interiority so that the Church becomes a "deeply praying community whose contemplation is inserted in the context of our time and the cultures of our peoples today. Integrated into everyday life, "authentic prayer has to engender in Christians a clear witness of service and love" (2 FABC Plenary Assembly, Calcutta, India, 1978).
4. movement toward an authentic community of faith. Fully rooted in the life of the Trinity, the Church in Asia has to be a communion of communities of authentic participation and co-responsibility, one with its pastors, and linked "to other communities of faith and to the one and universal communion" of the holy Church of the Lord. The movement in Asia toward Basic Ecclesial Communities expresses the deep desire to be such a community of faith, love and service and to be truly a "community of communities" and open to building up Basic Human Communities (3 FABC Plenary Assembly, Bangkok, 1982).
5. movement toward active integral evangelization, toward a new sense of mission (5 FABC Plenary Assembly, Bandung, Indonesia, 1990). We evangelize because we believe that Jesus is the Lord and Savior, "the goal of human history, ... the joy of all hearts, and the fulfillment of all aspirations" ("Gaudium et Spes," 45). In this mission, the Church has to be a compassionate companion and partner of all Asians, a servant of the Lord and of all Asian peoples in the journey toward full life in God's Kingdom.

6. movement toward empowerment of men and women. We must evolve participative Church structures in order to use the personal talents and skills of lay women and men. Empowered by the Spirit and through the sacraments, lay men and women should be involved in the life and mission of the Church by bringing the Good News of Jesus to bear upon the fields of business and politics, of education and health, of mass media and the world of work. This requires a spirituality of discipleship enabling both the clergy and the laity to work together in their own specific roles in the common mission of the Church (4 FABC Plenary Assembly, Tokyo, 1986). The Church cannot be a sign of the Kingdom and of the eschatological community if the fruits of the Spirit to women are not given due recognition, and if women do not share in the "freedom of the children of God" (4 FABC Plenary Assembly, Tokyo, 1986).
7. movement toward active involvement in generating and serving life. The Church has to respond to the death-dealing forces in Asia. By authentic discipleship, it has to share its vision of full life as promised by Jesus. It is a vision of life with integrity and dignity, with compassion and sensitive care of the earth; a vision of participation and mutuality, with a reverential sense of the sacred, of peace, harmony and solidarity (6 FABC Plenary Assembly, Manila, Philippines, 1995).
8. movement toward the triple dialogue with other faiths, with the poor and with the cultures, a Church "in dialogue with the great religious traditions of our peoples," in fact, a dialogue with all people, especially the poor.

This is the vision of a renewed Church that the FABC has developed over the past thirty years. It is still valid today. Yet we keep searching for the deeper challenges of renewal -- its meaning and scope in our life and mission in Asia.

## **B. The Meaning of Renewal**

"Behold I make all things new" (Rev 21:5). In Asia we discover again and again that renewal is the work of God's Spirit. It is the Spirit of the Lord "that has filled the world" (Wis 1:7) and "renews the face of the earth." We need to be attentive and open to the mysterious stirrings of the Spirit in the realities of Asia and of the Church. In the Scriptures, renewal is the shaping of what is qualitatively new, totally new. Renewal refers principally to the salvation wrought through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. It extends to everything and to all times -- until the Spirit has refashioned a new heaven and a new earth (Rev 21:1; Is 65:17).

We are caught up in the dynamism and tension of what is already here and still awaits its full realization. Renewal is God's gift as well as our own task. God has already accomplished it as the fruit of the mission of Jesus and the Spirit. It is now impacting on our world. Yet, renewal is a gift waiting to be made our own, to be incarnated in the life of the world, in the life of the men and women of Asia, in the life of the Church. The Church is always in need of an intense renewal of her life and mission. We are a holy Church in need of purification. We do acknowledge that we have, in many ways, fallen short of our vocation to the mission of love and service.

As Church in Asia we choose:

- A renewal of which the author is God, who recreates us anew in the Spirit of his Son. For God in Christ has made us a sacrament of a new humanity, a sign and servant of newness. Heeding the words of St. Paul, we embrace the ethical demand of renewal to discard the old self and move forward to witness to new life in Jesus by selfless love;
- A renewal then toward a profound and holistic spirituality and an interiority that mirrors our newness of life in the Spirit of Jesus, our new way of being Church;

- A renewal which is missionary engagement, taking up with renewed vigor and spirit the mission of the Church, in creative interaction with the realities of Asia;
- A renewal that respects tradition but is courageous enough to embrace a future that grows in creative fidelity to that tradition;
- A renewal that enables us to dare tell the story of Jesus and announce his gift of new life to our Asian world of lights and shadows;
- A renewal that must include, given our human condition, not only conversion of minds and hearts but also a conversion of structures in which those marginalized by society are given a wider participatory role;
- A renewal that is the project of two poles, of the clergy and lay men and lay women creatively working together -- from above and from below -- so that newness is a sign of authentic communion;
- A renewal that celebrates communion-in-diversity, giving witness to the wonder of the Church's catholicity;
- A renewal that does not count merely on numbers and crowded churches, nor on the numerous services we render. What counts inestimably more is our ecclesial identity and the quality of our witness as servants and disciples of Jesus and the Kingdom of God for the peoples of Asia.

For us in Asia, to renew the Church is to be open to the mystery of the Spirit, to welcome the arriving presence of the God of surprises who will capture our hearts in wonder. We need, therefore, to be more than mere workers of renewal. We need to have the creative imagination of poets and artists, of wonderers and dreamers, as befits those who are gifted by the Spirit of God. It is in the doing of renewal that the Church experiences the surprises of God. Discerning and knowing God, communing with God through contemplative experience, the Church experiences the mandate of the Gospel as ongoing, as dynamically interacting with the complex realities of Asia.

## **Part II. Issues and Challenges in the Mission of Love and Service**

### **A. Globalization**

We view the Asian economic scenario with great pastoral concern. A critical awareness on our part of the diverse and complex socio-economic realities of Asia is essential (EA 5). While the process of economic globalization has brought certain positive effects, we are aware that it "has also worked to the detriment of the poor, tending to push poorer countries to the margin of economic and political relations. Many Asian nations are unable to hold their own in a global market economy" (EA 39). The phenomena of marginalization and exclusion are its direct consequences. It has produced greater inequalities among people. It has enabled only a small portion of the population to improve their standards of living, leaving many to remain in poverty. Another consequence is excessive urbanization, causing the emergence of huge urban conglomerations and the resultant migration, crime and exploitation of the weaker sections.

We are aware that "cultural globalization" through the over-saturation of the mass media is "quickly drawing Asian societies into a global consumer culture that is both secularist and materialistic," undermining or causing the erosion of traditional social, cultural and religious values that have sustained Asia. Such a process is a great threat to Asia's cultures and religions, resulting in "incalculable damage" (EA 7).

Therefore, globalization is an ethical and moral issue which we, as Church, can ill afford to ignore.

## **B. Fundamentalism**

We are painfully aware of the rise of religious fundamentalism, or better, extremism, which continues to bring division to Asian societies and suffering to our people. A renewed Church will encourage Christian men and women to participate fully in social and cultural activities, at the local as well as the national level, to bridge the gaps between communities and build harmony. In Asia Christians live in multireligious societies; and in all countries of Asia, except the Philippines and East Timor, they are a small minority. The Church should share with other religious leaders the Vatican II vision of a return to roots, and help them to draw nourishment from their own roots in this time of globalization which is causing widespread chaos and confusion among people. We must endeavor to promote the human rights of all people, regardless of caste, color, creed or religion, by raising our voices against all such violations.

## **C. Political Situation**

Though Asia is free from external colonization, and most Asian countries have some sort of democratic government, they do not follow the same model of democracy. The results of elections are at times questionable. Frequently, after elections, the governed have very little say in governance. Some would even characterize the situation as a hijacking of democracy. A common feature is that those who are elected pursue their own interests. Most of the governments come to power through the alliance of various parties, often without a clear mandate from the people. Further, there is a tendency towards centralization of power and decision-making. Pervasive corruption is a reality at various levels of government. In certain countries, the whole of life is politicized, affecting every sector, making implementation impossible. Governments are forced to adopt policies and practices such as the Structural Adjustment Policies (SAP) dictated by the IMF, the WB and the WTO. These policies are devoid of a human face and social concern. The model of economic development promoted by the transnational corporations in Asia is not acceptable.

## **D. Ecology**

As we look at the development being promoted in Asia and its impact on our environment, we see a steady, ongoing deterioration of our environment as a result of uncontrolled pollution, degrading poverty, deforestation, etc. The effect worsens when some Asian countries become dumping grounds for toxic wastes, production platforms for hazardous industries, and industrialization proceeds without any environmental standards. Even if there are standards, government agencies of environmental control are often slack in enforcing accepted norms of the right to a clean environment.

## **E. Militarization**

The increasing militarization of societies, fostered by governments and the "death merchants," is another challenge. Peace-building, including disarmament, becomes imperative, calling for urgent responses to such issues as the banning of land mines, trade in small arms and nuclear proliferation. Given the nature of armed conflicts in many Asian countries, conflict-prevention, as well as conflict resolution, constitute a critical challenge. Asian religions, including Christianity, are called to contribute to the building-up of peace. This is a central area for dialogue with religions and cultures leading to reconciliation.

### **Part III : The Challenge of Discerning The Asian Way**

Asia is a cultural mosaic shining with its rich diversity. This is also true of the Catholic Church. The local churches in Asia present a splendid variety in their origin, historical, socio-political and cultural situations, ecclesial identity and growth. Obviously, the pastoral challenges facing the Church in Asia are equally diverse. Yet, one common mission unites all: to proclaim "the Good News of Jesus Christ through Christian witness, works of charity and human solidarity. ... The many positive elements found in the local churches ... strengthen our expectation of a 'new springtime of Christian life'" (EA 9).

In the face of such a challenge, we recognize with hope "a growing awareness throughout Asia of people's capacity to change unjust structures," with an ever-growing awareness and demand for social justice, for more political and economic participation, for equal opportunities, and the determination to safeguard human dignity and rights. Long-dormant minority groups are seeking ways to become agents of their own social advancement. In this we see the Spirit of God at work in people's struggles and efforts "to transform society so that the human yearning for a more abundant life may be satisfied as God wills" (EA 8).

Renewal for a mission of love and service requires fresh understanding and emphases. As we have been listening to each other we have realized that something new is happening. For thirty years, as we have tried to reformulate our Christian identity in Asia, we have addressed different issues, one after another: evangelization, inculturation, dialogue, the Asian-ness of the Church, justice, the option for the poor, etc. Today, after three decades, we no longer speak of such distinct issues. We are addressing present needs that are massive and increasingly complex. These issues are not separate topics to be discussed, but aspects of an integrated approach to our Mission of Love and Service. We need to feel and act "integrally." As we face the needs of the 21st century, we do so with Asian hearts, in solidarity with the poor and the marginalized, in union with all our Christian brothers and sisters, and by joining hands with all men and women of Asia of many different faiths. Inculturation, dialogue, justice and the option for the poor are aspects of whatever we do.

We are committed to the emergence of the Asianness of the Church in Asia. This means that the Church has to be an embodiment of the Asian vision and values of life, especially interiority, harmony, a holistic and inclusive approach to every area of life. We are also convinced that only by the "inner authority" of authentic lives founded on a deep spirituality will we become credible instruments of transformation. This is important, because our contacts with those of other religious traditions have to be at the level of depth, rather than just the level of ideas or action. We are aware that this Asianness, founded on solid values, is a special gift the world is awaiting. For the whole world is in need of a holistic paradigm for meeting the challenges of life. In this task, together with all Asians, the Church, a tiny minority in this vast continent, has a singular contribution to make, and this contribution is the task of the whole Church in Asia. We believe in:

the innate spiritual insight and moral wisdom in the Asian soul; and it is the core around which a growing sense of "being Asian" is built. This "being Asian" is best discovered and affirmed not in confrontation and opposition, but in the spirit of complementarity and harmony. In this framework of complementarity and

harmony, the Church can communicate the Gospel in a way which is faithful both to her own Tradition and to the Asian Soul (EA 6).

### **A. Pastoral Concerns**

Since the contexts of people's life are so diverse in the Asian continent, it is each ecclesial community, under the leadership of its episcopal conference, which discerns the pastoral priorities for its area. However, in this Plenary Assembly, we identified certain sectors of people to whom we need especially to direct our mission of love and service, and who are, at the same time, equally partners in that mission. These are: the youth, women, the family, indigenous peoples, sea-based and land-based migrants, and refugees.

**1. The Youth.** Asia is generally described as the continent of the youth, since youth constitute the majority of Asia's population. The youth are the reality of today, not only the hope of tomorrow. They are a source of energy and vitality in society and in the Church. At the same time, they are the most vulnerable and are victimized by structures of exploitation in our world. The situation of the youth should be understood against the background of the complex realities in which they live. The swift and drastic changes taking place in our world -- globalization, political changes and the media explosion -- radically affect the lives of youth in every part of Asia. Youth of all backgrounds, urban and rural, poor and rich, educated and uneducated, employed and unemployed, the organized and unorganized, are all being tossed about by the waves of contemporary culture. The problems faced by youth need to be tackled collectively, along with the youth leaders.

The new millennium awaits us with hope, openness and optimism because of the very resources of our youth, which enable them to deal with the concerns of evangelization, leadership, unemployment, women's empowerment and communal harmony in order to establish the Reign of God based on justice and peace. If the Church journeys with youth, many new horizons of love and service will evolve and the objectives of the youth ministry itself (i.e., fellowship, formation and service) will be realized. The new way of journeying with the youth is to see the youth as resources and not as problems; to facilitate their learning from their experiences and not from ready-made answers; to involve the youth more in the decision-making process, and not only to ask them to implement the decisions taken by others. Only when the youth are recognized as agents and co-workers of the evangelizing mission of the Church will their full potential blossom forth.

**2. Women.** We acknowledge that the cultures of Asia value the family and family relationships. Yet there is a widespread discrimination against the girl-child, destruction of the unborn girl-child, violence against and abuse of women and girls in the family, and a general lack of respect for life. Certain cultural prejudices and traditions have a strong influence on the way society and communities treat women. The Church can address herself to these issues by creating effective structures for awareness-building, advocacy, empowerment, and for dealing with issues of violence to women. We take Jesus to be our exemplar for a new way of mission for and with women. Against the prevailing culture of his times, Jesus courageously accepted and recognized women's equality, dignity and giftedness. His great sensitivity and respect for women are an invitation for a deep conversion for the Church and society.

**3. The Family.** The family embodies for its members the mystery of Trinitarian love in the heart of our world. It can be called a "sacrament" of God's love and is, in fact, the domestic church. It is the school and sanctuary of love where human beings first experience love and learn the art of loving and praying. Asia has a millennial tradition of great respect for the gift of the family. The family is the bearer of the heritage of humanity; and the future of humanity passes on by way of the family. It is also the cradle of faith-formation and the school for imparting Gospel values, the first arena for socialization and development of the child. "The family is not simply the object of the Church's pastoral care; it is also one of the Church's most effective agents of evangelization" (EA 46). Renewal in the Church, therefore, should begin with the family.

At this juncture of history, we painfully witness the breakdown of the family in many places in our

continent, especially in the urban centers. Many are the forces arrayed against the sanctity and the endurance of the values of family life. Individualism, hedonism, materialism, consumerism, interference from the state, a contraceptive mentality and a technological life-style all adversely affect the stability of marriage and family life, and endanger the stability of our society and its values.

**4. Indigenous People.** Indigenous peoples form a significant section of Asian society and of the Church in Asia. These communities are ancient and well-knit communities, and have preserved many important human and social values. Today, in many countries of Asia, their right to land is threatened and their fields are laid bare; they themselves are subjected to economic exploitation, excluded from political participation and reduced to the status of second-class citizens. Detribalization, a process of imposed alienation from their social and cultural roots, is even a hidden policy in several places. Their cultures are under pressure by dominant cultures and "Great Traditions." Mighty projects for the exploitation of mineral, forest and water resources, often in areas which have been the home of the tribal population, have generally worked to the disadvantage of the tribals.

In our contemporary society, where there is a steady erosion of traditional Asian values, indigenous Asian communities can play an important role. Close to nature, they retain the values of a cosmic view of life, a casteless sharing and a democratic society. They have preserved their simplicity and hospitality. Their values and cultures can offer a corrective to the culture of the dominant communities, to the emerging materialistic and consumeristic ethos of our modern societies.

**5. Sea-based and Land-based Migrants and Refugees.** Among the rapid changes that are taking place within Asian societies, we view with great concern the phenomenon of unprecedented migration and refugee movements. It is "a major social phenomenon, exposing millions of people to situations which are difficult economically, culturally and morally. People migrate within Asia and from Asia to other continents for many reasons, among them poverty, war and ethnic conflicts, the denial of their human rights and fundamental freedoms" (EA 7). Other reasons are the establishment of giant industrial complexes with an eye to cost-efficiency and profit, solely for the economic interests of national and transnational corporations. Migrants experience the destructive effects of migration in their personal and family life, their social and cultural values.

The alarming number of migrants, refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons, and the emerging economic, cultural, religious and moral issues are certainly a pastoral challenge for the Church, demanding an adequate and urgent pastoral response. In the light of the teaching of the Church, we affirm that migration and refugee movements, which result in depersonalization, loss of human dignity and the break up of families, are moral issues confronting the conscience of the Church and that of our Asian nations. As for the Church in Asia, these pose urgent pastoral challenges to evolve life-giving, service-oriented programs of action within the pastoral mission of the Church. The Church should join hands with all who are concerned with the rights of the migrants and their situation, keeping in mind that the migrants themselves are to be the primary agents of change.

## **B. The Thrust of Our Response**

When we turn to a consideration of the response of the Church to these and other challenges, a credible and integrated approach emerges as imperative. If we would dare add anything to the words of St. Paul about the beginnings of faith, we would add, from the perspective of Asia: "faith comes from the 'hearing' and the 'seeing'." We could easily trace the source of many conversions to the living witness of genuine Christians, be they clerical or lay. The Asian search for the Ultimate has been felt and voiced frequently in our meditations and discussions. We will be

credible witnesses to our Asian sisters and brothers only if they sense that we have experienced the Ultimate.

Our approach must be integrated. Our Churches are coming to the renewed conviction that the agents of service and ministry cannot be isolated any more in specialized groups. The whole community, every group, every person, with whom we relate in service, is an agent of evangelization. We realize that, precisely because it is the Spirit who ultimately invites, directs and energizes each of us for mission, this mission cannot take place except in mutuality and exchange. Moreover, the issues and needs that we are facing have reached a volume and complexity that go well beyond the skills, capabilities and resources of individuals, communities and churches. Ecumenism and interreligious dialogue have become essential to any ministry we undertake. This shared understanding has equally underlined the participatory and mutual character of our ministry and service. No real service takes place that is not collaborative, that is not actively involving the other person or community, that does not become a real "exchange of gifts" -- the true meaning of the charismatic theology of St. Paul. One of the best ways to help and to empower the "other," whoever he or she is, will always be our ability to recognize their gifts and wisdom, and the deep and hidden capabilities of humanity they carry within themselves in the midst of their search, suffering, poverty or segregation.

Thus, we recognize with gratitude and admiration the ever-present and generous contribution of women, the young, and consecrated persons. Furthermore, in this continent of Asia where we cherish and reverence elders, we also recognize the elderly as energetic, experienced and mature persons of faith and humanity. We invite them to put their capabilities at the service of the mission of Christ in Church and society.

### C. A Few Practical Directions

1. The most effective means of evangelization and service in the name of Christ has always been and continues to be the **witness of life**. The embodiment of our faith in sharing and compassion (sacrament) supports the credibility of our obedience to the Word (proclamation). This witnessing has to become the way of the Gospel for persons, institutions and the whole Church community. Asian people will recognize the Gospel that we announce when they see in our life the transparency of the message of Jesus and the inspiring and healing figure of men and women immersed in God.

2. We consider the **formation** of all evangelizers -- laity, priests and religious -- as pivotal and crucial in the process of our becoming Asian and in fulfilling our mission in an Asian way. "In the past, formation often followed the style, methods and programs imported from the West ..." (EA 22). What is being done and still needs to be urgently pursued is "to adapt formation to the cultural contexts of Asia" and to the social, economic and religious milieu where ministry has to be exercised. Formation that will facilitate the emergence of ministers and evangelizers capable of promoting a new way of being Church in Asia should take place in the local church, contextually and within the wider community. It should be undertaken with active involvement and participation of the different sections of the Church. Worthy of special attention is the question of ongoing formation for all evangelizers: bishops, priests, religious and lay people. In formation programs for the laity there should be lay women and men, along with priests and religious.

Similarly, in the formation of future priests, and religious, and in their ongoing formation, the partnership of competent lay persons needs to be ensured in order that such formation is geared towards the realization of a participative Church. Unless the entire community is creatively involved in the formation process, we cannot achieve the goal we have set for ourselves: an Asian image of the Church. (Such an Asian image of the evangelizer is spelt out by Pope John Paul II in "The Church in Asia.")

