THE ASIAN FAMILY TOWARD A CULTURE OF INTEGRAL LIFE

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PART III. PASTORAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FAMILY MINISTRY

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, 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 full life, 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. [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 central role in evangelization and in the formation not only of the laity, but also of the Church as a whole.]. *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 [*Lumen Gentium*, 11; *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 11; *Familiaris Consortio*, 21. From the Latin word *domus*, home, the term *domestic church* shall be used throughout the paper although it may be less than felicitous, since related words such as "domesticated," "domestic worker" can evoke images of inferiority, passivity, submissiveness, and timidity]. The Acts of the Apostles reminds us that the faith spread "from house to house" (Acts 20:20). 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 toward a vision of family ministry in Asian dioceses and its general pastoral orientations.* We begin our reflection on the pastoral challenges that the Asian family confronts.

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 their 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, notwithstanding 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 [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]. 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. This*

can be like the "rock" we build upon for our Asian home, like the wise man in the parable of Jesus. It is, therefore, imperative that families consciously practice, promote and develop these positive values, so that their worth may not diminish but are 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 reshaping 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. [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].*

2. A Variety of Family Forms

9. Almost common now in Asia are family situations that are certainly different from what Asians used to call 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.

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 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 Asian families is massive poverty. It is the tragic reality of poverty that the majority of Asian families must contend with everyday and are unable to escape from. *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 UN Human Development reports regularly observe that economic globalization has *aggravated* the situation of poor people and of poor countries - and particularly of the poor in poor countries. The effect of globalization on the poverty 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" [Catholic Bishops Conference of Japan, Intervention on the Working Paper (CBCJ, IWP), July 1, 2004, p. 1]. 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 [see FABC VI, Manila, 1995]. 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 [from the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, Rome, 2004].

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, whenever 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 indigenous families. They have from time immemorial considered the land, the rivers and the forests as their own even without any legal ownership paper to show. Exploiting this indigenous understanding of ownership as well as the law, loggers, miners, farmers from lowland areas encroach into the ancestral domain of indigenous peoples and reduce their boundaries year after year. Often indigenous communities have to uproot themselves and retreat farther into the mountains to avoid conflict. But certainly their rights to land and to their own economic and cultural development are violated. Moreover *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 Impact on the Family*

21. *With 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 reshaping 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. There are many positive features of this technological revolution. It brings into Asia a deeper awareness of individual dignity, autonomy, and human rights so characteristic of the West. It makes global solidarity in times of great disaster almost an instant reality. Knowledge has grown by leaps and bounds, and the *application and* sharing of that knowledge has significantly improved human life.

23. 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, 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* a*re 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 (see *Centesimus Annus*, 32), 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 [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].*

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, inter-faith relationships, politics and governance. In its extreme form, fundamentalism has given rise to intolerance and even terrorism, increasingly a source of tension in Asian societies.
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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. *[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].*

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 year. She might even become the victim of infanticide. [According to international sociological categories, "girl-child" and "boy-child" refer to children below four years of age]. 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 (see FABC VI, Manila, 1995) 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 widespread practice of child labor. Driven by poverty and social inequalities, millions of children are engaged in labor. The phenomenon might even stem from a cultural view that parents consider their children as "properties" to be used for the welfare of the whole family. Thus, parents themselves allow or even encourage their children to pick up odd jobs in the streets, in factories and shops in order to supplement the family income, provide more food at the table, and help support their own education.*[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, IWP, p. 2, citing the annual report of the U.S. State*

Department, June 2004]. 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, it is usually claimed, is a healthy population and the reduction of population to meet decreasing food production. The Malthusian doomsday thesis is still very much a part of official government thinking despite the scientifically valid alternative views of economists who see the thesis as basically a myth that has been regularly disproved by population and food production trends in the past three decades.

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 [see CBCK, IWP, p. 2; CBCJ, IWP, p. 2].*

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 health that have both moral and medical implications. Therefore, the Church is challenged 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. (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). "The Holy See supports research on stem cells of post-natal origin [E.g., from adult bone marrows] since this approach –as has been demonstrated by the most recent studies – is a sound, promising,

and ethical way to achieve issue transplantation and cell therapy that could benefit humanity" (Loc. cit.). 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. *[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].* The family is the basic cell of society and the fundamental ecclesial community, the Church that is the home. 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 BEC's/BHC's and even of the local Church as a whole. In other words, the Church begins in the home, not in the parish. In the light of this perspective a rethinking of 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.* Some forces are distinctly positive in the development of a culture *of integral life*. 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. While possessing many positive features the emerging secular, post-modern culture is at best ambivalent. Social, cultural, economic, political, religious factors – including structures - influence the Asian family for good or for worse. 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. [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].

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, 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 (see Gen. 2:7; Acts 17:25) and a sharing of God's life (see Rom. 6:23; Jn. 4:10, 14; Rev. 21:6), life lived today in unceasing struggle toward fullness which is its eternal destiny (Rom. 6:22), life in its fullness (Jn. 10:10) in the *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 (see GS, 27) -- 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 (2 Tm. 1:10; 4:1; Heb. 9:27-28) *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 (see Gen. 1: 26-28, 2:7; Wis. 15:11). In the Book of Genesis we even find a certain intimation of a Trinitarian sharing of communion with humanity: "Let us make humankind in our image… so in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them" (Gen. 1: 26, 27 – NRSV) Thus human life began, only because of God's love. Formed according to the divine image, life is God's gift. For this reason the life of every person, no matter how poor and degraded, remains precious and sacred. Undoubtedly, the Scriptural creation stories place the creation of the human person as the climactic point. But we need to acknowledge that by virtue of God's creative act the whole cosmos is truly a web of interdependent relationships over which the human person exercises a 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…all things were created through him and for him" (Col. 1: 15-16). Through him "all things, whether on earth or in heaven"

and all broken relationships are reconciled to himself, "making peace by the blood of his cross" (Col. 1: 20).

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" (Hos. 11: 3-4); "As one whom his mother comforts, so will I comfort you" (Is. 66:13). Even the language of communion between bridegroom and wife is used (see Hos. 2: 16, 19-20). The following words exemplify the tenderness of God's life-giving love for the people: "I have called you by name, you are mine…you are precious in my eyes and honored, and I love you" (Is. 43: 1, 4). God's covenant familial relationship with the chosen people is characterized by limitless patience, kindness, summons 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 (Ex. 22:22-23; Dt. 24:17-22; Is. 1:17; Jer. 22:3; Zech. 7:10). Finally, when the covenant relationship seems to be radically broken because of stubborn infidelities, God's life-giving love promises a radical transformation in terms of a "new heart" that is malleable to God's re-shaping (see Ez. 11:19; 36: 26).

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 (See, e.g., Ps. 97:11-12; 145:13, 17-21; Wis 4:7-14).*

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 overwhelming and surpassing as when he sends his only begotten Son to assume our humanity except its sinfulness – in order that we might have eternal life (see Jn. 3:16). We believe that Jesus Christ is the Word of Life (1 Jn. 1:1). With total mastery of life, he can lay down his life for the sake of others and can "take it up again" (Jn. 10: 17-18, see also Jn. 5: 26). In ultimate self-disclosure, Jesus declares, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (Jn. 14:6). He then speaks of believing, of keeping his word, and of intimate communion of love. "Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him" (Jn. 14: 23). He who is life itself describes his mission on earth as life-giving, as salvific solidarity with others, "I came so that they might have life and have it to the full" (Jn. 10:10). *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 (see, e.g., the Beatitudes in Mt. 5:3-10), even about a "new birth" without which one cannot see the Reign of God (Jn. 3:3-8). "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 the full.

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 (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12). From Christ comes "living water" that becomes "a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (Jn. 4:14). He is moreover "the bread of life" (Jn. 6: 34, 48) that has come "from heaven and gives life to the world" (Jn. 6: 33). Jesus speaks here of Communion in the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, his own body and blood: "I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh" (Jn. 6:51). "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life" (6: 54). "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him" (6:56). That is why the apostle Paul would exult: "For me to live is Christ" (Phil.1:21). In his turn the evangelist John would proclaim: "And from his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace" (Jn. 1: 16).