Further, people in Asia want to see their pastors not as administrators of institutions and providers of services "but as persons whose minds and hearts are set on deep things of the Spirit" (Rom 8:5). The Church must respond to the reverence which Asian people have for those

in authority by a clear moral uprightness on the part of those with ministerial responsibilities in the Church" (EA 43). The formators should promote "a profound understanding of the elements of spirituality and prayer akin to the Asian soul, and to involve themselves more deeply in the Asian people's search for fuller life" (EA 22). The primacy of the Spirit, which characterizes Asia, needs to find concrete expression in all formation programs. "In Asia, home to great religions, where individuals and entire peoples are thirsting for the divine, the Church is called to be a praying Church, deeply spiritual, even as she engages in immediate human and social concerns. All Christians need a true missionary spirituality of prayer and contemplation" (EA 23).

3. The Church's evangelizing mission is deeply affected by the impact of the **mass media** and new information technologies. Nevertheless, the media can assist greatly in the proclamation of the Gospel to every corner of the continent, as it is done now by the FABC initiative Radio Veritas Asia. However, it is not enough to use the media simply to spread the Christian message and the Church's authentic teaching. It is necessary to integrate that message into the "new culture" created by modern communications (EA 48).

4. Serious and faith-inspired involvement of **professionals** in public life is crucial for the building of society. Thus, the professionals become witnesses among their own ranks and counterparts, their clients, customers and beneficiaries. The Church's task of promoting justice, peace and human development, as well as safeguarding human rights, will be more effective when policy-makers, planners and executives are properly informed about the human and moral side of their professional career or service. It is here that Catholic professionals, politicians, business persons, technocrats, executives and others have their special mission. Let the Catholic professionals open the doors of their boardrooms or chambers of commerce to Christ to renew and sanctify the temporal order. The pastors must also allow them to enrich the Church by their expertise, guidance and experience.

On the other hand, specialization in various fields has left most of the Catholic professionals with a knowledge of the faith inadequate to their level of education -- many are hardly aware of the social teaching of the Church. Therefore, there is a "need especially for lay men and women with responsibilities in public life to be well informed in these teachings so that they can inspire and vivify civil life and its structures with the leaven of the Gospel" (EA 32).

5. **Advocacy** has emerged as a powerful method and means to respond to the issues and challenges that have surfaced at this 7th Plenary Assembly. Civil society in Asia is already doing it. Bishops have an important role in advocacy and should take it up as a pastoral priority. Based on the ethical and moral imperatives that are found in the social teaching of the Church, the process of advocacy should be articulated effectively. Particularly, the emphasis on the common good could form the basis for advocacy as we join hands with men and women of other faiths. The bishops' conferences that constitute the FABC should take up advocacy for the common good, depending upon the prevailing circumstances.

6. **Education** in its different forms -- formal, informal, parochial, public and private -- has contributed much to human growth and personality formation. In every problem and challenge we face there are dimensions of Christian humanism, of mental and spiritual growth and liberation that a Christian perspective can help develop. Catholic educators, in professional and creative dialogue with members of other religions and other Christian communities, are called to be companions and guides in the ongoing process of becoming persons. This extends to every stage in human growth, and is also a dimension of the pastoral service of the Church, which should be articulated in relevant programs of ongoing formation for its own members and the public at large. Furthermore, educators must remember that an essential element of any holistic educational program is formation in values.

7. Other effective means for our mission of love and service will continue to be **the Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs), Small Gospel-Based Communities, and Ecclesial Movements**. The vision of a "New Way of Being Church" (AsIPA), promoted by FABC, is proving

to be a very good help to the growth and development of the BECs and deserves our attention and support. Ecclesial Movements, duly discerned by the local church along with its hierarchy, can also offer specific and creative contributions to the being and ministry of the Church.

8. In this varied, demanding and global ministry of love and service, the presence and promotion of specific groups who dedicate themselves to the service of God, his Kingdom and the Church will continue to be an important task of the hierarchy. Here we mention the different groups of consecrated persons, the Asian-born missionary societies, and the many lay persons who offer important years of their life to missionary or other volunteer work.

9. Lastly, **exchange of personnel** and other resources in its different forms, such as *Fidei Donum* priests, "twinning" of dioceses, sponsoring formation-education opportunities and the like, are forms of support for the overall mission of the Church.

## Conclusion

As we celebrate the Great Jubilee of the birth of Jesus Christ our Savior, and the Holy Doors of churches are being opened, we look at the image of the door and are gladdened to rediscover our calling to enter into the community of Christ's disciples and to share in his life and mission. It is there beyond the doors that we hear his reassuring and empowering word. During these days of meeting together it was so for us: we have heard his whisper in all that we have shared. It is through the same doors that we now go out into the world of the peoples of Asia and into their struggles and joys, which are also ours.

Here in Samphan, we have shared our lives, hopes and difficulties, and have been strengthened by the Spirit, mutual love and friendship in our gathering. In the Scriptures and the Eucharist we put all our memories together as we open our hearts to Christ and to each other:

Trusting in the Lord who will not fail those whom he has called, the Church in Asia joyfully makes her pilgrim way into the Third Millennium. Her only joy is that which comes from sharing with the multitude of Asia's peoples the immense gift which she herself has received -- the love of Jesus the Savior. Her one ambition is to continue his mission of service and love, so that all Asians may have life and have it more abundantly (EA 50).

In this mission, we draw inspiration and strength from Mary, the Mother of the Church, who with haste went to the house of Elizabeth to proclaim the Good News -- Jesus Christ the Savior.

**Published January 2000**

**END**

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**FABC Papers No. 111**

**Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences**

**THE 8TH FABC PLENARY ASSEMBLY**

**FINAL DOCUMENT**

**"The Asian Family towards a Culture of Integral Life"**

August 17-23, 2004

Daejeon Catholic University & St. J. Hasang Education Center

Daejeon, Korea.

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## **APPENDIX: CHARTER OF THE RIGHTS OF THE FAMILY**

### **PRAYER FOR THE FAMILY**

Lord, God, from you every family in heaven and on earth takes its name.

Father, you are Love and Life. Through your Son, Jesus Christ, born of woman, and through the Holy Spirit, fountain of divine charity, grant that every family on earth may become for each successive generation a true shrine of life and love.

Grant that your grace may guide the thoughts and actions of husbands and wives for the good of their families and of all the families in the world.

Grant that the young may find in the family solid support for their human dignity and for their growth in truth and love.

Grant that love, strengthened by the grace of the sacrament of marriage, may prove mightier than all the weakness and trials through which our families sometimes pass.

Through the intercession of the Holy Family of Nazareth, grant that the Church may fruitfully carry out her worldwide mission in the family and through the family.

Through Christ our Lord, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life forever and ever.

Amen.

(Pope John Paul 11)

## **THE ASIAN FAMILY TOWARD A CULTURE OF INTEGRAL LIFE**

### **INTRODUCTION:**

#### **The Hope of the Asian Family for Life in Fullness**

1. The hope, the aspiration, the dream of the Asian family for life in fullness in the Reign of God is one that never fades. Even in the midst of seemingly insurmountable misery and poverty, Asian families live this hope not without reason with vibrant, even exuberant joy. The positive experiences of Asian families who find continuing happiness and well-being by being family are signals of the Spirit of God at work. Sustaining this hope is the profound Asian sense of the sacred and Asia's rich spiritual resources. God, the ultimate Being and Creator of Life, is the reason for this hope. It is God's Spirit working in the cultures of Asia that sustains and explains the closeness, harmony, resiliency, relative stability and many other positive values that endure in Asian families. It is God's Spirit that provides a vision of the Asian family on a journey of communion, solidarity and mission to the Reign of God. All these are reasons for hope.

2. To reflect on the Asian family and its hope for life in fullness, the Bishops of Asia have come together for the 8th Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) on the theme "The Asian Family toward a Culture of Life." They realize that their gathering as shepherds of God's "little flock" in Asia from August 17 to 23, 2004 is a great blessing from the Lord.<sup>[1]</sup> Only last year, 2003, for the first time on Asian soil, in Manila, the Fourth World Meeting of Families pressed upon the Church the crying concern for the Family and its utmost significance in the divine plan of salvation.

3. Especially is this concern urgent in the light of world developments. For the past two decades rapid cultural, scientific and technological developments alongside economic and political developments have been impacting human society heavily. 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, economic and religion-based ideal relationships. As a world body the United Nations continues to consider the family as the basic unit of society though some neo-liberal trends in the West have questioned it. The social teaching of the Church, has always accepted the family as the first basic cell and community of society. Undoubtedly the first and fundamental structure for human ecology is the family.

4. The universal Church consistently insists 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.<sup>[2]</sup> The Acts of the Apostles reminds us that the faith spread "from house to house" (Acts 20:20).<sup>[3]</sup> Pope John Paul II has already convoked the World Meeting of Families on four different occasions 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. 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.

5. As Bishops in Asia we hope that the following reflection would contribute toward even deeper reflection on the Asian family in view of relevant and effective pastoral care. We also hope that it would serve as a reference document for Asian Episcopal Conferences and dioceses toward a vision of family ministry and its general pastoral orientations. We begin our reflection on the pastoral challenges that the Asian family confronts. 📌

## **PART I. PASTORAL CHALLENGES TO THE FAMILY IN ASIA.**

### **1. Family Traditions and Values.**

6. In the midst of swift, sweeping, and even revolutionary changes in the world, Asians continue to value marriage as sacred. Children are cherished as treasures and gifts of God. To show love for their children, parents are willing to undertake all kinds of sacrifices in providing for their health, their education and general welfare. Nuclear families remain close-knit. Such closeness of relationships is also true in the extended family. The elderly, retired members of the family, parents and grandparents still receive great respect and care within the family setting, not with standing the many difficulties and sacrifices involved. They are listened to, honored, and loved. It is the elders that assure the family's cohesiveness. The hospitality of Asian families, even of the very poor, is proverbial. Despite many serious difficulties from within and without, Asian families have relatively high stability. They are resilient and ready to sacrifice in the face of great hardship. With their deep religiosity and sense of the divine, they are effusively optimistic. Most Asian families being rural, they have a natural closeness with God's creation. These values are especially exhibited by indigenous peoples, considered as generally among the poorest in Asia who are relatively untouched by technological culture. Many other values endure in Asia as part of family tradition and are bright hopeful spots in the Asian landscape.<sup>[4]</sup> It is tradition that sustains the

resilience of the Asian family in the face of poverty and of different death-dealing forces in today's world. The positive values in the Asian family tradition are seeds of God's Word and can help serve as the "rock" on which we build our Asian homes, as in Jesus' parable of the wise man (see Mt. 7: 24-25; Lk. 6: 47-48). It is, therefore, imperative that families consciously practice and develop these positive values, so that their great worth may not diminish but is enhanced.

7. Still some values are ambivalent. Strong kinship and family-centeredness, for instance, has also its downside. Graft and corruption, nepotism, political and economic cronyism in Asia are often due to inordinate concern for family, to the dominant and selfish desire to serve the interests of the family, of kin and cronies — at the expense of the common good. This might even lead to strong clannishness that would divide rather than unite the whole community or society. 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. These social changes are re-shaping moral and religious beliefs, self-concepts of individuals and families, even the very structures of marriage and family.

8. While we need to be aware of the different cultural situations in Asia, we can recognize major commonalities in the situation of Asian families. Admittedly, a rather different and especially difficult situation is that of the family in the former Soviet Republics. With a small Catholic minority, a generation seems to have been lost because of long years without the free exercise of religion. Beliefs regarding marriage and family are quite far from the Christian norm.<sup>[5]</sup> 📌

## 2. A Variety of Family Forms

9. Almost common now in Asia are family situations that are certainly different from what Asians consider the "traditional" and even "ideal" family. Intercultural families and inter-faith families that result from "mixed marriages" abound. In such marriages couples might find adjustment to each other much more difficult than if they were of the same faith. Also increasing in number are families with single parents, families with separated parents and cases of remarriage for one or both partners. 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 families where only the father or only the mother is around with the children, families where parents only come once or twice a year and families where children do not have common fathers or mothers. There are also many families where the parents are not married and are not able to offer stability to their children. And there are homes where parents do not wish to have children or delay having children. Less and less do we see the traditionally close-knit Asian "extended family" of parents, their children, their grandparents, their sons-in-law or daughters-in-law and grandchildren. "Nuclear families" tend to have lesser communication with other members of the extended family. Further, within the extended family are conflicts, e.g. with in-laws, that need a process of conflict resolution and the healing power of forgiveness.

10. With the advance of new liberation movements and growing neo-liberal and post-modern thinking, other forms of "families" are slowly beginning to emerge in more secularized and liberalized Asian countries, albeit, with great disapproval, such as families with same sex partners. Some of these family forms are deeply 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 might even raise the question whether couples really believe in marriage as a sacred covenant or merely as a legal contract. Moral questions could also be raised about a common practice of having a civil marriage first and at a later time a church marriage. In some societies this may be due to a family's lack of available funds or due to clan law or customs and traditions.

11. 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 Reign 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.**

12. The first major challenge confronting the vast majority of Asian families is massive poverty. It is the tragic reality of poverty that they must contend with everyday and are unable to escape from. Many poor young people have difficulty to think of marriage and start a family because of the lack of basic means of support and sustenance. But today's Asian poverty has a new dimension. This is the process of neo-liberal economic globalization that is producing a new world order to which every country has to be conformed lest it be left behind on the road to economic progress as defined by developed countries. But globalization is ambivalent at best. Yearly United Nations 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 poverty may be noted in at least three areas:

a) 13. **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 becoming unproductive in the light of such emerging conditions. Aggravated by migration to urban centers, the above situation results in the stagnation of rural communities. Noteworthy is the observation that "the problem of the Japanese rural families is not economic poverty, but the collapse of the agricultural villages themselves".<sup>[6]</sup> Finally, in

situations of poverty, families are sometimes driven to the extreme of selling bodily organs so as to survive.

b) 14. **The Poverty of Urban Families.** The phenomenon of urbanization in Asia is not recent. But the migration of the rural poor to urban settings has never been as rapid and 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 in search of 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 rapid urbanization. Poverty conditions of the urban poor are even harsher in terms of habitat, family living conditions, family space and privacy, safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene. Since slum dwellers stay on either government owned or privately owned properties, they run the risk of being ejected and rendered homeless. These are inducements sometimes in desperation to criminality, abuse in the family, and family break-up.

c) 15. **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. Certainly, the more economically developed Asian societies such as those of Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand as well as the oil-rich Middle East countries are favorite destinations. Tragically migrant workers often labor in circumstances of grave discrimination and exploitation. Asia is the great exporter of cheap labor. It is true that 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.

16. 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 in re-entry as well. Thus we see a close link between the two priorities of FABC VII, namely migrant workers and indigenous peoples.

17. In sum, migrant workers and their families urgently need great pastoral care from the churches of sending and receiving countries. Pastoral care for migrant workers is, in fact, one of the five pastoral priorities of the Church in Asia.<sup>[7]</sup> A careful and compassionate implementation of the guidelines and directives of the recent Instruction, *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi*, would demonstrate the Church's great pastoral concern.<sup>[8]</sup>

18. Cutting across these dimensions of Asian poverty is a new phenomenon which development reports call "the feminization of poverty." A realization is dawning that much of the burden of poverty is borne by women. In most cases it is the husband who might be providing the resources necessary for the family to survive, but it is the wife who has to cope with making both ends meet as she tries to feed and clothe the children, cook for them, take care of them when they are sick, care for old members of the extended family. There does not seem to be any timetable for her. Housekeeping is not a job simply from

7:30 A.M. to 5:00 P.M., with a couple of hours for a noon break. The daughters have to pitch in whenever they can. Oftentimes mother and daughters have to help earn a few more amounts outside the home, when-ever possible. It would appear that poverty hits women more than men. 📌

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

19. 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.

20. Land is life - this axiom is especially true for the indig-enous 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 patterned on the neo-liberal model of development that is promoted by economic globalization government development projects in indigenous ancestral domain sometimes work against the integral development of indigenous peoples. 📌

#### **5. Cultural Globalization and Its Impact on the Family**

21. Of even greater value significance, economic globalization is also bringing cultural globalization in its wake. Since the middle of the 20th century Western secularism has been strongly influencing Asian societies. But at no time has the secularizing process, now with a significant post-modern spirit of individualistic sense of freedom, been more rapid and effective in re-shaping the value systems of Asian families than in the last two decades of the 20th 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.

22. The technological revolution has, indeed, many positive features. It is bringing into Asia a deeper awareness of individual dignity, autonomy, and human rights so characteristic of the West. It creates and promotes global solidarity almost instantaneously in times of great disaster. It has made knowledge of the world and of the human person to grow by leaps and bounds. The application and sharing of that knowledge has generally and significantly improved human life.

23. But 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 neo-liberalism, secularism, materialism, hedonism and consumerism, is alien to the religious-oriented cultures of Asia. Relational, interconnected and interdependent lifestyles of Asian peoples are also undermined. Many values of the technological culture run counter to Asian family values. A growing techno-mindset is weakening marital and familial relations of intimacy and love. Many no longer see marriage as a lifetime commitment. Thus cohabitation without marriage is no longer very rare in urban areas where anonymity takes away some of the traditional stigma connected with this. Even now there are attempts to change the traditional concepts of marriage and family, and even the value of life. So pervasive and enticing is this post-modern and secular spirit in the tools of social communication, especially mass media, that it has managed subtly and insidiously to capture the souls of many Asians.

24. 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. Ironically, tools of social communication such as television, computers and internet, mobile phones, that are meant to enhance communication and reinforce family ties become hindrances to family relations as the members spend less quality time with one another. Family rituals, meals and recreation together are less. No doubt such negative influences contribute to the increase of divorces, family break-ups and the juvenile crime rate as well as the breakdown of family discipline.

25. Moreover, cultural globalization is also creating new forms of poverty. New technologies 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,<sup>[9]</sup> then the poverty of other nations may be construed as due largely to the absence of this new kind of wealth. In addition we need to recognize that more than economic and technological poverty is spiritual poverty, a poverty of moral and religious convictions and values.<sup>[10]</sup>

26. We also have to note that one of the responses of some sectors to the unsettling cultural changes made by globalization is recourse to fundamentalism. This seems 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, interfaith 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

27. With regard to the roles of women and men in the Asian family and in the wider society, patriarchy remains sadly the determining factor. Rooted in the Latin word, "pater" or father, patriarchy has become a pejorative term. But in early Christianity the word "pater" was used in the light of Jesus' Abba experience, his filial relationship of love with God and hence it was emptied of its dominative and oppressive elements. There is, indeed, a need of retrieving for our times the Gospel significance of "pater," as shown in the generous and forgiving love of the father in Jesus' parable of the prodigal son, or the dominion of love that the prayer to "Our Father" expresses, or the servant-headship that Jesus himself exemplified for his disciples at the Washing of the Feet. In this sense, one can have "paternal love" or "paternal authority" without being paternalistic. Today as in earlier Jewish and Graeco-Roman societies, patriarchy is understood with its negative meaning. As such the social attitude of patriarchy is embedded in social structures and 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, submissiveness and subordination. 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.<sup>[11]</sup>

28. 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

29. 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.

30. However, the slow shift toward equality and partnership 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. While the boy-child is favored, the girl-child suffers discrimination in her early years.<sup>[12]</sup> She might even become the victim of infanticide. Finally, in many parts of Asia women-trafficking for commercial sex either locally or abroad is not an infrequent phenomenon and does not even spare children. All these pastoral challenges cry for appropriate pastoral response.

31. 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. Youth in the Family

32. Given the intrusiveness of information technology and mass media, there is no doubt that the emerging and ambivalent post-modern culture is seeping into the family sanctuary. It is especially affecting the youth. With usually greater opportunities for education than their elders, the youth also have greater access to the world of communication. This may be both a blessing and a curse, the world of communication being ambivalent. The youth communicate with one another in the new language of a technological culture. This is why quality time in the family is so necessary. It is the time of owning and exploring their identity. It is the family that provides them with stability. When they lack the guidance of their parents, they imbibe the values of the new culture, at times uncritically. As a result the emerging culture establishes value gaps between old and young. The young themselves might even experience a crisis of values. They are torn between the values treasured in their traditional homes that may not always be positive and the secular values in the extra-domestic fora that may not always be negative. As family relationships deteriorate there could be a resort to escapism, sometimes through drugs that victims mistakenly believe would help them forget their tribulations.

33. Yet as other FABC assemblies have noted, the youth of Asia are often at the vanguard of social and religious transformation in many countries, leading various social emancipation and advocacy movements, participating in movements of renewal in the Church, and emerging as leaders in the Church's pastoral programs and in Basic Ecclesial Communities. Identifying the Youth of Asia as one of the five major pastoral priorities<sup>[13]</sup> reinforces the hope of the youth and in the youth. Asia being the continent of the youth, the youth are not simply the future of the Church in Asia but the present. 📌

## 9. Child Labor

34. Yet another phenomenon affecting Asian families is the wide-spread 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 supplement the family income, provide more food at the table, and help support their own education.<sup>[14]</sup> But the necessary consequences of child labor are the lack of integral growth and development of children, high illiteracy rates, malnutrition, the phenomenon of abandoned or "street children" without their parents and homes, and high incidence of juvenile crime and delinquency. 📌

## 10. Ecology

35. Environmental degradation in Asia also impacts Asian families negatively. 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. 📌

## 11. Population Programs

36. Moreover, government population programs are especially targeting poor families. The over-all objective, as 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.

37. 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 foreign aid for development requires developing countries to legislate population reduction measures. These measures emphasize artificial contraception and advocate the legalization of abortion, at least in certain cases. Grounded on the secular and neo-liberal ideology of economic development, these measures obviously promote a "culture of death". A contraceptive mentality and the rise of premarital sex among the youth and the increasing pervasiveness of the global secular culture are not unconnected.

38. Moreover in the population control agenda is a belief that the migration of many Asians to other countries for the proverbial greener pastures is an economic and sometimes security threat. On the other hand many Asian observers believe that in targeting the poor the population reduction programs of governments conveniently sidestep 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. In contrast to the above is the situation of South Korea and Japan whose very low birth rates and ageing populations are creating major problems of decreasing labor force and deteriorating public pension services. They are presently striving to increase their populations.<sup>[15]</sup>

39. 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 unborn human life, the nature of marriage as that of man and woman and as a lifetime commitment, the meaning of woman's health, the notion of "human right" 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. 📌

## 12. The Family and HIV/AIDS

40. The specter of HIV/AIDS in Asia is yet another reason that government population programs adduce in order to emphasize the idea of "safe sex" and the use of artificial contraception. Thus the population control campaign has strategically transformed the issue of "safe sex" into a health and political issue with the use of the ambiguous term "the right to reproductive health." In this way, the moral dimension of the problem has been conveniently ignored.

41. Indeed, we need to recognize that HIV/AIDS as a disease is hitting many Asian countries severely. It is still on the rise with ominous signs of becoming an Asian human catastrophe of epic proportions. Consequently the Church in Asia has to confront the disease on several pastoral fronts - medically through compassionate care for HIV/AIDS victims and their families, politically through principled influence on national legislatures, and morally through teaching and unceasing advocacy of the Church's moral doctrines particularly in the social sphere related to the issues involving HIV/AIDS. On each of these fronts Asian families have a major role to play that the whole Church has to discern, support and promote. But other than confronting the issue of HIV/ AIDS, families also have to contend with other issues of health that have moral, medical and pastoral implications. Therefore, the Church is challenged, for instance, to provide adequate holistic health care for those with addiction problems. 📌

## 13. Families in the Midst of Conflict

42. 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 and jeopardized. 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 peace, not war. 📌

#### **14. Bio-Genetic Threats to Life**

43. Today the incredibly rapid advances of science have expanded our knowledge of human life and continue to provide valuable scientific information. The Human Genome Project is potentially of immense benefit for humankind. There is a future where the most serious ills that have hitherto no known cures could be cured. In the light of faith these advances have immensely increased our awe of God's infinite creative power. On the other hand, from these tremendous scientific and technological developments have emerged profound bioethical issues regarding the sacredness and dignity of life from its very beginning and regarding human stewardship of God-given life.

44. When the production of embryonic stem cells through human embryonic cloning was first announced their therapeutic potential to cause the healing or replacing of diseased body parts was immediately recognized. Embryonic stem cells are derived from human embryos that are either produced for therapeutic purpose or for reproductive purposes from in vitro fertilization. Thousands of human embryos are destroyed in order to produce embryonic stem cells. Since then some researchers in Korea have reportedly succeeded in producing embryonic stem cells. In 2003 the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan submitted a comment to the government's Panel on Bioethics and protested against the production of human embryos for research purposes and therapeutic human cloning. Passionate debates continue among scientists, moral theologians, ethicists, and religious leaders. These developments are not foreign to Asia, because experiments are now going on in some Asian countries. More disturbing is the fact that ideas contrary to Church teachings are now being used to justify the production and destruction of human embryos such as the idea that human embryos are human beings but not human persons. The specter of genetics becoming eugenics, selectively and scientifically producing super-humans or "designer babies" and a super-race, is looming over humankind trying to play God.

45. Clearly human embryonic cloning and the production of embryonic stem cells by way of destroying human embryos are serious affronts to human dignity and the sacredness of human life. Even when their intentions, i.e., for therapeutic or reproductive purposes, might be good, the production, manipulation and destruction of human embryos to obtain suitable embryonic stem cells are not morally acceptable.<sup>[16]</sup> "The Holy See supports research on stem cells of post-natal origin since this approach -as has been demonstrated by the most recent studies - is a sound, promising, and ethical way to achieve tissue transplantation and cell therapy that could benefit humanity."<sup>[17]</sup> In a pro-active stance, the Church has to be vigilant about these developments entering the doors of Asia. 📌

## 15. Families and Basic Ecclesial/Human Communities

46. 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. The family is the basic cell of society and the fundamental ecclesial community, the Church that is the home.<sup>[18]</sup> In Asia today there is a growing realization that the family has to be the focus of integral evangelization and the essential building block of the BEC/BHC 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 pastoral programs has to be done. Already in many approaches to 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 aimed at building up family life. 📌

## 16. Summing Up

47. We have discerned many forces in the pastoral situation. They may be death-dealing forces or life-giving forces. The emerging secular, post-modern culture is at best ambivalent. It possesses many positive features that contribute to the positive development of a culture of integral life. Cultural, economic, political, religious factors - including structures - influence the Asian family for good or for worse. However, other forces such as Asia's massive poverty, divisions, conflicts, exploitation and oppressive structures are facilitated by the process of economic and cultural globalization and are death-dealing. They threaten not only the quality of life but also the very survival of many Asian families. Even life itself is threatened by genetic developments. Certainly caste-ism, patriarchy and gender inequality, poverty, child labor, land problems, ecological degradation and social conflicts are major death-dealing forces. 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. In a word, the pastoral situation in Asia, negative or positive, profoundly affects the life, the unity and harmony - communion and solidarity - of Asian families, values of God's Reign that once characterized the whole of creation, flowing as it did

from the love and life of God and the covenant that God made with humanity. These biblical values will be the themes of our theological-pastoral reflection.

48. The pastoral situation is truly a great challenge to the Church's family ministry in Asia. 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.<sup>[19]</sup>

49. Hence these are the overarching pastoral questions that we wish to address: Can the Church in Asia, particularly the domestic church, respond adequately to the pastoral challenge so described? In what way can the Church reflect pastorally and theologically - and relevantly - on the death-dealing and life-giving forces in Asia that affect the life, the unity and communion and solidarity of Asian families? How can the Church be effective through relevant pastoral programs for the Asian family? 📌

## **PART II. THEOLOGICAL-PASTORAL REFLECTION**

### **A. A Framework and a Process of Reflection**

50. It is the purpose of this theological — pastoral reflection to help provide the response of faith to the above questions. It does this by meditating on the data of Sacred Scriptures and the Teachings of the Church,<sup>[20]</sup> keeping always in mind the major elements of the pastoral situation that challenge the evangelizing mission of the Church. Its framework will generally be: Life, Communion, Solidarity, and Mission. It follows this thematic process:

- a. To the culture of death in the Asian situation, we respond by presenting a vision of a culture of integral life with a particular orientation to marriage and the family. We envision a culture of integral life that is centered on covenant life with God, where the values of the Reign of God, such as love, communion, and solidarity among individuals, families, and societies reign.
- b. We present this culture of integral life as a gift as well as a task given by God in and through Jesus who raised human life to the divine and shared it with us in the Church through the Holy Spirit.
- c. We reflect then on the Church itself as the Family of God that serves as a sign as well as a promise of integral life in the Reign of God. Jesus and the Reign of God that he proclaimed are our faith response to the culture of death that threatens every gospel value that the family was ordained to have from the very beginning. We consider this perspective as significant in the light of the pluralistic nature of many Asian families.
- d. Further meditating on the Christian vision, we reflect on the God-given nature of marriage and of the family in the light of the fundamental values of covenant, love, communion, and solidarity. The thrust of our reflection is to consider the family not merely as an object to be evangelized and led to discover its identity but more importantly as a subject of internal mission (*missio ad intra*) within itself and external mission to others (*missio ad extra*) — toward the culture of integral life in the Reign of God.

- e. To be certain that our meditation is far from being abstract and sterile, we apply it to some of the major social, cultural, and ecclesial challenges in Asia.
- f. The final stage of our meditation on the family-in-mission toward a culture of integral life integrates all the above stages. It is on the spirituality needed by the family in Asia to realize its identity and fulfill its mission. 📌

## B. A Culture of Integral Life

52. While the emerging culture has certainly many positive contributions to our world, it is a challenge to Asian families to evangelize it and liberate by transforming it into a culture of integral life so that it may not be inimical to integral human 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<sup>[21]</sup> and a sharing of God's life,<sup>[22]</sup> life lived today in unceasing struggle toward fullness which is its eternal destiny,<sup>[23]</sup> life in fullness<sup>[24]</sup> in the Reign 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<sup>[25]</sup> — part of a culture of death. It is against God's will and the Reign of God. A culture of integral life on the other hand respects, nurtures, enhances, promotes and serves human life in all its dimensions, from the very finality of the procreative act and the moment of conception, through its earthly struggles to its return to God full life at the end of time<sup>[26]</sup> in the Reign of God. This perspective of integral life has profound implications on the meaning of "pro-life" and the extent of family ministry.

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

53. At the basis of the culture of integral life, according to the Sacred Scriptures, is God's love as the Creator and Giver of all life, and especially of human life.<sup>[27]</sup> 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".<sup>[28]</sup> 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 duty of stewardship, reflecting God's own dominion of loving care. For this reason in the original design of God, there was solidarity of all creation characterized by interdependence and harmony. For human beings, such solidarity was always by free choice, thus preventing the artificial establishment of solidarity by naked power.

54. The New Testament adds the integrating apex of this divine design. 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.... through him and for him."<sup>[29]</sup> "Through him "God was pleased to reconcile to himself

all things, whether on earth or in heaven." Through him all broken relationships are reconciled, "by making peace through the blood of his cross."<sup>[30]</sup>

55. The covenant between God and the chosen people in the Old Testament is one definitive moment of the culture of integral life. Yahweh as Lord stipulates what has to be done in order to ensure life; the people as subjects assent, in free obedience, to Yahweh's will. But it is also very 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.<sup>[31]</sup> "As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you.<sup>[32]</sup> Even the language of communion between bridegroom and wife is used.<sup>[33]</sup> 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 sight, and honored, and I love you.<sup>[34]</sup> God's familial covenant relationship with the chosen people is characterized by limitless patience, kindness, constant summon to renewal, mercy and forgiveness.

56. Because of God's loving providence over them, the covenant people are told to be in active solidarity with everyone. This requires mission to serve others especially with the needy, the orphan, the widow, and the stranger.<sup>[35]</sup> 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.<sup>[36]</sup>

57. For the Old Testament the culture of integral life would clearly include these four major emphases: life as God's gift of love, communion and solidarity with God and with others, including a mission of service especially to the poor and the needy, as covenant-demand, and God's promise of full life. This perspective would find completion in the key Old Testament theme of the Reign of God in the end-time in which, finally, the upright life is saved and human desires fulfilled.<sup>[37]</sup>

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

58. 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 over-whelming 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.<sup>[38]</sup> We believe that Jesus Christ is the Word of Life.<sup>[39]</sup> Master of life, he can lay down his life for the sake of others and can "take it up again."<sup>[40]</sup> In ultimate self-disclosure, Jesus declares, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life."<sup>[41]</sup> He then speaks of believing, of keeping his word, and of intimate communion of love. "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them."<sup>[42]</sup> He who is life itself describes his mission on earth as life-giving, as salvific solidarity with others, "I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full."<sup>[43]</sup> Again and again he relates his mission of life-giving to the Reign of God, a Reign he speaks about in a radically different way in favor of the lowly and the humble,<sup>[44]</sup> even about a "new birth" without which one cannot see the Reign of God.<sup>[45]</sup> "Life," integral life, is what the first disciples

experience in and through Jesus. John graphically describes their experience. What they had "heard," "seen," "looked upon," and "touched with their hands" was not one with mere physical existence, but one with a radically different - transcendent - quality of life. To them Jesus is the one who has come to bring life to fullness.

59. It is at Baptism that this new life is given. By baptism the believer passes from death due to sin to life in Christ.<sup>[46]</sup> From Christ comes "living water" that becomes "a spring of water welling up to eternal life."<sup>[47]</sup> He is moreover "the bread of life"<sup>[48]</sup> that has come "from heaven and gives life to the world."<sup>[49]</sup> Jesus speaks here of Communion in the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, his own body and blood: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."<sup>[50]</sup> "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life.... Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them."<sup>[51]</sup> That is why the apostle Paul would exult: "For to me, living is Christ."<sup>[52]</sup> In his turn the evangelist John would proclaim: "And from his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace."<sup>[53]</sup>

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

60. 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. The new commandment is also mission: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."<sup>[54]</sup> 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."<sup>[55]</sup> Thus the Church is born as a new creation,<sup>[56]</sup> God's "household", his own family<sup>[57]</sup> born of the Spirit of Jesus, the Spirit of Life.<sup>[58]</sup>

61. Life in Christ then is life in the Spirit.<sup>[59]</sup> Only faith knows of such a life. But there are certain signs a life of the Spirit is, indeed, being lived. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."<sup>[60]</sup> Paul brings the language of love to the perspective of life in the Reign of God when he writes: "...for it is not eating and drinking that make the kingdom of God, but the saving justice, the peace and the joy brought by the Holy Spirit."<sup>[61]</sup> In contrast to the life of the Spirit is life in the flesh which is demonstrated by "works of the flesh" - "fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."<sup>[62]</sup> Avoiding these "works of the flesh" is a fundamental requirement of the new covenant. Paul summarizes the covenant relationship in terms of in terms of mission to love and serve one's neighbor:

"For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'."<sup>[63]</sup>

62. 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, complementariness amid differences, and co-responsibility for the building up of the whole.'<sup>[64]</sup>

63. 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, Solidarity and Mission. They are fundamental dimensions of a culture of integral 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 - and serve others. 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 Reign of God proclaimed by Jesus as "now here and yet to come" is the Reign of Life in its fullness. 📌

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

64. The life of God's family on earth, the Church, is both a gift that anticipates full life in the Reign of God that is now here and is yet fully to come and also a task that is to be done on the journey to full life. The reality of the Church is both actual experience and longed-for realization. In the context of the Church's life as both gift and task, 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."<sup>[65]</sup> From the family the culture of integral life is to be rediscovered, given renewed energy, and re-expressed in our new contexts. Deeper reflection on covenant life, communion, solidarity and mission tells us why this is so.

#### **1. Jesus' Experience of Family with Mary and Joseph.**

65. Christians have always considered the family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph at Nazareth as the family par excellence, the model of Christian families. His Nazareth home is Jesus' primordial experience of human family. It began with the divine call to Mary and Joseph to be husband and wife. As narrated in the Gospels,<sup>[66]</sup> Mary and Joseph had to probe with faith the mystery of their call to be parents and to know the mystery of their only Son. Everyday they had to cope with these profound mysteries. Mary "treasured all these... and pondered them in her heart."<sup>[67]</sup> These are not the ordinary lot of man and woman falling in love and getting married. But their life together as husband and wife was ordinary, indeed, simply that of a carpenter and his wife. Still they experienced what was extraordinary: inability to find a suitable place for the birth of their child, yet exultation when finally the child is born. Joy as they offer their child to God in the Temple, yet suffering as they hear prophetic words that indicate future suffering for both child and mother. Joy as the family succeeds in seeking refuge in a foreign land, yet sorrow as children are killed because of their son. Distress and confusion as they "lose" their son for three days, and great relief when they find him in the Temple, yet wondering what he really means about 'being in his Father's house.'" Still, all these simply strengthen the bond of love, of communion, between parents and son, between family

and God in the covenant that Mary had obediently and freely accepted in faith: "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."<sup>[68]</sup>

66. From the Scriptures then, we know that Jesus was born and reared within a Jewish family whose fundamental religiosity arose from the home. There he experienced the love and care of parents and learned spiritual values so characteristic of Judaism: a passion for God and an intense concern for others. "He learned obedience,"<sup>[69]</sup> says the Letter to the Hebrews, that is, how to live in accordance with God's will - but not without suffering and struggle, like so many families then and now. Although he would eventually challenge those who followed him to think of family beyond natural ties, he never forgot the value and importance of family relationships he kept referring to: "Who are my mother and my brothers?"<sup>[70]</sup> or "Whatever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters..."<sup>[71]</sup> Up to the very end he would commend the familial way of relating when he entrusts a "son" to a "mother" and a "mother" to a "son."<sup>[72]</sup> In Jesus' experience of family, we once again encounter the recurring theme of covenant love and life, communion "unto death," solidarity and mission, a mission that extends from the limits of the nuclear family to the family of faith and beyond. The way of the family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph is the way of every Christian family.

## **2. Marriage: A Sacred Covenant between Man and Woman**

67. At the beginning of the family is a sacred covenant between man and woman. In their sexual difference they are fundamentally "oriented toward communion." Marked "with the sign of masculinity and femininity" they have from the very beginning "a nuptial attribute, that is, the capacity of expressing love, that love in which the person becomes a gift." Thus "man and woman are called from the very beginning not only to exist 'side by side' or 'together', but they are also called to exist mutually 'one for the other'...The text of Genesis 2:18-25 shows that marriage is the first and, in a sense, the fundamental dimension of this call."<sup>[73]</sup> Marriage then from which the family springs is a covenant of love and life between husband and wife whereby they "give themselves to each other and accept each other,"<sup>[74]</sup> hold on to each other lovingly and faithfully until death<sup>[75]</sup> in a total reciprocity of self-giving. This is an awesome truth on the meaning of marriage - total self-giving, until death.

## **3. A Sacrament of Christ's Love**

68. For the Church, communion in marriage is sacramental. It makes visible and palpable the invisible and hidden love of Christ for people. At the same time "Christ's own union with the Church" is the model of conjugal communion.<sup>[76]</sup> The sacramental bond of communion between husband and wife reflects the profound reality of the bond of love between Christ and the Church. Hence, the love of the husband needs to be like Christ's own love for his bride, the Church, faithful and sacrificing covenant love. So must the love of the wife be for her husband. Husband and wife are a sacrament of Christ's love as well as sacrament of Christ's love of 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. If then we want to know concretely what this love of Christ is all about, all we need to do is to look at a loving

married couple. This is the "great mystery"<sup>[77]</sup> 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, or by other symbols as in some Asian cultures.

69. 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.<sup>[78]</sup> That St. Paul, in a patriarchal setting, tells husbands to love their wives as Christ loved is truly revolutionary. Husbands are not just called to model their love for their wives on the conjugal love of Christ for the Church but the text in Ephesians 5:25 also implies that because Christ has loved us, we must, love one another. Christ's love thus becomes for the couple the source and strength of their love for one another. In this context, the full semantic meaning of "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."<sup>[79]</sup> Hence, even if St. Paul speaks about seemingly different duties, e.g., husbands to love their wives and wives to respect their husbands, such values in their full meaning are identical and are mutually given. Husband and wives are to respect — love — one another. Complementariness and mutuality are essential to spousal love.

70. By loving each other, husband and wife grow together towards human and Christian maturity as they live their conjugal life and face the challenges of their responsibilities. Such love spills over to the rest of the family and is marked by patience, kindness, respect, trust, forgiveness, sacrifice and mercy, enduring in times of pain and sorrow as well as in times of joy. Thus the family bond is strengthened and delighted in every child who is born. Blessed with new life, parents often stand in awe at the giftedness of life beyond their own making. This experience of life invites them to recognize the God of life present in such family reality and to look forward to the future. Happiness spills over to dreams and hopes that the tomorrows of their life will somehow be better. Truly, because of its divine inner riches the great mystery of the family is Good News.

#### **4. Covenant Love in Marriage: Parenthood and Children**

71. As "the author of marriage"<sup>[80]</sup> God mandated marriage from the very beginning to be indissoluble<sup>[81]</sup> 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."<sup>[82]</sup> Inseparable, therefore, from the gift given by God for husband and wife to become "one body".<sup>[83]</sup> 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.

72. Christian couples have to work together to educate their children in the ways of the faith and of the Reign of God. They are the first teachers of faith of their children. In this regard parents are to seek ways to make their children grow in faith, help them express it in their lives and share it with others, especially children of their age through the varied opportunities offered by, the Church, or through their own creativity guided by the Church. Like the family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, the Christian family has to be a home, a school of holiness and discipleship, where the ways of God and the values of the Gospel are learned and lived, where listening to and heeding the Lord is a daily norm, where the children first experience the presence of God. In the pluralistic societies of Asia where Christians are a small minority and where religious education in schools may not be accessible, the mission of husband and wife to educate their children for God and lead them to missionary consciousness is absolutely necessary. A family of deep religious faith is a sign of the Church and of the Reign of God. In ecumenical and inter-religious families, such deep religious sense is a countersign to the increasingly irreligious sense of a secular culture.

73. 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.

## **5. Human Relationships in the Family and the Reign of God.**

74. When we abstract from the uniquely Christian particularities of our reflection and view marriage, the family, and human relationships within the family from the perspective of the Reign of God a new and significant dimension is added. We discover that ecumenical and inter-religious marriages and families analogously and truly share the values of covenant life, communion, solidarity, complementariness and mutuality of self-giving. For this reason, the Christian partner brings into the covenant of marriage and family the distinctive riches of her/his beliefs while growing together and journeying together with the other partner and their children toward the Reign of God.

75. The fundamental theological dimensions of covenant life, communion, solidarity, and mission within the family are not as abstract as they seem to be. The actual human relationships within the family in daily life, the harmonious loving and caring relations between spouses, between spouses and their children, and among the children, especially when the family is experiencing great distress, their family journey to full life through suffering and joy — these make communion, solidarity, and mission concrete. Belongingness, intimacy, warmth, joy, friendship are the more familiar signs of profound communion in the family. The key to such human relationships, family counselors often state, is the total quality of communication, verbal and behavioral, among family members. Hence, it is imperative that family ministry in Asia has formation in human relationships as a principal pastoral concern. 📌

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

76. Built into the very nature of the family is a divine vocation and mission. Every Christian is called to seek above all else the Reign of God. This is the one and common vocation of all. Married couples have responded to this call by way of marriage and family life. They have embraced the Reign of God by becoming married. The way they live their marriage and family life indicates their fidelity to God's Reign. In their love for one another, in the expression of that love in the conjugal act, in their rearing of children, in their use of material resources, they express their commitment to the Reign of God. Indeed, marriage is in a true sense a fundamental orientation toward the Reign of God.

77. The call for the family to mission is: "Family, become what you are!" This mission is sacramentally rooted in Baptism and Confirmation. Drawn by God's unconditional love, their very identity as a married couple impels them to mission. Their experience of God in and through marriage missions them. Precisely as married couples they have a particular ecclesial ministry to carry out within and outside the family.<sup>[84]</sup> They minister to each other. They seek the Reign of God together. They teach their children to opt for God's reign above all else. The members of the whole family minister to one another. In ordinariness, in anxieties and in joy, through the cross and resurrection of daily marital life, mutual evangelization takes place. It takes place through the mutual loving, caring and serving of husband and wife, 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. Specifically for the Christian family, it is in the family "where the Gospel is transmitted and from which the Gospel radiates... all the members evangelize and are evangelized."<sup>[85]</sup> The family is the place where people can be themselves and grow integrally. It is the place where the sense and passion for service in different ways of living are fostered, including missionary vocation.<sup>[86]</sup> In the daily interaction of human relationships within the family the members witness to the Reign of God and to the death and resurrection of Christ the Good News of salvation. This is truly a catechesis of life. Such is the internal mission (*missio ad intra*) of husbands and wives and their families

78. But not only to one another do family members proclaim the Reign of God and Christ's saving death and resurrection. They are likewise called to do so to others.

"Family, become what you are!" These words also call the family to external mission (*missio ad extra*). The loving relationships that are developed within the family — between husband and wife, between parents and their children, between the children, and between members of the nuclear and extended families - have a missionary dimension. They fulfill the words of the Lord, "It is by your love for one another that everyone will recognize you as my disciples."<sup>[87]</sup> The whole family is likewise called to illustrate in a unique way the reality that is the Church. Marriage and becoming family are a way of being and becoming church. By fostering human intimacy and commitment to the personal well-being of all its members, the family promotes in word and deed the reality and importance of loving, life-bringing relationships within the Church and its structures.

79. The family provides flesh and blood to the Christian conviction that God is Self-Giving Love. It sacramentalizes the gracious goodness of God, particularly so in the context of excessive and

widespread human suffering. Committed, faithful and nurturing love (intimacy) within the family without any betrayal of love makes more credible the Gospel value of total trust in God's unfailing concern — in Christ's unfailing, faithful, forgiving and nurturing love for us, the Family of God. This sign value of Christian marriage and the family has a powerful message to marriages and families that are being broken by selfishness and insensitivity, pettiness and dishonesty or by excessive economic, psychological or social concerns.

80. When God said of creation, "It is good," God did not only refer to the physical beauty of creation. The whole world is good because it came from God's design and images his goodness and love. It is marked by God's loving dominion. God reigns over all creation. 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. "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it".<sup>[88]</sup> More than just the physical implications of the command, they were also to fill the earth with the goodness and beauty, justice, and love of God - and bring it under the Reign of God. The experience of our first parents of the reality of sin and human limitation made them understand the painful process of human growth and maturity. But human limitations and failures are no obstacles to the fulfillment of family vocation and mission because of God's promise of continual fidelity.<sup>[89]</sup> It is thus in the midst of challenge that God calls families to help to restore spread the original moral and spiritual brilliance of humanity throughout the earth so that it could fittingly, even if finitely, mirror the divine goodness once again.

81. The family's mission to others extends, therefore, to the social, cultural, political, and educational fields. The family "is one of the of the Church's most effective agents of evangelization."<sup>[90]</sup> This really raises the question as to what church leadership can do to strengthen family presence and relationships — that is, to build a family that is truly a transforming sign of God's Reign or to build it truly as the domestic Church. It is a challenge of empowering the family for mission by helping the members to live out their marriage and family life in accord with the values of God's Reign or the teachings of the Gospel and of the Church. How this empowerment takes place has to be a principal concern of family ministry.

## **1. Mission and Economic Globalization**

82. 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 moral and social spheres 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. 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.

83. 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. 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.

84. 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."<sup>[91]</sup> 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**

85. 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.

86. 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."<sup>[92]</sup> Such understanding of freedom may be 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.

87. The Church has perennially held that there are 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 a 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.<sup>[93]</sup> This is required of a genuine caring and nurturing pastoral ministry for couples and their families.

88. Evangelization of culture involves different dimensions. We need to know more in depth our own cultures that are rich expressions of God's presence in our midst. Further we need to evangelize our own cultures and take away from them traditions, beliefs, customs, and practices that do not seem to be in consonance with the divine plan as understood by our Christian faith. The family where culture is first encountered and internalized is the setting for both its enhancement and purification. It has the opportunity to hand on a culture that is imbued by the spirit of the Reign of God. 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.

### **3. The Family and the Means of Social Communication**

89. The principal channels of the new world culture are the means of social communication. Their power to communicate and to influence either for good or for bad is almost incredible. Even poor people have some access to one or two media resources. The world of communications is the "first Areopagus", of the modern age<sup>[94]</sup> and has a moral dimension. Its tools provide "unlimited opportunities for information, education, cultural expansion, and even spiritual growth."<sup>[95]</sup>

90. For many, particularly for the younger generation, the means of social communications are the chief means for information and education, guidance and inspiration. Hence, the Church has to understand these tools and to have the competence and skills to use them effectively for its mission to evangelize. "Yet these same media also have the capacity to do grave harm to families by presenting an inadequate or even deformed outlook on life, on the family, on religion and on morality."<sup>[96]</sup> Therefore, it is the mission of the Church to evangelize them, to purify them and bring to conform to the values of the Gospel and of God's reign. Much of the power to evangelize the media lies in parents and their families. "Dialogue between families and those responsible for social communications"<sup>[97]</sup> would be beneficial to every family. Regulating the use of media in the home, pressing public authorities to provide guidelines for media based on the criteria of truth and human dignity would be necessary. An effective family ministry has to harness the power of the family and direct it to this important task.

#### 4. The Family and Social Transformation

91. 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 Reign of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them to the plan of God'."<sup>[98]</sup> 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. Such mission, however, is likewise the mission of every family, Christian or otherwise, for no family is ever isolated from this world that is always in need of transformation. And the journey to the Reign of God is the journey of every family.

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

93. Social change has to 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. At the same time, children do evangelize their parents for children have the sensitivity to intuitively recognize actions that are just, transparent, fair, kind and generous. Moreover, parents and their children in solidarity with other families can play a strong advocacy role in society through "family politics"<sup>[99]</sup> or political intervention in promoting transparency and accountability among public servants, or fostering mediation and reconciliation among conflicting parties.

94. Such family politics should also be exercised in the defense of their own family rights,<sup>[100]</sup> 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.<sup>[101]</sup> 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.

#### 5. The Family and Inter-Religious Dialogue

95. 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.

96. 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."<sup>[102]</sup> 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.<sup>[103]</sup> Mutual respect for common values will lead to mutual collaboration to protect and promote them.

97. 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.<sup>[104]</sup> 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.<sup>[105]</sup> The Christian family needs to do this proclamation at least through the catechism of its members and the witness of their lives.

98. But it is especially in a marriage of peoples from different religions that inter-religious dialogue is both a dialogue of word, of love and life.<sup>[106]</sup> 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.

## **6. The Family and the Basic Ecclesial/Human Community**

99. 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, a solid starting point for building a new society, the expression of a civilization of love."<sup>[107]</sup> There is no doubt that the family as the domestic church has a central place in the pastoral thrust of building Basic Ecclesial Communities in Asia. The family is the most fundamental community component of the BEC. 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 inter-religious families in Basic Human Communities gather for inter-religious prayer, reflection, fellowship and common action for the good of the neighborhood.

100. May it not even be said that focal point of evangelization should be the family as object and subject, to which all parish pastoral programs are geared? The BEC would then be a community of families, and the parish truly a community of communities.<sup>[108]</sup> 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.<sup>[109]</sup> This in turn would require a renewal of parish structures and pastoral programs as well as a reorientation 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.

## **7. The Family as Prophetic**

101. From all these reflections on the family, a very important dimension powerfully emerges. The family is authentically prophetic. Endowed by God with communion, solidarity and called to assist in building a culture of integral life, its very nature points to the values of the Reign of God, eminently human values that it is called to share. As a sign of God's Reign, the family is a prophetic community in society. It calls society to renew itself profoundly, given the many death-dealing forces that wantonly destroy God's gift of life, love, justice, harmony, and peace.

102. Faithful to its identity and vocation as the church in the home, the family is likewise a prophet to the whole Church. When the Church fails to live according to its identity as the sanctuary of covenant love and life, as communion and solidarity; when its energies weaken in its mission of integral salvation; when its pastors behave as less than shepherds after the heart of God; when equality in dignity, co-responsibility, participation, and self-giving generosity no longer animate the Church; when power, selfishness and discrimination threaten its inner structure — it is the family that prophetically calls the Family of God to the road of profound renewal. In this way, through the witness of the domestic church, the whole Church is "nuptialized," i.e., influenced by the experience of married couples. For this reason, the family has to live always in union with God in a dynamic spirituality of communion and discipleship. 📌

## **E. Family Spirituality Toward a Culture of Integral Life<sup>[110]</sup>**

103. The crucial question that parents and their families ask is: What does my faith tell me about the meaning of our marriage and of our family? Unless they have a response that integrally connects faith and life and which becomes operative in their lives, marital and family life would lose its most fundamental guide in coping with the various challenge that confront it. The first level of response is in the meaning of marriage and family we have reflected on in terms of a covenant of love and life, communion, solidarity and mission. At a much deeper level of response, at the very center of one's being, is spirituality, a spirituality of communion, a spirituality of discipleship, a eucharistic spirituality.

## 1. Spirituality of Communion

104. At the heart of marriage is love, God's love drawing man and woman to each other in a union of love — communion — in marriage, a love radically open to life in their children. Marital spirituality is founded on this communion of love. For marital spirituality to be a spirituality of communion, the whole person of the wife or husband is involved, including emotions, feelings, the heart and body, the elements of sexuality that make man and woman different and fundamentally oriented to each other. This means that in marriage a singularly peak moment of profound communion of mind and heart indeed takes place through the mutually self-giving conjugal act, truly a wondrous gift and mystery from God. The profound sense of oneness that married couples experience in the conjugal act, the deep feeling of self-giving love for the beloved, points to a conjugal mystical experience where one loses oneself completely for the other. They are drawn to and by the goodness of life and are led to comprehend more profoundly God's very nature as Self-Giving Love (Agape). Hence, rather than weakening spirituality as in a dualistic perspective that denigrates the human body, the loving communion of mind and heart expressed in the conjugal act vivifies, supports and strengthens marital spirituality as a spirituality of communion. Moreover, in fulfilling its very nature as open to fertility, conjugal love enhances communion. The birth of a child and the image of father, mother and child evoke Trinitarian Communion. Children are God's precious gifts and God's image. They bring joy to parents. They strengthen conjugal and family relationships. They challenge the parents to mature as parents.

105. As in marriage, so at the heart of the family 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 also a union of hearts and minds<sup>[111]</sup> 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 integral life.

106. Communion within the family, however, reaches out to the wider community and impels the family toward a mission of service<sup>[112]</sup> for the sake of the Reign of God. 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.

## **2. Spirituality of Discipleship and the Way of the Ordinary**

107. For Christian families a spirituality of communion is a spirituality of discipleship, of belonging to and following Christ. Family discipleship begins with listening to Christ and heeding his word in their ordinary experiences as couples and families in the light of the Gospel. 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."<sup>[113]</sup> 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 joys and the hopes, the grief and the anxieties, the troubles and afflictions that the family experiences, that it discovers what pleases God and what does not, what leads to integrity, justice, unity, harmony, 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 integral life. The manner by which they live in this very ordinary setting is the way they show their commitment to God's reign. For married couples and families steeped in faith it is precisely in the ordinary that the Extraordinary is experienced and recognized; in the ordinary, God is made visible and palpable.

108. 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 faith experiences of married couples and their families as a significant component in ecclesial discernment.

109. Acknowledging the incomparable uniqueness and richness of the Christian sacrament of marriage and its demands on the spirituality of Christian families, we need to expand our horizon. The same values that are important in the spirituality of Christian families are similarly the values needed in the human relationships within ecumenical and inter-religious families. They are values of the Reign of God - life, communion, solidarity, mission, service, fidelity, integrity, justice, unity, harmony, peace, love, listening to God and heeding God's will - values lived in the ordinariness of everyday family life. There is a discipleship of the Reign of God. What is also said below about conscience formation, prayer, love fortified by mutual sharing in sorrow or in joy, the faithful fulfillment of responsibilities, "eucharistic" selfgiving and mutual sanctification in the family are likewise necessary for a spirituality of the Reign of God.

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

110. The role of conscience is indispensable in family spirituality. God has imprinted into the heart of every person a law that has to be obeyed as God's voice - to do what is good and to avoid what is evil. Conscience "is in the core of being", "in the sanctuary of the heart." Conscience is God's gift for men and women to be truly human, and to be persons of God-experience. When every member of the family

follows conscience "aided by objective moral norms",<sup>[114]</sup> the family unites in love with God's own will. Communion with God is strengthened. It guides families in the common search for truth. In following conscience, members of families should not merely follow the current opinion or their own desires and wants. Their lives 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".<sup>[115]</sup> Especially is this significant when we realize that sin has caused the disordering of human freedom and God's grace is needed to direct it to the good.<sup>[116]</sup> In these days of increasing secularism God is becoming an afterthought and His Church a "voice in the wilderness." Hence, conscience 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."<sup>[117]</sup> To form an upright conscience, docile to God's law, is therefore 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. At the same time when children see their parents exemplify fidelity to responsibility, they are inspired and encouraged to emulate what they observe in their parents. They would be more able to learn and live filial piety, reverence and obedience.

111. Always and in all things, ordinary or extraordinary, the reliable, gracious and transforming presence of God in the family is a sure source of strength in the journey to holiness. Our faith tells us that Christian 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."<sup>[118]</sup> 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.

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

112. Prayer is at the center of this spirituality, "prayer by the family, prayer for the family, and prayer with the family."<sup>[119]</sup> Families need to be both encouraged and trained to pray regularly as a family, and not only on special occasions such as birthdays and other anniversaries. Family prayer has to link in creative ways the family's present everyday experiences with the values of the Gospel. Reading and reflecting on the Word of God as in *Lectio Divina* should become a regular feature of family prayer. Likewise fruitful for family life as experience shows is devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mother of God, Queen of the Family, especially the regular and prayerful recitation of the Rosary. Creating new prayer forms in the home as well as renewing rituals and devotions that they have grown accustomed to would be beneficial. Most evocative of God's dominion of love is the prayer that the Lord Jesus taught his family of faith. The Our Father is truly a universal prayer and pre-eminently a prayer of the family whose ultimate Father is God.

113. A prayerful family is able to walk with the Spirit, live in the Spirit, remain in the Spirit and follow Christ in faithful discipleship. 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."<sup>[120]</sup>

114. 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."<sup>[121]</sup> 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.

115. 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 and covenantal love. Pope John Paul II reminds us: "The Eucharist creates communion and fosters communion".<sup>[122]</sup> 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."<sup>[123]</sup> In this context would it not be desirable to celebrate the Eucharistic Year of October 2004 to October 2005 as a year likewise of the Family so that the Family could more faithfully heed the words of Pope John Paul II: "Family, Become What You Are!"? 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. For this reason the celebration of the Eucharist should be a family event with the participation of all members of the family, including children and infants.<sup>[124]</sup> 📌

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

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

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

- Therefore, in breadth family ministry should include but also extend beyond our usual concerns 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 to defend and promote vigorously our faith-convictions:
  - \* that "the family is based on marriage, that intimate union of life in complementariness between a man and woman which is constituted in the freely contracted and publicly expressed indissoluble bond of matrimony and is open to the transmission of life";<sup>[125]</sup>
  
  - \* that "marriage is the natural institution to which the mission of transmitting life is exclusively entrusted";<sup>[126]</sup>
  
  - \* that Christian marriage is a divinely instituted sacrament.
  
- Given the social, cultural, and religious realities in Asia, family ministry should also aim to prepare couples and families to meet the challenges of poverty, migration, gender, youth, indigenous families, environment, politics, economic and cultural globalization;
  
- 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 striving toward a culture of integral life;
  
- Family ministry should empower families to become evangelizers, such that ministry is not only for families but by families.

117. From what may be observed it would seem that family ministry in some Episcopal conferences in Asia has strong programs on prenuptial catechesis and on-going marriage formation. They are also quite well set on programs of Responsible Parenthood with emphasis on Natural Family Planning. 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 general program directions, other than the pastoral directions already being taken by family ministries in the Episcopal conferences: 📌

## **B. General Program Directions/Orientation**

### **118. 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;
  
- reorienting all pastoral programs so that they may contribute to strengthening and empowering the family for mission;

(b) Faith-Formation in the Family –

- promoting integral faith formation in the family, including missionary formation, leading toward a spirituality of communion, discipleship and mission;
  
- promoting the formation of parents to accept children as gifts of God and train them for citizenship;
  
- empowering parents through proper faith formation, family counseling, marriage enrichment, and other means to fulfill their calling as the primary educators, catechists, and missionary formators of their children;
  
- on-going faith formation of husband and wife, parents, and children toward a culture of integral life;
  
- strengthening Catholic values of marriage while remaining open to respectful dialogue with the beliefs and values of other religions;

- training for family prayer, bible reading and reflection or Lectio Divina in the family;
- promoting functional knowledge of the Charter of the Rights of the Family 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;
- educating and forming both men and women so that they may be able to assume a complementary and partnership role in sustaining and fostering marital life as well as the integral care of the children;
- 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 ministry; 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 –

- raising the awareness of families regarding the various vocations in the Church, including the vocation to family;
- forming young people for vocation to family to include proper discernment in choosing their life-partners in marriage;
- on-going faith formation of husband and wife, parents, and children toward a culture of integral life;
- forming the young for vocation to family to include on-going faith formation of husband and wife, parents, and children toward a culture of integral life;
- on-going faith formation of husband and wife, parents, and children toward a culture of integral life;
- providing the dimension of vocation animation in the family ministry so that families participate not only in supporting vocations to the priestly and religious life but also in discovering, animating, nourishing, and recruiting them;

(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;
- raising the awareness of couples regarding anti-natal and anti-life approaches to population control and organizing them for "family politics" while promoting the Church's teachings on Responsible Parenthood;
- producing materials for sex education, moral issues in conjugal relationships, Christian parenting, missionary formation of children, 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;
- incorporating the mass media into the Church's pastoral planning and activity and integrating the Christian message with the "new culture" that is promoted by modern communications so that families may be assisted to proclaim the Gospel.

**119. 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, ecumenical marriages, and inter-religious 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;
- empowering parents through proper faith formation, family counseling, marriage enrichment, and other means to fulfill their calling as the primary 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;

#### **120. 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 that enables 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, organizing and training women for the task of promoting social justice and peace;
- providing skills training, establishing networks and building family solidarity among inter-religious 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 family ministry in Catholic schools in order to care for ecumenical and inter-religious families especially since schools act in loco parentis;
- setting up competent multidisciplinary groups of lay people and couples for social and political advocacy on behalf of Gospel values threatened by media and legislation;

– setting up child care programs;

– stopping child and women trafficking for all forms of activity, particularly sex tourism;

121. The fundamental dynamic force of family ministry in Asia has to be a relevant and engaged Family Spirituality of Communion and Mission and a family spirituality of discipleship 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 Reign of God spirituality that would serve as a common denominator for mission and aim at assisting Asian families establish a genuine culture of life in Asia. 📌

### **C. SOME PRIORITIES AND PLANS DRAWN UP BY REGIONAL GROUPS AT 8TH FABC PLENARY ASSEMBLY:**

#### **123. General Orientations:**

a. The Family as Evangelizer for a New Evangelization in a New Century;

b. The Family as the Focal Point of Evangelization in the diocesan plan;

c. Family as Domestic Church:

– Church witnessing to family life through education reform, support of right social policies, etc.;

– Creating awareness of the family's role in social transformation;

– Preparing families for dialogue of life and action through neighborhood involvement, collaboration with the like-minded;

– Developing Family Life Liturgies and Prayer Books for celebrations like eve of wedding ('roce'), anniversaries, First Holy Communion, etc.

#### **124. Programs:**

– Promoting systematic and holistic Love and Life / Family Enrichment programs

\* at all levels (children, youth, adult);

\* for ecumenical, inter-religious, intercultural families;

\* for other forms of families (single parent families, families of divorced, remarried, migrants, etc.)

– Providing specialized Healing and Pastoral Care for families in special situations (divorced, addiction / violence-affected);

– Providing special care for children of deprived families;

– Setting up a Ministry for Men:

\* Developing Spirituality for Men;

\* Transforming distorted, corrupted, deformed masculinity and fatherhood so that men may radiate their own beauty and splendor as willed by God' divine plan;

\* Bringing them back to assume a responsible role in family life.

– Encouraging public witnessing to values of good and stable marriages at family milestones (e.g., wedding anniversaries, birthdays) through liturgies

\* Institutionalizing contact programs for couples in first five years of marriage

- \* Promoting programs that families would see as beneficial — like better parenting, relationship-building with siblings, parents, in-laws, conflict resolution

#### **125. Structures:**

- Reorganizing Family Ministry to affirm, encourage and enhance the environment for Family Life with Mentor Couples as Leaders, Priests as Collaborators and Professional Counselors as Facilitators;
- Establishing structures of Faith Formation:
  - \* Home Missions / Family Councils / Cells in parishes and dioceses;
  - \* BECs / BCCs / SCCs / sharing in small groups;
  - \* Bible Study groups in Families / family groups, to counter Pentecostal cults and keep families together;
  - \* With Pastors, undergoing formation as animators in Family Ministry.

#### **126. Research and Action on:**

- Status of women;
- Families of migrant workers / white collar and other professionals facing frequent separations because of job demands.

#### **127. Issues / Concerns for FABC Suggested by Regional Groups:**

- Develop an Asian Theology of Marriage and Family – vocation, mission and conjugal communion;
- Create a Family Office / Desk in FABC;

- Explore ways of affirming Asian family values;
  
- Promote Ministry for Ecumenical, Inter-Religious, Inter-cultural Marriages to inculcate mutual respect on religious practices and transmission of values to children;
  
- Study social systems of indigenous peoples and how they can contribute to enrichment of family life;
  
- Watch for inroads being made through trends / new civil laws that erode Christian concept of family (euthanasia, abortion, same sex marriages / contract marriages / living-in, "Double Income No Kids (DINK) / Single Income No Kids (SINK) cultures;
  
- Promote studies on impact on family life of emerging Information, Entertainment and Communications Technologies (not just pornography but isolationism — 'do your own thing');
  
- Encourage discernment and critical evaluation of media content and promotion;
  
- Special pastoral concerns:
  - \* Marginalized / vulnerable groups;
  
  - \* Families of migrant workers (encourage employers to adopt family-friendly attitude towards domestic helpers);
  
  - \* Elderly / senior citizens by developing neighborhood extended-family support;
  
  - \* Trafficking in women and children;
  
  - \* Marital break-up and Domestic violence

- \* Pastoral care for Same Gender Oriented (SGO) persons to respond to the universal call to holiness and service and to live as faithful members of the Church. 📌

## **APPENDIX**

### **CHARTER OF THE RIGHTS OF THE FAMILY**

*Presented by the Holy See to all persons, institutions and authorities concerned with the mission of the family in today's world October 22, 1983*

#### **Preamble**

Considering that:

- A. The rights of the person, even though they are expressed as rights of the individual, have a fundamental social dimension which finds an innate and vital expression in the family;
- B. the family is based on marriage, that intimate union of life in complementarity between a man and a woman which is constituted in the freely contracted and publicly expressed indissoluble bond of matrimony and is open to the transmission of life;
- C. marriage is the natural institution to which the mission of transmitting life is exclusively entrusted;
- D. the family, a natural society, exists prior to the State or any other community, and possesses inherent rights which are inalienable;
- E. the family constitutes, much more than a mere juridical, social and economic unit, a community of love and solidarity, which is uniquely suited to teach and transmit cultural, ethical, social, spiritual and religious values, essential for the development and well-being of its own members and of society.

- F. the family is the place where different generations come together and help one another to grow in human wisdom and to harmonize the rights of individuals with other demands of social life;
- G. the family and society, which are mutually linked by vital and organic bonds, have a complementary function in the defense and advancement of the good of every person and of humanity;
- H. the experience of different cultures throughout history has shown the need for society to recognize and defend the institution of the family;
- I. society, and in a particular manner the State and International Organizations, must protect the family through measures of a political, economic, social and juridical character, which aim at consolidating the unity and stability of the family so that it can exercise its specific function;
- J. the rights, the fundamental needs, the well-being and the values of the family, even though they are progressively safeguarded in some cases, are often ignored and not rarely undermined by laws, institutions and socio-economic programs;
- K. many families are forced to live in situations of poverty which prevent them from carrying out their role with dignity;
- L. the Catholic Church, aware that the good of the person, of society and of the Church herself passes by way of the family, has always held it part of her mission to proclaim to all the plan of God instilled in human nature concerning marriage and the family, to promote these two institutions and to defend them against all those who attack them;
- M. the Synod of Bishops celebrated in 1980 explicitly recommended that a Charter of the Rights of the Family be drawn up and circulated to all concerned; the Holy See, having consulted the Bishops' Conferences, now presents this "Charter of the Rights of the Family" and urges all States, International Organizations, and all interested Institutions and persons to promote respect for these rights, and to secure their effective recognition and observance.

### **Article 1**

All persons have the right to the free choice of their state of life and thus to marry and establish a family or to remain single.

- a) Every man and every woman, having reached marriageable age and having the necessary capacity, has the right to marry and establish a family without any discrimination whatsoever; legal restrictions to the exercise of this right, whether they be of a permanent or temporary nature, can be introduced only

when they are required by grave and objective demands of the institution of marriage itself and its social and public significance; they must respect in all cases the dignity and the fundamental rights of the person.

- b) Those who wish to marry and establish a family have the right to expect from society the moral, educational, social and economic conditions which will enable them to exercise their right to marry in all maturity and responsibility.
- c) The institutional value of marriage should be upheld by the public authorities; the situation of non-married couples must not be placed on the same level as marriage duly contracted.

## **Article 2**

Marriage cannot be contracted except by free and full consent duly expressed by the spouses.

- a) With due respect for the traditional role of the families in certain cultures in guiding the decision of their children, all pressure which would impede the choice of a specific person as spouse is to be avoided.
- b) The future spouses have the right to their religious liberty. Therefore to impose as a prior condition for marriage a denial of faith or a profession of faith which is contrary to conscience, constitutes a violation of this right.
- c) The spouses, in the natural complementarity which exists between man and woman, enjoy the same dignity and equal rights regarding the marriage.

## **Article 3**

The spouses have the inalienable right to found a family and to decide on the spacing of births and the number of children to be born, taking into full consideration their duties towards themselves, their children already born, the family and society, in a just hierarchy of values and in accordance with the objective moral order which excludes recourse to contraception, sterilization and abortion.

- a) The activities of public authorities and private organizations which attempt in any way to limit the freedom of couples in deciding about their children constitute a grave offense against human dignity and justice.
- b) In international relations, economic aid for the advancement of peoples must not be conditioned on acceptance of programs of contraception, sterilization or abortion.
- c) The family has a right to assistance by society in the bearing and rearing of children. Those married couples who have a large family have a right to adequate aid and should not be subjected to discrimination.

#### **Article 4**

Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception.

- a) Abortion is a direct violation of the fundamental right to life of the human being.
- b) Respect of the dignity of the human being excludes all experimental manipulation or exploitation of the human embryo.
- c) All interventions on the genetic heritage of the human person that are not aimed at correcting anomalies constitute a violation of the right to bodily integrity and contradict the good of the family.
- d) Children, both before and after birth, have the right to special protection and assistance, as do their mothers during pregnancy and for a reasonable period of time after childbirth.
- e) All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, enjoy the same right to social protection, with a view to their integral personal development.
- f) Orphans or children who are deprived of the assistance of their parents or guardians must receive particular protection on the part of society. The State, with regard to foster-care or adoption, must provide legislation which assists suitable families to welcome into their homes children who are in need of permanent or temporary care. This legislation must, at the same time, respect the natural rights of the parents.

- g) Children who are handicapped have the right to find in the home and the school an environment suitable to their human development.

## **Article 5**

Since they have conferred life on their children, parents have the original, primary and inalienable right to educate them; hence they must be acknowledged as the first and foremost educators of their children.

- a) Parents have the right to educate their children in conformity with their moral and religious convictions, taking into account the cultural traditions of the family which favor the good and the dignity of the child; they should also receive from society the necessary aid and assistance to perform their educational role properly.
- b) Parents have the right to freely choose schools or other means necessary to educate their children in keeping with their convictions. Public authorities must ensure that public subsidies are so allocated that parents are truly free to exercise this right without incurring unjust burdens. Parents should not have to sustain, directly or indirectly, extra charges which would deny or unjustly limit the exercise of this freedom.
- c) Parents have the right to ensure that their children are not compelled to attend classes which are not in agreement with their own moral and religious convictions. In particular, sex education is a basic right of the parents and must always be carried out under their close supervision, whether at home or in educational centers chosen and controlled by them.
- d) The rights of parents are violated when a compulsory system of education is imposed by the State from which all religious formation is excluded.
- e) The primary right of parents to educate their children must be upheld in all forms of collaboration between parents, teachers and school authorities, and particularly in forms of participation designed to give citizens a voice in the functioning of schools and in the formulation and implementation of educational policies.
- f) The family has the right to expect that the means of social communication will be positive instruments for the building up of society, and will reinforce the fundamental values of the family. At the same time the family has the right to be adequately protected, especially with regard to its youngest members, from the negative effects and misuse of the mass media.

## **Article 6**

The family has the right to exist and to progress as a family.

- a) Public authorities must respect and foster the dignity, lawful independence, privacy, integrity and stability of every family.
- b) Divorce attacks the very institution of marriage and of the family.
- c) The extended family system, where it exists, should be held in esteem and helped to carry out better its traditional role of solidarity and mutual assistance, while at the same time respecting the rights of the nuclear family and the personal dignity of each member.

## **Article 7**

Every family has the right to live freely its own domestic religious life under the guidance of the parents, as well as the right to profess publicly and to propagate the faith, to take part in public worship and in freely chosen programs of religious instruction, without suffering discrimination.

## **Article 8**

The family has the right to exercise its social and political function in the construction of society.

- a) Families have the right to form associations with other families and institutions, in order to fulfill the family's role suitably and effectively, as well as to protect the rights, foster the good and represent the interests of the family.
- b) On the economic, social, juridical and cultural levels, the rightful role of families and family associations must be recognized in the planning and development of programs which touch on family life.

## **Article 9**

Families have the right to be able to rely on an adequate family policy on the part of public authorities in the juridical, economic, social and fiscal domains, without any discrimination whatsoever.

- a) Families have the right to economic conditions which assure them a standard of living appropriate to their dignity and full development. They should not be impeded from acquiring and maintaining private possessions which would favor stable family life; the laws concerning inheritance or transmission of property must respect the needs and rights of family members.
  
- b) Families have the right to measures in the social domain which take into account their needs, especially in the event of the premature death of one or both parents, of the abandonment of one of the spouses, of accident, or sickness or invalidity, in the case of unemployment, or whenever the family has to bear extra burdens on behalf of its members for reasons of old age, physical or mental handicaps or the education of children.
  
- c) The elderly have the right to find within their own family or, when this is not possible, in suitable institutions, an environment which will enable them to live their later years of life in serenity while pursuing those activities which are compatible with their age and which enable them to participate in social life.
  
- d) The rights and necessities of the family, and especially the value of family unity, must be taken into consideration in penal legislation and policy, in such a way that a detainee remains in contact with his or her family and that the family is adequately sustained during the period of detention.

#### **Article 10**

Families have a right to a social and economic order in which the organization of work permits the members to live together, and does not hinder the unity, well-being, health and the stability of the family, while offering also the possibility of wholesome recreation.

- a) Remuneration for work must be sufficient for establishing and maintaining a family with dignity, either through a suitable salary, called a "family wage," or through other social measures such as family allowances or the remuneration of the work in the home of one of the parents; it should be such that mothers will not be obliged to work outside the home to the detriment of family life and especially of the education of the children.
  
- b) The work of the mother in the home must be recognized and respected because of its value for the family and for society.

#### **Article 11**

The family has the right to decent housing, fitting for family life and commensurate to the number of the members, in a physical environment that provides the basic services for the life of the family and the community.

## Article 12

The families of migrants have the right to the same protection as that accorded other families.

- a) The families of immigrants have the right to respect for their own culture and to receive support and assistance towards their integration into the community to which they contribute.
- b) Emigrant workers have the right to see their family united as soon as possible.
- c) Refugees have the right to the assistance of public authorities and International Organizations in facilitating the reunion of their families.

## Sources and References

- A. "Rerum novarum", no. 9; "Gaudium et spes", no. 24.
- B. "Pacem in terris", Part 1; "Gaudium et spes", nos. 48 and 50; "Familiaris consortio", no. 19; "Codex Iuris Canonici", no. 1056.
- C. "Gaudium et spes", no. 50; "Humanae vitae", no. 12; "Familiaris consortio", no. 28.
- D. the family, a natural society, exists prior to the State or any other community, and possesses inherent rights which are inalienable;
- E. "Rerum novarum", nos. 9 and 10; "Familiaris consortio", no. 45.
- F. "Familiaris consortio", no. 43.
- G. "Gaudium et spes", no. 52; "Familiaris consortio", no. 21.
- H. "Gaudium et spes", no. 52; "Familiaris consortio", nos. 42 and 45.
- I. "Familiaris consortio", no. 45.
- J. "Familiaris consortio", nos. 6 and 77.

K. many families are forced to live in situations of poverty which prevent them from carrying out their role with dignity;

L. "Familiaris consortio", nos. 3 and 46.

M. "Familiaris consortio", no. 46.

#### **art. 1**

"Rerum novarum", no. 9; "Pacem in terris", Part 1; "Gaudium et spes", no. 26; "Universal Declaration of Human Rights", no. 16, 1.

a) "Codex Iuris Canonici", nos. 1058 and 1077; "Universal Declaration", no. 16, 1.

b) "Gaudium et spes", no. 52, "Familiaris consortio", no. 81.

c) "Gaudium et spes", no. 52; "Familiaris consortio", nos. 81 and 82.

#### **art. 2**

"Gaudium et spes", no. 52; "Codex Iuris Canonici", no. 1057; "Universal Declaration", nos. 16, 2.

a) "Gaudium et spes", no. 52.

b) "Dignitatis humanae", no. 6.

c) "Gaudium et spes", no. 49; "Familiaris consortio", nos. 19 and 22; "Codex Iuris Canonici", no. 1135; "Universal Declaration", no. 16, 1.

#### **art. 3**

"Populorum progressio", no. 37; "Gaudium et spes", nos. 50 and 87; "Humanae vitae", no. 10; "Familiaris consortio", nos. 30 and 46.

a) Familiaris consortio, no. 30.

b) Familiaris consortio, no. 30.

c) Gaudium et spes, no. 50.

#### **art. 4**

Gaudium et spes, no. 51; Familiaris consortio, no. 26.

a) Humanae vitae, no. 14; Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration on Procured Abortion, November 18, 1974; Familiaris consortio, no. 30.

b) Pope John Paul II, Address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, October 23, 1982.

c) Universal Declaration, no. 25, 2; Convention on the Rights of the Child, Preamble and no. 4.

d) Universal Declaration, no. 25, 2.

e) Familiaris consortio, no. 41.

f) Familiaris consortio, no. 77.

#### **art. 5**

Divini Illius Magistri, nos. 27-34; Gravissimum educationis, no. 3; Familiaris consortio, no. 36; Codex Iuris Canonici, nos. 793 and 1136.

a) Familiaris consortio, no. 46.

b) Gravissimum educationis, no. 7; Dignitatis humanae, no. 5; Pope John Paul II, Religious Freedom and the Helsinki Final Act (Letter to the Heads of State of the nations which signed the Helsinki Final Act), 4b; Familiaris consortio, no. 40; Codex Iuris Canonici, no. 797.

c) Dignitatis humanae, no. 5; Familiaris consortio, nos. 37 and 40.

d) Dignitatis humanae, no. 5; Familiaris consortio, no. 40.

e) Familiaris consortio, no. 40; Codex Iuris Canonici, no. 796.

f) Pope Paul VI, Message for the Third World Communications Day, 1969; Familiaris consortio, no. 76.

#### **art. 6**

Familiaris consortio, no. 46.

a) Rerum novarum, no. 10; Familiaris consortio, no. 46; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, no. 17.

b) Gaudium et spes, nos. 48 and 50.

#### **art. 7**

Dignitatis humanae, no. 5; Religious Freedom and the Helsinki Final Act, 4b; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, no. 18.

#### **art. 8**

Familiaris consortio, nos. 44 and 48.

a) Apostolicam actuositatem, no. 11; Familiaris consortio, nos. 46 and 72.

b) Familiaris consortio, nos. 44 and 45.

#### **art. 9**

Laborem exercens, nos. 10 and 19; Familiaris consortio, no. 45; Universal Declaration, nos. 16, 3 and 22; International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, nos. 10, 1.

a) Mater et magistra, Part II; Laborem exercens, no. 10; Familiaris consortio, no. 45; Universal Declaration, nos. 22 and 25; International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 7, a, ii.

b) Familiaris consortio, nos. 45 and 46; Universal Declaration, no. 25, 1; International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, nos. 9, 10, 1 and 10, 2.

c) Gaudium et spes, no. 52; Familiaris consortio, no. 27.

#### **art. 10**

Laborem exercens, no. 19; Familiaris consortio, no. 77; Universal Declaration, no. 23, 3.

a) Laborem exercens, no. 19; Familiaris consortio, nos. 23 and 81.

b) Familiaris consortio, no. 23.

#### **art. 11**

Apostolicam actuositatem, no. 8; Familiaris consortio, no. 81; International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, nos. 11, 1.

#### **art. 12**

Familiaris consortio, no. 77; European Social Charter, 19. 

**Published October 2004**

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- b. The Witness of Consecrated Life in Asia Today, by Sr. Julma C. Neo.
- c. A Renewed Church in Asia: In Solidarity with Women, by Virginia Saldanha.
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110. *Family in Communication; Communication in the Family*, by the FABC Office of Social Communication, 2004.
111. Final Document, The 8th FABC Plenary Assembly, "The Asian Family towards a Culture of Integral Life", 2004
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### FOOTNOTES

- 1 Since its inception in 1974 the FABC in plenary session has presumed the major role of the family in evangelization. Only the 4th 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 indispensable role in evangelization and in the formation not only of the laity, but also of the Church as a whole.
- 2 *Lumen Gentium* (LG), 11; *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 11; *Familiaris Consortio* (FC), 21. From the Latin word *domus*, home, the term domestic church shall be used throughout the paper although it might conjure up related words such as "domesticated," "domestic worker" that can evoke images of inferiority, passivity, submissiveness, and timidity.
- 3 Unless otherwise noted all scriptural quotations are from The New Revised Standard Version.
- 4 See The International Social Survey Program (ISSP), 2002; cited by the Bishops of South Korea, Intervention on the Working Paper (CBCK, IWP), July 22, 2004, p. 1.
- 5 For instance, in Kazakhstan it is "difficult to speak of 'Catholic' or even 'Christian' families due to the many mixed marriages with non-practicing Christians, with Muslims, or non-believers." In fact, "Kazakhs who become Christians are often ostracized or even threatened with death by their relatives or co-nationals." Thus Family Ministry has to start from the beginning with the training of suitable personnel. See Report of the Conference of the Bishops of Kazakhstan for the 8th Plenary Assembly of the FABC, pp. 1-2.
- 6 Catholic Bishops Conference of Japan, Intervention on the Working Paper (CBCJ, IWP), July 1, 2004, p. 1.
- 7 See FABC VI, Manila, 1995.

- 8 From the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itiner-ant People, Rome, 2004.
- 9 See Centesimus Annus (CA), 32
- 10 The Japanese Bishops state that while other Asian families face economic poverty, "the major poverty confronting Japanese families is spiritual poverty," CBCJ, IWP, p. 1.
- 11 Even as the authority of fathers has weakened in Japanese families with mothers managing the household, "we still find sexism in society (especially in the companies)", CBCJ, IWP, July 1, 2004, p. 2.
- 12 According to international sociological categories, "girl-child" and "boy-child" refer to children below four years of age.
- 13 See FABC V1, Manila, 1995.
- 14 While Japan strictly follows the prohibition of child labor, it is of record that Japan is a destination country for working children from other countries, see CBCJ, 1WP, p. 2, citing the annual report of the U.S. State Department, June 2004.
- 15 See CBCK, IWP, p. 2; CBCJ, IWP, p. 2
- 16 See Intervention by the Holy See Delegation at the Special Committee of the 57th General Assembly of the United Nations on Human Embryonic Cloning, 23 September 2002.
- 17 Ibid. The Holy See refers, for instance, to stem cells developed from adult bone marrows.
- 18 To be noted is the observation of the Bishops of Japan who believe that in Japan "it is not possible for the family to be the basic cell of the ecclesial community" since "we can often find only one Catholic in so many families", CBCJ, IWP, p. 2.
- 19 Final Statement of the 4th 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.
- 20 E.g., Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1994, nos.1601-58.
- 21 See Gen. 2:7; Acts 17:25.
- 22 See Rom. 6:23; Jn. 4:10, 14; Rev. 21:6.
- 23 Rom. 6:22.
- 24 Jn. 10:10.
- 25 See Gaudium et Spes (GS), 27.
- 26 2 Tm. 1:10; 4:1; Heb. 9:27-28.
- 27 See Gen. 1: 26-28, 2:7; Wis. 15:11.

- 28 Gen. 1: 26, 27.
- 29 Col. 1:15-16.
- 30 Col. 1: 20
- 31 Hos. 11:3-4.
- 32 Is. 66:13.
- 33 See Hos. 2: 16, 19-20.
- 34 Is. 43:1, 4.
- 35 Ex. 22:22-23; Dt. 24:17-22; Is. 1:17; Jer. 22:3; Zech. 7:10.
- 36 See Ez. 11:19; 36: 26.
- 37 See, e.g., Ps. 97:11-12; 145:13, 17-21; Wis 4:7-14
- 38 See Jn. 3:16.
- 39 1 Jn. 1:1. 1 Jn. 1:1
- 40 Jn. 10: 17-18, see also Jn. 5: 26.
- 41 Jn. 14:6.
- 42 Jn. 14: 23.
- 43 Jn. 10:10 (The New Jerusalem Bible).
- 44 See, e.g., the Beatitudes in Mt. 5:3-10
- 45 Jn. 3:3-8.
- 46 Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12.
- 47 Jn. 4:14.
- 48 Jn.6:34,48.
- 49 Jn. 6: 33.
- 50 Jn. 6:5 1.
- 51 Jn: 6:54, 56.
- 52 Phil.1:21.

- 53 Jn. 1: 16.
- 54 Jn. 13:34-35.
- 55 Dictionary of Biblical Theology, ed., Xavier Leon-Dufour, updated 2nd ed., 1982; Jn. 19:30.
- 56 2 Cor. 5:17.
- 57 Eph. 2:19; 1 Tm. 3:15.
- 58 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 11, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 199.
- 59 See Rom. 8: 1, 9-10.
- 60 Gal. 5:22.
- 61 Rom. 14:17 (The New Jerusalem Bible).
- 62 Gal. 5: 19-21.
- 63 Gal. 5: 13-14.
- 64 Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor 12:4-7; 12:12; Eph. 4:16.
- 65 CA, 39.
- 66 See Mt. 1:18-2:23; Lk. 1:26-2:52.
- 67 Lk. 2:19, 5 1.
- 68 Lk. 1:38.
- 69 Heb. 5:8.
- 70 Mk. 3:33; Mt. 12:48.
- 71 Mt. 25:40.
- 72 Jn. 19:26-27.
- 73 See Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World, May 31, 2004, no. 6 - citing a reflection of Pope John Paul 11 on the human body based on Gen. 2:4-25.
- 74 GS, 48; see Gen. 2: 24.
- 75 Mt. 19: 6.
- 76 LG 48.

- 77 See Eph. 5: 21-33.
- 78 Eph. 5:33.
- 79 Salvatore Fisichella, "The Christian Family in a Time of Cultural Change, " Acts of the International Theological -Pastoral Congress, The Christian Family: Good News for the Third Millennium, Fourth World Meeting of Families, Manila, January 22-24, 2003, p. 46.
- 80 LG, 48.
- 81 Mt. 19:5-6.
- 82 LG, 48; see also 50.
- 83 Gen. 2: 24; Mt. 19: 3-9.
- 84 See LG 11.
- 85 Evangehi Nuntiandi (EN), 71.
- 86 See Redemptoris Mission (RM), 80; Familiaris Consortio (FC), 54.
- 87 Jn. 13:35.
- 88 Gen. 1:28.
- 89 Is. 38:19; Jer. 31:3.
- 90 Ecclesia in Asia (EA), 46.
- 91 Pope John Paul 11, Message for the World Day of Peace, I January 1998, no. 3.
- 92 FC 6.
- 93 Eph. 4:15.
- 94 RM 37c.
- 95 Pope John Paul 11, Message for World Communications Day 2004, "The Media and the Family: A Risk and Richness", no. 2.
- 96 Loc. cit.
- 97 Pope John Paul 11, Message for World Communications Day, 1980.
- 98 FC 47, quoting LG 31.
- 99 See FC 44.
- 100 See the enumeration of such rights in FC 46.

- 101 The Charter is appended to this present document.
- 102 RM 57.
- 103 See GS 51, Evangelium Vitae (EV) 58-67, FC 16.
- 104 See Dialogue and Proclamation, 57.
- 105 Cf. Rom. 10:14-15.
- 106 See the situation given by St. Paul in I Cor. 7: 12-16.
- 107 EA 25.
- 108 Cf. Acts 4:32.
- 109 The Pope has referred to the globalization of charity and solidarity in his World Day of Peace Messages.
- 110 Complementing this reflection on family spirituality are the reflections of FABC 4th 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 5th Plenary Assembly, Bandung, Indonesia, 1990, on A Spirituality for Our Times, nos. 9.1-9.7.
- 111 Jn. 17:21; Acts 4:32; Phil. 2:2; 1 Pt. 3:8
- 112 Jn. 17:14, 18, 20.
- 113 Jn 2: 5.
- 114 GS 16.
- 115 LG 50.
- 116 GS 17.
- 117 LG 50.
- 118 LG 48.
- 119 Pope John Paul II, Letter to Families, no. 4.
- 120 GS 49.
- 121 FC 57.
- 122 Ecclesia de Eucharistia (EE), 40.
- 123 Sermo 272: PL 38, 1247, quoted in EE 40.

124 Where children regularly have their own Holy Mass by themselves, the celebration of Holy Mass as a family event should be done, even if only once a month, see CBCK, IWP, p. 6.

125 Holy See, Charter of the Rights of the Family, October 22, 1983.

126 Ibid. 

**END**

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*Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences*

**SIXTH PLENARY ASSEMBLY**

**FINAL STATEMENT**

**"Christian Discipleship in Asia Today: Service to Life"**

**January 10-19, 1995    Manila, Philippines**

**INTRODUCTION**

1. To our God of love and life, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we give praise and thanks!

In the same city of Manila, where 25 years ago in the inspiring presence of the revered Pope Paul VI, the dream of actualizing the communion of Asian Churches began, we, the bishops-delegate of twenty-one countries and territories, gather in Manila for the Sixth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. We are deeply blessed by the active participation in our Assembly of a number of dedicated lay persons, priests, religious sisters and brothers. (Note: We note with pain the absence of delegates from some countries. We hope for the day when conditions would allow them to celebrate with us our ecclesial communion in a fuller way.)

On this occasion a singular grace for us is likewise the moving presence of Pope John Paul II. With him we not only celebrate the 25th anniversary of the resolution to form a structure that would later become the FABC, but also the 25th year of Radio Veritas Asia, the 400th year of the Archdiocese of Manila and its 3 historic suffragans, Cebu, Caceres, and Nueva Segovia, and especially the 10th World Youth Day. Indeed these festivities are peak moments of God's grace to the Church in Asia, in communion with one another and with the Holy Father -- at the service of life.

2. Remembering with gratitude the beginnings of FABC, we are impressed by the vigor of the creative energies that gave it birth and life. We also recognize that the history of FABC is but a short chapter in the continuing saga of the Asian Churches' solicitude for life, whose individual and collective stories are about promises already realized, if yet waiting to be fulfilled.

This remembrance of blessings past is both comfort and strength. For we realize that the spring from which FABC draws its vigor is the God who has blessed us in Jesus Christ with every spiritual blessing (Eph 1:3). We thank our God in our remembrance (Phil 1:3).

**A. 25 YEARS OF FABC COMMITMENT TO LIFE**

3. Through its past five plenary assemblies, FABC tried to discern the current "life-context" of the Asian pastoral situations that inevitably consist of death-dealing as well as life-serving realities. The initial bishops' meeting in Manila in 1970 already indicated the expectations of Asians for "a better and fuller life for themselves and their children" (ABM, 10). For this reason, the Church in Asia must foster a threefold dialogue: with the many different faiths of Asia, with the cultures of Asia, and with the poor multitudes of Asia. We believe that fullness of life can be realized "only in and through Christ and his Gospel, and by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit"

(FABC I, 1974).

For the Church and its mission in Asia whose peoples are characterized by traditions of deep religiosity, prayer has to be "the river of life." Prayer is absolutely indispensable if the Christ-life is to indwell Christian participation in life-giving liberation and development (FABC II, 1978). This inner life of prayer builds the Church into a credible community of faith, rooted in the life of the Trinity and turned resolutely toward the construction of a fully human future for Asian peoples (FABC III, 1982).

This is why the laity must act as an evangelizing and liberating force in the struggle for fullness of life (FABC IV, 1986). Our unique contribution is our vision of Jesus Christ, and our Christian spirituality manifested through dialogue, discernment and deeds. As Church, we need to walk in compassion and humility, in accompaniment with all the peoples of Asia "as they pray, work, struggle and suffer for a better human life, (in their) search for the meaning of human life and progress" (FABC V, 1990).

Through the years FABC has addressed various concerns that promote social, economic, religious and ecclesial life. Such concerns are: the promotion of justice and integral development particularly in relation to women, migrant workers and indigenous peoples; the building of basic ecclesial communities and basic human communities; the promotion of interreligious dialogue, especially the dialogue of life; leadership formation and specialized formation of priest-formators, youth chaplains, bishops and lay leaders; the conscientization and organization of basic sectors of society; and a more effective use of media for evangelization.

The overall thrust of activities in recent years has been to motivate the Churches of Asia towards "a new way of being Church," a Church that is committed to becoming "a community of communities" and a credible sign of salvation and liberation.

4. Yet on this the 25th anniversary of FABC, we have to confess humbly that the goal of conscientizing the local Churches and building a communion of our Asian Churches is still far from being reached, despite the truly remarkable advances already made in this regard.

We are glad to recall, even if only briefly, the extraordinarily rich story of FABC. It is the story of a listener attentive to the perils of life, to the visions of life, to celebratory songs of life and who wants to share the singular wealth one has, which is the memory of the person named Jesus who is for us the Way, the Truth and the Life.

5. The theme for this Sixth Plenary Assembly of FABC is most fitting. We take as our theme "Christian Discipleship in Asia Today: Service to Life," in order that we may recommit ourselves to the promotion of life in Asia.

## **B. A VISION OF LIFE AMID ASIAN REALITIES**

6. "Life. Vibrant life pulsating from the fecundity of Asia" (FABC International Theological Colloquium, 1994). How do the disciples of Jesus in Asia view this life that is welling up from the depths of Asian peoples, their histories, their habitats and their cultures? What service can the disciples of Jesus in Asia offer to affirm, enhance, defend and promote this life?

Our response begins with a rapid scan of Asian realities not so much to repeat the already substantive analyses that previous FABC assemblies and a great number of FABC seminars and workshops have done, as simply to situate more clearly the struggle of Asia for life.

7. We turned our attention to whatever threatens, weakens, diminishes and destroys the life of individuals, groups or peoples; whatever devalues human beings, conceived, born, infant, old; whatever socio-cultural, religious, political, economic, or environmental factor that threatens or destroys life in our countries. We identified some of these forces of death at work in Asia. And we concluded that as promoters of life, we could only denounce them.

We were alarmed at how the global economy is ruled by market forces to the detriment of peoples' real needs. We considered the insecurity and vulnerability of migrants, refugees, the displaced ethnic and indigenous peoples, and the pain and agonies of exploited workers, especially the child laborers in our countries.

We became more aware of the forces of death depriving women and the girl child of their dignity, freedom, personhood and fuller humanity. We realized how the same forces undermine the family, the basic cell of society and the Church, through liberalist, anti-life, anti-child, anti-woman, anti-family policies and values and pose many threats to wholeness of life in the area of health care, especially of the poor.

We recognized the growing violence, terrorism, conflicts and nuclear proliferation fueled by the arms trade and greed for profit, all of which violate people's rights. They threaten participative democracy, humane governance and a just and peaceful society. We also noted with pain that our sisters and brothers in some countries are still denied their right to religious freedom.

In the area of religious pluralism, we reflected on the growing fundamentalist extremism and fanaticism discriminating and excluding people who belong to other religious traditions, thus destroying the harmony of peoples' lives and their solidarity already witnessed to in a dialogue of life.

As we reflected on these negative areas, we could not ignore the immense damage to the ecosystem of our planet which offends justice and the rights of people.

We say "no" to these death-dealing forces.

8. In this scenario of shadows, we were also encouraged by areas of light. We became aware of the many signs of hope in the histories and cultures of our peoples, as seen in peoples' movements and the initiatives of groups, peoples, and the Churches in Asia for the service of life. We identified with great joy these expressions of life powerfully at work in Asia. We resolved to affirm them, encourage them, celebrate them, and unite our efforts to them.

Noteworthy among them are the growing consciousness regarding human dignity and empowerment of the poor, the growing voices of groups and peoples for humanized development, and the cries of the marginalized groups for participatory and democratic governance.

We dwelt also on the movements for the protection of the environment and ecosystem linked to justice, and the solidarity of committed groups and peoples in the struggle for the rights of women, children, especially the girl child, and those of indigenous peoples. Truly remarkable is the increasing number of young people moving towards solidarity and community, and seeking a deeper spirituality. We were consoled by efforts of many groups to foster dialogue with people of other faiths.

We did not miss the value of the discovery of mass media for the promotion of values and support of peoples' movements and rights.

To these life-giving forces, we give a resounding "yes."

9. From the dynamic forces at work within Asian realities a basic vision of life emerges. In the living heritage of cultures and religious traditions of Asia we discern values and their expressions in symbols, stories and art forms, that embody a vision of life; while we are critically aware of the distortions that have entered into these traditions. In these cultural and religious traditions we also discover the responses to life given by past generations of Asian peoples, which in turn become resources for our contemporary response.

We Asians are searching not simply for the meaning of life but for life itself. We are striving and struggling for life because it is a task and a challenge. But life is a gift too, a mystery, because our efforts to achieve it are far too short of the ultimate value of life. We speak of life as a becoming -- a growing into, a journeying to life and to the source of life.

10. So what might this vision be?

In the rich diversity of ancient Asian cultures and faiths is a vision of unity in diversity, a communion of life among diverse peoples. In this context we seek to become persons of dialogue.

Ours is a vision of holistic life, life that is achieved and entrusted to every person and every community of persons, regardless of gender, creed or culture, class or color. It is the fruit of integral development, the authentic development of the whole person and of every person.

We envision a life with integrity and dignity, a life of compassion for the multitudes, especially for the poor and the needy. It is a life of solidarity with every form of life and of sensitive care for all the earth. It is thus a life that unites us Asians among ourselves and with the whole of creation into one community of life.

For us to live is to live with integrity and dignity, in peace and justice, in freedom and participation, in mutuality and complementarity. It is to live in simplicity and friendship.

At the heart of our vision of life is the Asian reverential sense of mystery and of the sacred, a spirituality that regards life as sacred and discovers the Transcendent and its gifts even in mundane affairs, in tragedy or victory, in brokenness or wholeness. This deep interiority draws people to experience harmony and inner peace and infuses ethics into all of creation.

11. Such is a broad sketch of an Asian vision of life. With the eyes of the heart, with our faith, we need to understand it as the work of the creative Spirit of the God of Life, who in all things and among every people is healing, renewing, and recreating in ever new, ever mysterious ways.

What can we, and how can we, as disciples of Jesus, contribute to the shaping and achieving of such a vision of life in Asia, with our Asian peoples and for Asian peoples. How can the Churches of Asia participate, as Churches and as Asian, in the common global search for life? What does Christian discipleship in Asia mean, if it is to truly serve life?

Our response leads us to Jesus, the Life whom we are following and whom we share with others.

### **C. TO LIFE IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF JESUS**

12. All life is related to the active presence of the Creator Spirit. No wonder Jesus, confessed as Messiah and Lord, is Spirit-filled. He who is The Life is dependent on the Spirit. Conceived in the virgin's womb by the Spirit's power (Lk 1:35, Mt 1:20), anointed by the Spirit at his baptism in the Jordan (Mk 1:10), driven to the wilderness by the Spirit to be prepared for his mission (Mt 4:1), sent to preach the good news of salvation by the Spirit's action (Lk 4:18-19), Jesus ushers in

the new creation, the fullness of life in God. As the Risen One, he breathes the Holy Spirit on his disciples (Jn 20: 22f), making them partakers of his life and mission.

What vision of life emerges from the Spirit-filled Jesus?

**13. JESUS AND THE KINGDOM OF THE GOD OF LIFE.** "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10). With these simple words, Jesus describes his mission. But it is also depicted as the mission of announcing and inaugurating the Kingdom of God (Mk 1:15), the hope of subjugated Israel for the fullness of life in God. Jesus teaches what life in the Kingdom consists in.

**13.1. Communion with Abba.** Jesus identifies the ultimate source of life, the God whom he intimately calls Abba. In Abba Jesus finds his whole life. "I am in the Father and the Father in me" (Jn 14:11). In Abba he finds the resting place of his life's journey. "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Lk 23: 46). Who Jesus is, what he does, where he ends up, are all found in a passion for communion with Abba.

**13.2. Liberating and Recreating Communion among Neighbors.** In compassionate love, Jesus makes his own the struggles and aspirations of Israel for life. Assuming their humanity, he incarnates Abba's life-giving actions of old: creation of all the living out of sheer love, liberation of the chosen people from the bondage of Egypt, mutual belonging within the covenant. Like Abba, Jesus brings life through a new creation, a radical liberation and a renewed communion.

At his word, demons flee, sinners are liberated. At his touch, the sick are healed. He frees the victims of society from the evil and sin that shackle them. He restores them to communion. He breaks down barriers set up by greed, pride, discrimination, lopsided social norms and even religious distortions. Outcasts become sisters and brothers. Sinners are worthy of compassion. The hungry, the thirsty, the prisoners, the naked bear the divine presence. And God is our Father. In the freedom and communion that Jesus offers, a new creation dawns. The human community is reborn. Indeed the time of fulfillment has come. Life in abundance is in our midst. The Kingdom is here (Lk 17:21).

**13.3. Death for the Life of the Many.** In his passion for life, Jesus courageously confronts death. But like all defenders of life, he catches the wrath of the "friends of death" and suffers humiliating death. In the meal he shares with his friends before being crucified, he portrays his death as an act of self-giving for the life of others: "my body is given for you" (Lk 22:19), "my blood is to be poured out for the many" (Mk 14:24). And he commands his disciples to remember this supreme act of love. On the cross, Jesus unites himself with every person seeking life. On the cross, life is poured out from the love and strength that dare to be weak for Abba and neighbors. On the cross, Jesus wins life by offering his own life in death.

**13.4. The Risen One Conquers Death.** Jesus' rising from the dead the whole of humanity and creation that God is the Master of life. In the resurrection of Jesus, death has been stripped of its definitive role in shaping history. History belongs to life! The whole of creation is propelled by life! God offers hope to the whole world and its teeming millions searching and struggling for life through the Risen One, Word of Life, the Bread of Life, the Author of Life.

**13.5. The Gift of the Spirit of Life.** Jesus promises and gives the Spirit, "the Lord, the Giver of Life." The Spirit that enabled Jesus to be the life-giving Messiah, will enable the community of disciples to remember him, to follow him, to participate in his life. The followers of Christ, individually and corporately, are to be comforted and rejuvenated in their following of Jesus by the Spirit of Life.

This image of Jesus -- man of the creative Spirit, friend of God, person of interiority, bringer of harmony, lover of the poor, healer and liberator, bold prophet, suffering companion, victor over death, sharer of his Spirit -- resonates with the Asian peoples' vision of life.

**14. DISCIPLESHIP IN THE SPIRIT OF LIFE.** It is the Spirit of Jesus that creates the disciple-community. And it is in the power of the Spirit that we believe in him (1 Jn 4:2f), remember him (Jn 14:26), communicate him (Acts 8:39) and live by him (2 Cor 12:13). Discipleship is living by the Spirit of the Risen Lord and by the demands of the Kingdom of Life. The peoples of Asia will be drawn to Jesus if his disciples abide in his life (Jn 15:4).

**14.1. "Solidarity" with God.** As Jesus immersed himself into the depths of Abba's life and love, so the disciple-community has to immerse itself totally in the life of the Triune God and live by communion with God. Through this communion, the disciple-community, can more credibly share the love and life of God with others and more effectively bring the forces of God's Kingdom of Life to bear on the death-dealing realities of Asia.

To be in solidarity with God, prayer is indispensable. Prayer expresses our inner spirit and impels us towards ever deeper communion and intimacy with God. This communion is at the core of life-giving spirituality. In Jesus' own example, mission and service draws their energy and power, their very life, from solidarity with Abba and leads back to this solidarity. If the disciples of Christ are steeped in prayerful encounter with and service of Abba, they will strike a chord in the heart of Asia where traditions of spirituality and prayer abound.

**14.2. Liberating and Recreating Communion Among Neighbors.** Like Jesus, we have to "pitch our tents" in the midst of all humanity building a better world, but especially among the suffering and the poor, the marginalized and the downtrodden of Asia. In profound "solidarity with suffering humanity" and led by the Spirit of life, we need to immerse ourselves in Asia's cultures of poverty and deprivation, from whose depths the aspirations for love and life are most poignant and compelling. Serving life demands communion with every woman and man seeking and struggling for life, in the way of Jesus' solidarity with humanity.

Our solidarity requires a resolve to work with our Asian sisters and brothers in liberating our societies from whatever oppresses and degrades human life and creation, most especially from sin. We offer the radical freedom of life in Christ. In a special way, we will follow Jesus in his "preferential journey" with the poor and will assist in the liberation of the materially poor, of indigenous peoples, displaced persons, victims of misguided economic and political development, victims of wars and divisions, victims of sex tourism. We will more actively assist in the integral development of women, children and the youth, who cry out for liberation from many dehumanizing and oppressive situations and for their rightful place in society and in the Church's mission to serve life.

With our Asian sisters and brothers, we will strive to foster communion among Asian peoples who are threatened by glaring economic, social and political imbalances. With them we will explore ways of utilizing the gifts of our diverse religions, cultures and languages to achieve a

richer and deeper Asian unity. We will build bridges of solidarity and reconciliation with peoples of other faiths and will join hands with everyone in Asia in forming a true community of creation.

**14.3. Dying for the Many.** Immersion in Asia's cultures of poverty is a dying to ourselves so that we may live for God and for others. It is a dimension of the spirituality that stems from Jesus himself for whom the giving of life to others happens in the giving of the very self. That is why the love of the Father, Son and Spirit, the self-giving of God to all humanity, especially on behalf of the poor, is at the heart of all genuine service to life.

It is this love that impels us as the disciple-community of Jesus to confront and act against death-dealing realities, oppression and injustice, discrimination and exploitation, the destruction of ecosystems, the tampering with life. As disciples we cannot serve both life and death! Just as Jesus worked as a prophet of new life and died to usher it in, so we in Asia today must prophesy on behalf of the God of life. Refusal to prophesy and speak against the forces of death is to fail in serving life!

We may hesitate because we are minority group. Indeed we are a little flock in Asia. But it is from this position of weakness that God's gift of divine life in Jesus Crucified, the power and wisdom of God, is most significant. Triumphalism and displays of pomp and human power do not witness to the abnegation of Jesus on the Cross. It is often from our weakness that God's love as life-giving grace is more clearly made manifest.

We memorialize Jesus' total self-gift around the Eucharistic table. We partake of the very life of Jesus, the Bread of Life broken and shared. We drink of the Cup of the new covenant with God. We join Jesus in serving life by washing the feet of our neighbors. We celebrate the new creation when simple fruits of the earth and work of human hands become the presence of Jesus in our midst. We look to that promised banquet where all will sit as brothers and sisters around the God of Life.

**14.4. Living in the Risen One.** Faith in the Risen One demands that his disciples in Asia be symbols of hope. Because Jesus is risen, we realize that the promise of life is not empty. Our common search will not end in senselessness but in life. The resurrected life, proclaimed in word, deeds, presence, community and service by the disciples of Christ, can help assure Asians that in the various arenas of death, life still pulsates and flows, life is a promise that is being realized and will be fulfilled in Jesus and His Spirit.

**14.5. Walking by the Spirit of Life.** The gift of the life-giving Spirit makes men and women disciples of Jesus. "Living by the Spirit, walking by the Spirit," (Gal 5:25) is concretely seen in a life marked by the fruits of the Spirit: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal 5:22f). These values, which are opposed to the "fruits of the flesh," need to be infused into the Church's lifestyle, policies, programs and communal life.

The Spirit is the powerful breath animating the mission of the disciples of Christ. Whether in explicit proclamation of the Gospel or in the silence of prayer, whether in the warmth of personal contact or the burden of liberative action, the Spirit of life guides, sanctifies and unifies the disciple-community for the world and humanity. The deepest communication of the Church to Asia is its Spirit-filled and multiform mission of sharing Christ as the Way, the Truth and the Life.

**14.6.** Our reflection on discipleship cannot be complete without invoking Mary, the woman who gave Jesus to the world. She who is the Mother of Life is also the foremost disciple of Life. Her example teaches us that discipleship involves attentive listening to the word of God and the freedom to respond to it (Lk 1:26-38). She regards herself a servant in solidarity with her people Israel, celebrating God's mercy for the lowly and the hungry (Lk 1:46-55). She courageously suffers with her Son at the foot of the cross and from that wood of life becomes the mother of us all (Jn 19:25-27). With the early disciple-community, she prays, awaiting the promised Spirit of Life (Acts 1:12-14). Now with her son in glory, she enlivens the hope of all for eternal life. In Mary we find not only a mother but also a model and companion in our pilgrimage to life.

**14.7.** In the final analysis to the question that we have asked about our Christian contribution to the struggle for full life in Asia, our answer is brief, but profoundly committed. Our answer is Jesus and his Gospel of Life. Our answer is the sharing of Abba's liberating and reconciling life and love with others. Our answer is authentic discipleship in the creative Spirit of Jesus, the Spirit of Life.

**15. MAJOR PASTORAL AREAS OF DISCIPLESHIP.** The above reflection on a theologico-pastoral basis of discipleship leads us to its concrete implications to our pastoral mission. Many, indeed, are our pastoral concerns: dialogue with peoples of other faiths, dialogue with the poor, dialogue with the cultures of Asia; justice and integral development mediated by the social teachings of the Church, formation and education, the apostolate of the media and the arts. We have deliberated on all these very important and interconnected concerns. The results will be published.

**But in the light of our faith-reflection, we believe that five concerns require special pastoral focus:**

15.1. The **Asian family** is a microcosm of Asian society. It is bombarded on all sides by anti-family forces of dehumanization and disintegration, ranging from material and moral poverty to secularistic values and external pressures leading to anti-life types of bioethics and practices of abortion and contraception. Children, as in many other areas of life, become the unwilling and innocent victims. Young girls and boys are also exploited through illegal labor practices and sex tourism. Discipleship in Asia then has to denounce such anti-life and anti-family pressures, policies, and practices and foster bioethics that is in accord with God's law and the Church's teachings in order to promote the family as a "sanctuary of life" and a school of life.

15.2. The complex issue of **women and the girl child** in Asia has to be one of the major concerns. Already our Fourth Plenary Assembly, in Tokyo, 1986, raised the issue to the level of the whole Asian Church. We cannot effectively promote our Christian vision of full life unless the Church as a communion of communities will credibly expend its moral and spiritual energies to the conversion of mentalities, the transformation of structures, and the eradication of practices that deny women and the girl child in Asia their God-given dignity. An urgent pastoral imperative is for women to exercise their right to corresponsibility and mutuality with men -- in society and in the Church.

15.3. On the occasion of the 10th World Youth Day, the Church likewise confronts the reality of Asia as the continent of the **youth**. As in other FABC forums, we stand in solidarity with their struggles for authentic life. We share their concern and alarm in the face of misguided policies and structures that are already laying the foundations of their future. We wonder with them if the earth will still be preserved for them and their children at the rate it is being misused now. We commit ourselves to accompany their life-giving movement in their aspiration to transform themselves and our societies towards fuller life.

15.4. **Ecology** is once again brought to our pastoral attention. And urgently so, since we see in the countries of Asia the continuing and unabated destruction of our environment -- waters, forests, plant and animal life, air -- and the support systems of all created life. Life, especially in a Third World setting, is sacrificed at the altar of short term economic gains. The Lord, the Giver of Life, calls our discipleship in Asia into question on the time bomb issue of ecology. Choosing life requires our discipleship to discern and act with other faiths and groups against the forces of ecological destruction.

15.5. Special attention is given to **the displaced** in our societies: political and ecological refugees and migrant workers. They are marginalized and exploited by the system, denied of their place in society and must go elsewhere to seek a dignified life. In welcoming them we expose the causes of their displacement, work toward conditions for a more human living in community, experience the universal dimension of the Kingdom (Gal 3:28) and appreciate new opportunities for evangelization and intercultural dialogue.

Though our pastoral directives for action touch on many issues of concern, we appeal for a particular pastoral focus on these five major challenges.

## CONCLUSION

16. As we end our deliberations, we do so as we began -- with a prayer of thanks, hope, and commitment.

### *Prayer of Service to Life in Asia*

Loving and life-giving God, at the beginning you called us in Asia into life, enriched us with an astonishing variety of cultures, ways of living, believing, and worshiping. As sisters and brothers in your one Asian family, we thank you and praise you.

Among us are the poorest of the poor, the poor with their many faces of misery and pain, millions who seek not only a better life but the full Life that only you can give. We hear your call to serve them, the way your Son Jesus served others in total love, in utter selflessness, eucharistically.

Send us your Spirit of Life, that together with other communities, we may respond to the anguish of our sisters and brothers with courageous and generous love, and with them come to the Life that never ends.

May our Mother, Mary, the voice and Mother of the Poor, who announced the liberation of the lowly, be our companion. May she as the mother and model of all disciples lead us to the Way, the Truth, and the Life in your Kingdom forever and ever. Amen. .

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*Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences*

**FIFTH PLENARY ASSEMBLY**

**FINAL STATEMENT**

**"Journeying Together Toward the Third Millennium"**

**July 17-27, 1990    Bandung, Indonesia**

## **1.0 I. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 Gathered together at Bandung, Indonesia, for the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, from the 17th to the 27th of July 1990, we, the bishops, priests, Religious and laity, experienced a communion which resembled our Asian Church in miniature. We were united in prayer, asking for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all the Church, imploring his grace also for those who were not able to be present. In an atmosphere of mutual sharing and dialogue, we considered the theme: "The Emerging Challenges for the Church in Asia in the 1990s: A Call to Respond." We reflected on the time in which we find ourselves in Asia, and tried to see the way on which we must walk as the Church in this vast continent. The time, the way and the place are deeply related to the mission of Christ which we as his Church must continue.

1.2 We sought to understand and appreciate the critical importance of the present time and to hear what God is calling us to do as we complete the last decade of the second millennium and come to the threshold of the third, remembering that all times are embraced in the hour of Jesus.

1.3 Being at Bandung, we remembered that it was here that the Non-Aligned Movement was born 35 years ago, as a Third Force in between the first world of capitalism and the second world of communism. And today, with the collapse of the Berlin Wall, symbolizing the dawn of new era, we see an opportunity opening up for the Church to present its social doctrine. We feel even more the challenge to work for a new and just international order, where even the small states can make a contribution and all nations can participate with dignity, and live in peace with one another. We discussed the theology and motivation which should inspire us at this critical time.

1.4 We searched together for a way along which the Asian Church must walk. A father of the Church has said: "Walk in man and you will arrive in God." This is possible because the Word of God became flesh and called himself the Way (John 14:6). As Pope John Paul II says in *The Redeemer of Humankind*: "This man is the way for the Church -- a way that, in a sense, is the basis of all the other ways the Church must walk, because with man -- every man without exception whatever -- Christ is in a way united, even when man is unaware of it."

1.5 Finally, having regarded this huge land mass of Asia and our "teeming millions," we tried to understand our Asian realities. This is the context of God's creative, incarnational and redemptive action, the theater in which the drama of Asia's salvation is enacted.

1.6 We then tried to see the new way of being and becoming Church in Asia and also the spirituality which must inform it.

1.7 We regret that there are many situations and structures, groups and persons in Asia where justice and peace, love and compassion, equality and brotherhood, and religious freedom do not always find a sufficient place for existence. Our challenge is to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God: to promote justice, peace, love, compassion, equality and brotherhood in these Asian realities. In short, it is to work to make the Kingdom of God a reality. We wish, then, to share with our Asian sisters and brothers and with all men and women of goodwill the journey in faith that we experienced in these days when we were together at Bandung. Our challenge is to cooperate with all people of goodwill in God's action in the world in the service of justice and peace.

## **2.0 II. CHALLENGES AND HOPES**

### **2.1 A. THE CHALLENGE OF FERMENT AND CHANGE IN ASIA**

2.1.1 The past year has been a time of extraordinary change and desire for change. The face of Eastern Europe appears transformed. There is new hope for a just society in Southern Africa. Here in Asia popular movements for participation in society are emerging.

2.1.2 We are conscious that the Asian reality is increasingly part of the global reality. Our world is becoming progressively interdependent, with mutual interests and concerns. This situation holds out great opportunities. The old order dominated by the two power blocs has broken down. A new order is emerging, in which even the smallest nation can play its role; Asian countries influencing, as well as being influenced by, the rest of the world.

2.1.3 Change is the most constant factor in our societies. Some changes are clearly beneficial - we think, for instance, of the disappearance of many old animosities between nations. Other changes are full of promise but of uncertain outcome -- we think of the growing desire for participation in society, dramatically apparent in the democracy movement which has made itself felt in a number of Asian countries. Other changes again are at best of ambiguous value. There is new economic prosperity in many of our societies, but typically it has benefited mainly a tiny elite -- old power structures remain substantially unchanged.

2.1.4 A striking change in many of our societies is the breakdown of the nation-state. Typically the nation-state in Asia was usually the creation of the colonial powers; boundaries were set up with little regard for traditional ethnic and cultural groupings. Hence, it is not surprising that we now witness a variety of "secessionist" movements, and, tragically, widespread ethnic and communal conflict and violence.

2.1.5 One reaction to this situation is the growth of "statism" -- the imposition of artificial harmony through oppressive state power. Elsewhere, the struggle for power spawns militant fundamentalism, by which a majority group or a powerful minority imposes its values on the rest of society. Religious fundamentalism has its attraction to some believers for primarily religious reasons. But such attraction is too often exploited by persons and groups whose motive is political power and social control, or economic greed. Here we see how valid Pope John Paul II's analysis of social problems is in his encyclical On Social Concerns. He points out that the

desire for profit and the desire for power are the root causes of social problems all over the world.

2.1.6 Modernization offers bright promise for our future. Even so, the whole process of modernization is fraught with ambiguity. Modernization often leads to social and cultural dislocation. Traditional values and attitudes are called into question. Traditional symbols lose their power. The beneficiaries of modernization are too often infected with secularism, materialism and consumerism. In some countries there has arisen a new middle class which is highly consumeristic and competitive, and in general insensitive and indifferent to the overwhelming majority of poor and marginalized people.

## **2.2 B. THE CHALLENGE OF CONTINUING INJUSTICE**

2.2.1 We are deeply conscious, therefore, that within our context of change there is the unchanging reality of injustice. There remains in Asia massive poverty. Hundreds of millions of people are debarred from access to natural resources. Exploitation of the environment destroys precious resources and thus destroys the material and spiritual habitat of many of our peoples. Militarization involves the wasting of scarce resources on armies and armaments rather than the using of these resources to meet genuine and pressing human needs. Traditional patterns of discrimination against women continue in force. In situations of poverty and injustice it is usually women who suffer the most. We see this in the flourishing of exploitative tourism, where women and children are driven into prostitution -- this is both a matter of sexual morality and also a matter of structural injustice. Poverty likewise drives both men and women to become migrant workers, often destroying family life in the process. Political conflict and economic desperation have driven millions to become refugees, to living for years in camps that are sometimes in effect crowded prisons. Within many Asian societies, graft and corruption remain a source of serious injustice.

2.2.2 Asia is home to vast numbers of young people. But too many of them face a future of unemployment and consequent frustration. The most basic and fundamental human right to life is denied to the unborn child by the practice of abortion. Child labor (even bonded labor) is still prevalent. Our youth, who are 60% of the Asian population, tend to be influenced by an education, the media and social pressures which perpetuate this reality of injustice, and youth themselves are often victims.

2.2.3 Connected too with these injustices are other violations of human rights. We see forms of cultural imperialism, with the imposition of majority values, or of values of an assertive minority on the rest of society. Access to education and employment is denied or limited on the basis of religion, caste, political stance, economic status, or ethnic origin. Those in these societies and elsewhere who speak and act in the name of justice are subject to imprisonment and other forms of punishment. All of these injustices are interconnected. Taken together, they amount to a crisis of survival.

## **2.3 C. HOPE AT THE CROSSROADS**

In the face of the massive problems engendered by social change and in the face of massive injustice, we can discern, however, many signs of hope.

2.3.1 There is a new consciousness on the part of the marginalized that the situation is not an inevitable fate but something to be struggled against. Coupled with this is a new consciousness

of solidarity -- people are not isolated in the struggle against injustice. The growing desire for and growing sense of solidarity cross national, ethnic and class boundaries, boundaries of religion and sex -- indeed, the boundary between the human and the rest of creation.

2.3.2 We see, in other words, the promise of movements for democracy, participation and human rights, of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, of the women's movement, of ecological movements, of the search for spirituality and spiritual values. We see the vitality of our young people and the potential that they provide for positive change. These movements converge in a desire for community which at its best is a desire for inclusive community, community which seeks to cross boundaries, to break down walls rather than artificially strengthening itself by building barriers.

2.3.3 The desire for solidarity is present on both sides of the old boundaries. Ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, for example, has come about because both Christians and those of other faiths desire to learn from one another, to search together for a better understanding of the meaning of life, to work together for a new world which is at once more human and more divine. It is an enterprise full of hope and also of challenge. We are all being challenged to appreciate the other, to learn from the other, even to be corrected by the other -- and at the same time to remain faithful to what is best in our own tradition. By doing this we run counter to all forms of fundamentalism.

2.3.4 Dialogue between religious traditions, the ecological movement, and aspects of the women's movement offer hope for a more holistic spirituality. This hope and desire is present within, and beyond, the Catholic community. We live in Asia, the home of great contemplative traditions. The Catholic Church is often perceived as not sharing in these contemplative traditions, as being primarily concerned with the external, with rituals and festivals. Central, however, to the Catholic tradition is incarnation, sacramentality. And genuine sacramentality is the antithesis of empty ritualism. It is about finding the mystery of the Divine in everyday reality -- a deeply contemplative task -- and then celebrating that mystery. At the heart of the ecological movement, likewise, can be found a theology of creation, or better, a spirituality of creation -- creation as the divine handiwork and the place of divine presence. Desire for spirituality, for the contemplative, on the one hand, and the possibility of convergence of the sacramental tradition, of the contemplative tradition in other faiths, of concern for the environment, of respect for the feminine, on the other -- these for us are great signs of hope.

2.3.5 They are instances where those who are blessed with power and wealth are animated by the spirit of the Gospel, work to promote the common good and are generous in sharing their gifts and talents.

2.3.6 A further sign of hope is the desire for community. We have spoken of this at the global level as the desire for solidarity. More locally, it is seen in the growth of Basic Ecclesial Communities, of neighborhood groups, of groups that come together to defend human rights, or that come together for prayer or Bible-sharing. Of course, these groups overlap and interlock. In part, they are motivated by a healthy reaction to the breakdown of traditional structures of community. And more positively, they stem from a concern with human persons rather than with impersonal structures, a concern above all with those who are small, neglected or despised. In cities, the caste system is gradually weakening.

2.3.7 Desire for community goes together with desire for dialogue. It goes together too with desire for participation, the longing to share in shaping one's personal and communal destiny. We have noted this desire in society. It is felt passionately too in the Church, and is beginning to find its flowering in greater lay involvement in the Church's life and ministry.

2.3.8 We can, therefore, speak of a time of "crisis" in the Asian continent, a moment of history opening out to both danger and opportunity. The very same historical situation holds out possibilities of sin as well as grace. It is up to the local Churches in Asia to walk with their people, to accompany them in their journey toward a world that is more Spirit-filled. For in all this ferment we sense the stirrings of the creative Spirit, a Spirit sometimes disturbing, but ever surprising, challenging and hope-giving.

2.3.9 We began by looking at the changing face of Asian societies, change with much danger for dehumanization. The danger is all too often realized. But the signs of hope that we have discerned offer the potential for humanized and humanizing change. The truly human can, moreover, never be divorced from the rest of divine creation. And when the truly human is discovered and deeply contemplated, it reveals to us the mystery of the Divine, of that creative Being who loves all creation in ways beyond even our deepest hopes and imaginings. So, though there may be negative and dangerous things occurring, the movement in Asia toward modernity calls for a joyful response from the Church as it accompanies our Asian people, as partner with them in all positive movements of the human spirit. The challenge for the Church is to work for justice and peace along with the Christians of other Churches, together with our sisters and brothers of other faiths and with all people of goodwill, to make the Kingdom of God more visibly present in Asia.

### **3.0 III. THE EVANGELIZING MISSION OF THE CHURCH IN CONTEMPORARY ASIA**

The vastness of the Asian continent, the number, complexity and tenacity of its problems could cause in Christians a paralyzing discouragement. But seen with the eyes of faith, these difficulties, together with the signs of hope that accompany them, are as so many challenges to mission. God speaks to us from the travails and the progress of our countries, and bids us from the contemporary challenges of our world to renew our sense of mission.

#### **3.1 A. A RENEWAL OF THE SENSE OF MISSION**

3.1.1 1. A renewal of our sense of mission means, first of all, renewal of our faith that God so loved the world that he sent his Son to be the savior of all. This Son, through whom all things were made (Jn 1:3; Heb 1:2), became like us in all things, sin alone excepted (cf. Heb 4:15). He went about doing good and healing all who were in the power of evil (cf. Acts 10:38). Filled with the Spirit, he preached the Good News of the Kingdom of God, and commanded his disciples to do the same. Lifted up from the earth, he draws all peoples to himself through his Church, and through other ways unknown to us. He is the light that enlightens every human being (Jn 1:9). He has imprinted traces of his revelation in the world which exists in him (Col 1:16), and in the "seeds of the Word" found in cultures and in other religious traditions. The Spirit, sent by the Father and the Son, and ever-present and active in the Church, in the world and in the human heart, leads all to their unity and fulfillment.

3.1.2 From this perspective, mission, being a continuation in the Spirit of the mission of Christ, involves a being with the people, as was Jesus: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14). Therefore, mission includes: being with the people, responding to their needs, with sensitiveness to the presence of God in cultures and other religious traditions, and witnessing to the values of God's Kingdom through presence, solidarity, sharing and word. Mission will mean

a dialogue with Asia's poor, with its local cultures, and with other religious traditions (FABC I).

3.2 2. Renewal of a sense of mission will also require a renewal of our motivations for mission. There has been perceived in some a weakening of these motivations so necessary to persevere in this demanding task. Why indeed, should we evangelize?

3.2.1 a) We evangelize, first of all, from a deep sense of gratitude to God, the Father "who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing" (Eph 1:3), and sent the Spirit into our hearts so that we may share in God's own life. Mission is above all else an overflow of this life from grateful hearts transformed by the grace of God.

That is why it is so important for us Christians to have a deep faith-experience of the love of God in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:39), that love which has been poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Rom 5:5). Without a personal experience of this love received as gift and mercy, no sense of mission can flourish.

3.2.2 b) But mission is also a mandate. We evangelize because we are sent into the whole world to make disciples of all nations. The one who sends us is Jesus, who has been sent by the Father, and to whom has been given all authority in heaven and on earth (Mt 28:18). He sends us on a mission which is part of the epiphany of God's plan to bring all things together under Christ as head (Eph 1:9-10). We cannot fulfill this mission apart from him (Jn 15:4-5). But he assures us that he will remain with us all days till the end of time (Mt 28:20), and he has sent us his Spirit so that we may be his witnesses to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8).

3.2.3 c) We evangelize also because we believe in the Lord Jesus. We have received the gift of faith. We have become Christians. "The Christian vocation is by its very nature a vocation to the apostolate (Vatican Council II, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, 2). That is why Pope Paul VI emphatically states: "It is unthinkable that a person should accept the Word and give himself to the Kingdom without becoming a person who bears witness to it and proclaims it in his turn" (Evangelization in the Modern World, 24).

Unfortunately for many Catholics, faith is only something to be received and celebrated. They do not feel it is something to be shared. The missionary nature of the gift of faith must be inculcated in all Christians. All must be helped to realize that God has called us to be Christians not only so that we may be saved but that we may collaborate in the work of the world's salvation, and invite those whom God draws to the Church to share in our faith.

3.2.4 d) We evangelize also because we have been incorporated by baptism into the Church, which is missionary by its very nature because it is the result of the mission of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Vatican Council II, Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, 2). The Church exists in order to evangelize (Evangelization in the Modern World, 14), and each member, by virtue of the sacraments of baptism and confirmation has received the right and duty to the apostolate from the Lord himself (Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, 33).

3.2.5 e) And finally, we evangelize because the Gospel is a leaven for liberation and for the transformation of society. Our Asian world needs the values of the Kingdom and of Christ in order to bring about the development, justice, peace and harmony with God, among peoples and with all creation that the peoples of Asia long for.

Yes, for Asia and its teeming millions also we must affirm: "The Lord is the goal of human history, the focal point of the desires of history and civilization, the center of humankind, the joy of all hearts, and the fulfillment of all aspirations" (Vatican Council II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 45).

We look forward to the day when daughters and sons of the Church, imbued with these motivations, will see in their evangelizing mission not only a duty that they must fulfill but a

privilege they can be thankful for, and a right they will faithfully safeguard. Christians formed in a missionary spirituality will be joyful witnesses of the values of the Kingdom, and of Christ whose disciples they are.

3.3.1 3. The renewal of our sense of mission will mean, thirdly, that the acting subject of mission is the local Church living and acting in communion with the universal Church. It is the local Churches and communities which can discern and work out (in dialogue with each other and with other persons of goodwill) the way the Gospel is best proclaimed, the Church set up, the values of God's Kingdom realized in their own place and time. In fact, it is by responding to and serving the needs of the peoples of Asia that the different Christian communities become truly local Churches.

3.3.2 This local Church, which is the acting subject of mission, is the people of God in a given milieu, the whole Christian community -- laity, Religious and clergy. It is the whole diocese, the parish, the Basic Ecclesial Community and other groups. Their time has come for Asia.

3.3.3 Hence, we can see from the point of view of mission how vital is the formation of fully participatory Christian communities where people experience that they "belong" and that together they are the Church. On the other hand, such communities become fully Church only when they accept their share in the Church's mission.

#### **4.0 B. THE MODE OF MISSION IN ASIA**

4.1 Mission may find its greatest urgency in Asia; it also finds in our continent a distinctive mode. We affirm, together with others, that "the proclamation of Jesus Christ is the center and primary element of evangelization" (Statement of the FABC All-Asia Conference on Evangelization, Suwon, South Korea, August 24-31, 1988). But the proclamation of Jesus Christ in Asia means, first of all, the witness of Christians and of Christian communities to the values of the Kingdom of God, a proclamation through Christlike deeds. For Christians in Asia, to proclaim Christ means above all to live like him, in the midst of our neighbors of other faiths and persuasions, and to do his deeds by the power of his grace. Proclamation through dialogue and deeds -- this is the first call to the Churches in Asia.

4.2 Mission in Asia will also seek through dialogue to serve the cause of unity of the peoples of Asia marked by such a diversity of beliefs, cultures and socio-political structures. In an Asia marked by diversity and torn by conflicts, the Church must in a special way be a sacrament -- a visible sign and instrument of unity and harmony.

4.3 But we shall not be timid when God opens the door for us to proclaim explicitly the Lord Jesus Christ as the Savior and the answer to the fundamental questions of human existence. We shall proclaim the Gospel in the manner of the Lord Jesus, who expressed his mission in these terms:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord (Lk 4:18-19).

4.4 Despite the goodwill and sometimes heroic efforts of evangelizers, our deeds have often proven inadequate. What was lacking?

4.5 It seems to us now that in confrontation with Asian realities we have preached about values which ought to be pursued, but have often failed to follow through with effective actions that would help dismantle structures of sin oppressive of our peoples. We now recognize the need to plan and do appropriate deeds consequent upon dialogue and prayerful discernment.

4.6 Our minority status should not deter us from patiently working out in collaboration with Christians of other Churches and peoples of other religions and persuasions the steps needed to liberate our people from the bondage of sin and its societal manifestations, and to inscribe the values of the Kingdom in Asian society. For the Lord assures us: "Fear not, little flock, for it has pleased the Father to give you the Kingdom" (Lk 12:32).

### **5.0 C. THE ROLE OF THE LAY FAITHFUL**

5.1 The renewal of Asian society which the Lord bids us to accomplish in dialogue and collaboration with peoples of other religious traditions and persons of goodwill requires the effort of the whole Church. While bishops and priests should be active in the Christian formation of lay people (Pope John Paul II, Message to FABC V, Bandung), the lay faithful should take upon themselves as their specific responsibility the renewal of Asian society according to the values of the Gospel. They are the primary evangelizers of culture and of cultures, and of the whole fabric of life in society. Hence, there must not be in Catholics what Vatican II has described as a "pernicious opposition between professional and social activity on one hand and religious life on the other" (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 43).

5.2 This calls for a thorough education of Catholics in the social doctrine of the Church, as well as the formation of their hearts toward just and compassionate living in present-day Asian society. Christians formed in this manner will be evangelizers of their own -- the young evangelizing the young, workers evangelizing workers, professionals evangelizing professionals, government officials evangelizing government officials, families evangelizing families -- and will be leaven for the transformation of Asian society.

### **6.0 D. THE FACE OF THE CHURCH IN ASIA**

6.1 We have up to now emphasized deeds. But mission is more than deeds. It involves the very being of the Church. Therefore, we ask: "What should the Church be in and to this changing Asian world marked by so much diversity, poverty, suffering and injustice, and with so many movements for social transformation?"

6.2 The Christian community, it seems to us, must live in companionship, as true partners with all Asians as they pray, work, struggle and suffer for a better human life, and as they search for the meaning of human life and progress. Because the human person created in Christ, redeemed by Christ and united by Christ to himself is the way for the Church, the Church must walk along with him/her in human solidarity.

6.3 But it is as servants of the Lord and of humanity that we Christians share the same journey with all the Asian peoples. The Church was not sent to observe but to serve -- to serve the Asian peoples in their quest for God and for a better human life; to serve Asia under the leading of the Spirit of Christ and in the manner of Christ himself who did not come to be served but to serve and to lay down his life as a ransom for all (Mk 10:45) -- and to discern, in dialogue with Asian peoples and Asian realities, what deeds the Lord wills to be done so that all humankind may be gathered together in harmony as his family. As servant of Yahweh and of humanity, the Church will seek above all faithfulness to God and to the Asian peoples, and will also invite to full participation in the Christian community those who are led to it by the Spirit of God.

6.4 This service will be done in compassion, the compassion of Jesus himself who, like the

Good Samaritan, came to bind the wounds of humanity. It will be a compassion that makes the Church weak and powerless with those who are weak and powerless. But it will be a compassion that will denounce, in deeds, if it is not possible to do so in words, the injustices, oppressions, exploitations and inequalities resulting in so much of the suffering that is evident in the Asian situation. Such compassion will see as fellow members of the one human family under the Fatherhood of God all exploited women and workers, unwelcome refugees, victims of violations of human rights, and in fact every needy human person. This compassion will see even deeper, and will welcome in each human being -- but especially the poor, deprived and oppressed -- the very person of Christ who has united himself to every human being though he/she may be unaware of it (The Redeemer of Humankind, 14).

6.5 Such a Church will not boast of human power but will serve with the power of the Lord Jesus who emptied himself and took the form of a servant (Phil 2:7), but is, for all who believe, the Wisdom and Power of God (I Cor 1:23-24).

6.6 This Church, witnessing by its very being and deeds to the values of the Kingdom of God, will be credible when it proclaims with its lips that Jesus is the Savior of the world and the answer to all its longings.

## **7.0 IV. LIVING IN THE SPIRIT: PASTORAL RESPONSES**

### *Our Process*

7.1 Our reflection on the Asian situation in the light of our mission of evangelization has led us to realize the enduring validity of a process of: (a) dialoguing with the realities of Asia from within; (b) discerning the movement of God's Spirit in Asia; and (c) translating into deeds what the Spirit bids us to accomplish. This process has to be the general approach for our total response as Church in Asia.

### **7.2 A. PERVADING PASTORAL IMPERATIVES**

#### *At the Level of Discernment*

From our sharing of experiences and reflections, six pervading pastoral imperatives have constantly emerged:

1. The necessity for Christian mission to keep Christ at the center of our proclamation, behavior and relationships.
2. The imperative of considering with the utmost concern and sensitivity the relationship and interaction between the mission and pastoral thrust of the Church and the pluralism of Asian societies.
3. The imperative of empowering people for mission, ministry and the task of integral liberation.
4. The need to encourage, initiate and facilitate micro-level initiatives with ripple effects especially at the grassroots level.
5. The indispensable necessity for the Church in Asia to be credible in its lifestyle and deeds in proclaiming its faith and in acting for justice and human rights.
6. The imperative of re-envisioning and re-planning formation processes, with particular attention being given to cultural values and structural factors.

## 7.3 B. SPECIFIC PASTORAL DIRECTIONS

### *At the Level of Doing*

Having discerned the way the Holy Spirit is leading us to respond to the challenges emerging in Asia, for specific pastoral initiatives and processes we urge:

#### *7.3.1 Proclaiming the Faith*

1. That appropriate formation processes for mission and proclamation be developed, with emphasis on the laity's participation.
2. That integral catechesis and the promotion of Bible study and reflection toward the building of Word-centered communities be undertaken.
3. That serious concern and care, through intensive inculturation and catechesis, be given toward a meaningful and joyful celebration of the Sacraments and Liturgy, especially the Eucharist, that would be creative of fellowship and community.
4. That effective measures be taken by episcopal conferences to develop and communicate a process of regular faith-discernment that everyone could easily use and share in.
5. That the content and programming of Catholic media implement a "ministry of compassion" for the sick and poor of Asia, thus making itself a more effective instrument of evangelization.
6. That a commission for the Biblical apostolate be set up in every episcopal conference to promote an understanding and a love of the Scriptures among our people.

#### *7.3.2 Serving Asian Societies*

##### *7.3.2.1 Mediated by the Social Doctrine of the Church*

1. That social analysis be integrated with cultural analysis, and both subjected to faith-discernment.
2. That the social doctrine of the Church be part of formation in faith for everyone, at all levels of laity, Religious and clergy.
3. That the formation of a faith-inspired social conscience be a priority task in catechesis, media, schools and other apostolates of formation.
4. That the Church, consistent with its social doctrine, investigate and remove from within its own structures and practices whatever obstructs human rights and justice.
5. That, wherever possible, specialized institutions be set up to provide, from a faith-perspective, competence for lay persons in the socio-economic and political field, including the civil service.

##### *7.3.2.2 In Quest of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation*

("There is no peace without social justice, and little social justice without peace.")

1. That episcopal conferences effectively incorporate into their Justice and Peace programs a vigorous defence and promotion of human rights, especially those of women and children, born and unborn.

2. That Catholic schools integrate into their curricula the formation of values necessary for peace and social transformation, and study how Gospel values can positively influence culture, science and technology.

3. That the justice and peace commissions of episcopal conferences develop and implement a program of forming men and women dedicated to the Gospel value of active non-violence, and facilitate the organization of peace groups (e.g., peace cells, zones of peace) at the grassroots level.

4. That FABC set up contacts with other regional associations of episcopal conferences in order to raise and discuss both the interlocking character and also the moral dimensions of issues of justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

### ***7.3.2.3 In a Situation of Pluralism***

1. That episcopal conferences develop a formation process for clergy, Religious and laity toward the formation of "persons of dialogue," who would be sensitive to other faiths and persuasions, and to social and cultural diversity in the Church and in the world.

2. That the collaboration of the appropriate FABC offices to facilitate at the grassroots level ecumenical and interreligious dialogue for integral development be continued, and that such dialogue be further promoted by episcopal conferences in their own areas.

3. That the episcopal conferences identify cultural attitudes and grassroots structures, including interchurch and interfaith groups, and set up leadership-training programs that would promote ecumenical and interreligious dialogue.

4. That episcopal conferences explore closer relationships with international Catholic organizations and with government and non-government organizations to promote integral development.

5. That efforts to have a dialogue of life at the grassroots level be facilitated and promoted so that people of different Churches, religious traditions and persuasions, becoming aware of shared human and spiritual values, may act together for the common good.

6. That the Church, as the sacrament of unity of all humankind, promote communion within the Church, and peace and harmony in the world, especially when pluralism becomes a cause for division.

### ***7.3.3 Deepening the Faith***

1. That episcopal conferences promote the establishment of centers of prayer; and the development of seminaries into centers of deep spirituality for priests and other ministers of the Church.

2. That episcopal conferences promote the development of the spiritual depth and possibilities of pilgrimages which could also serve as events of ecumenical and interreligious encounter.

3. That episcopal conferences foster the inculturation of the sacraments and liturgy, especially the celebration of the Eucharist.

4. That the ways of prayer be integrated into all catechetical programs, especially of Christian initiation.

5. That episcopal conferences explore approaches to spirituality that would be relevant to youth.

6. That Religious orders and congregations in Asia exercise leadership in living the Gospel

prophetically and radically, thus providing depth and spiritual inspiration for the upbuilding of the Body of Christ.

7. That events and experiences that would help bishops come into deeper contact with the inner journey of the Spirit be planned and promoted.

## **8.0 C. A NEW WAY OF BEING CHURCH IN THE 1990s**

### *Response at the Level of Being*

(For principal features of this "new" way of being Church, see FABC III, 1982, "The Church: A Community of Faith in Asia"; and the FABC Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church, 1977)

8.1 The above recommendations of the Fifth Plenary Assembly envision alternative ways of being Church in the Asia of the 1990s. But these alternative ways share some major dimensions.

8.1.1 1. The Church in Asia will have to be a communion of communities, where laity, Religious and clergy recognize and accept each other as sisters and brothers. They are called together by the word of God which, regarded as a quasi-sacramental presence of the Risen Lord, leads them to form small Christian communities (e.g., neighborhood groups, Basic Ecclesial Communities and "covenant" communities). There, they pray and share together the Gospel of Jesus, living it in their daily lives as they support one another and work together, united as they are "in one mind and heart."

8.1.2 2. It is a participatory Church where the gifts that the Holy Spirit gives to all the faithful -- lay, Religious and cleric alike -- are recognized and activated, so that the Church may be built up and its mission realized.

8.1.3 3. Built in the hearts of people, it is a Church that faithfully and lovingly witnesses to the Risen Lord Jesus and reaches out to people of other faiths and persuasions in a dialogue of life toward the integral liberation of all.

8.1.4 4. It is a leaven of transformation in this world and serves as a prophetic sign daring to point beyond this world to the ineffable Kingdom that is yet fully to come.

## **9.0 D. A SPIRITUALITY FOR OUR TIMES**

### *Response At the Focal Point of the Spirit*

(For major features of this spirituality, see FABC II, 1978, "Prayer -- The Life of the Church of Asia"; and FABC IV, 1986, "The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World of Asia.")

9.1 At the center of this new way of being Church is the action of the Spirit of Jesus, guiding and directing individual believers as well as the whole community to live a life that is Spirit-filled -- that is, to live an authentic spirituality. It is nothing more and nothing less than a following of Jesus-in-mission, an authentic discipleship in the context of Asia.

9.2 If people are convinced more by witnessing than by teaching, this is most true of the peoples of Asia whose cultures hold the contemplative dimension, renunciation, detachment, humility, simplicity and silence in the highest regard. We would have a message for Asia only

when our Asian sisters and brothers see in us the marks of God-realized persons. Credibility is the fruit of authenticity. The sharing of what are our lived spiritual experiences is of incalculable necessity and importance in the tasks of evangelization and integral development.

9.3 Our spirituality has, therefore, to integrate every aspect of Christian life: liturgy, prayer, community living, solidarity with all and especially with the poor, evangelization, catechesis, dialogue, social commitment, etc. There has to be no dichotomy between faith and life, or between love and action, unless we wish simply to be like clanging cymbals, noisy and distracting, without depth and direction. In all things, we need to have a profound sense of the holy, a deep sense and awareness of God, his presence and mystery.

9.4 We require a return to the very sources of Christian life, to the Scriptures, to the living traditions of our Church, to the spiritual wisdom of our ancestors. And this return would have to be in dynamic interaction with a pervasive sensitivity to the aspirations of all, and especially of the poor peoples of Asia.

9.5 For the spirituality of the new way of being Church is the spirituality of those who place their complete trust in the Lord. It is the spirituality of the powerless, of the anawim. Renunciation and simplicity, compassion for and solidarity with all, and especially with the poor, meekness and humility -- virtues promoted by active non-violence -- are some of the significant features of the spirituality we need, and these Gospel values resonate deeply with the cultures of Asia. It is a spirituality of harmony. It expresses our intimate communion with God, our docility to his Spirit, our following of Jesus, as we challenge the disharmonies of our Asian world. It moves us away from images of exterior organization, power or mere secular effectiveness to images of simplicity, humble presence and service.

9.6 Its depth prepares us for ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. It stirs up in us a faith and hope in the Lord of history, a sense of wonder at his mighty work, a hunger for the saving message, and beckons all to share in the ultimate goal of all human striving, which is the inner life of God.

9.7 By itself then, such spirituality is already a living proclamation of Jesus, the Lord and Savior, unequivocal in its meaning, powerful and far-reaching in its impact.

10.0 We began by emphasizing deeds as a response of the Church to the challenges of Asia and we have ended by pointing out that responding with the very being and heart of the Church has primacy over doing. This must be so, for effective doing can only result from the very depths of the Church's being and authentic living. The Church has to become what it really is for the doing to begin, for the Church in Asia "to act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

With a prayer on our lips and a hope in our hearts, we entrust ourselves to Mary, the Mother of Jesus. She is our Guide for the Way. She will help the Church in Asia to keep on the right path even if this proves to be the Way of the Cross. She will assist us to be faithful to God's plan for the Church in Asia till the time comes when her Son will return to take us to that place decreed by Isaiah:

"On this mountain, he has destroyed the veil which used to veil all peoples, the pall enveloping all nations: he has destroyed death forever.

Lord Yahweh has wiped away the tears from every cheek; he has taken away his people's shame everywhere on earth, for Yahweh has spoken" (Isaiah 25:7-8).

END

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