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*: "A new commandment I give you: Love one another as I have loved you. By this shall people know that you are my disciples" *(Jn. 13:34-35)*. There is no deeper communion of love and life than this – the sharing of Jesus own Body and Blood, his whole life, with believers. His sacrificial love gives rise to a new community, a family of faith born in the Spirit. "But when Jesus dies and 'gives up His Spirit' to God, He 'hands on' his Spirit to the Church in the same act" [Dictionary of Biblical Theology, ed., Xavier Leon-Dufour, updated 2nd ed., 1982; Jn. 19:30]. Thus the Church *is born* as a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17), God's "household", his own family (Eph. 2:19; 1 Tm. 3:15) born of the Spirit of Jesus, the Spirit of Life [The church as the family of God was the special focus of the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa. See Pope John Paul II, Ecclesia in Africa, 199].

61. Life in Christ then is life in the Spirit (see Rom. 8: 1, 9-10). Only faith knows of such a life. But there are certain signs a life of the Spirit is, indeed, being lived. These signs are the "fruit of the Spirit" – "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Gal. 5:22). *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" (Rom. 14:17). In contrast to the life of the Spirit is life in the flesh which is demonstrated by "works of the flesh" - "immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like" (Gal. 5: 19-21). Avoiding these "works of the flesh" is a fundamental requirement of the new covenant. Paul summarizes the covenant relationship in terms of *in terms of mission to* love *and serve one's* neighbor:

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

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 (Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor 12:4-7; 12:12; Eph. 4:16).

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" (CA, 39). *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, Mary and Joseph had to probe 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 "kept all these in her heart." 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 'going about his Father's business." 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: "Let it be done according to your word."

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," 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 is my mother, my brother or sister?" or "Whatever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters…." 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." 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"[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 II on the human body based on Gen. 2:4-25]. 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" (GS, 48; see Gen. 2: 24), hold on to each other lovingly and faithfully until death (Mt. 19: 6) in a total reciprocity of self-giving. *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 (LG 48). *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" (see Eph. 5: 21-33) of love and life that is signified by the nuptial vow that husband and wife pronounce to each other and is symbolically expressed by the nuptial rings, *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 (Eph. 5:33). *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" [Salvatore Fisichella, "The Christian Family in a Time of Cultural Change," Acts of the International Theological-Pastoral Congress [AITPC], The Christian Family: Good News for the Third Millennium, Fourth World Meeting of Families, Manila, January 22-24, 2003, p. 46]. *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 are in their full meaning 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. Such 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" (LG, 48), God mandated marriage from the very beginning to be indissoluble (Mt. 19:5-6) and radically open to God's gift of procreated life. Motherhood and fatherhood are gifts implied from the beginning in the complementariness of male and female as image of God. "By its very nature the institution of marriage and married love is ordered to the procreation and education of the offspring and it is in them that it finds its crowning glory" (LG, 48; see also 50). Inseparable, therefore, from the gift given by God for husband and wife to become "one body" (Gen. 2: 24; Mt. 19: 3-9) is their unity of love and of life, not only of their own life together but also of any new life that God creates through them. Indeed, they have to be radically open to any new life, because God's love does not discriminate and does not exclude anyone, a boy child or a girl child, a handicapped baby or a totally healthy baby, rich or poor. Every child is a gift of God. This does not in any way stigmatize infertile couples for in the physical inability to have children the radical and fundamental moral openness to any life that God might give is already a blessing and a grace from God.

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 (see LG 11). 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" (EN, 71).* 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 (see RM 80; FC 54). 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" (Jn. 13:35). 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. "Go forth and multiply and fill the earth." 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. 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 (Is. 38:19; Jer. 31:3). It is thus in the midst of challenge that the original moral and spiritual brilliance of humanity be spread throughout the earth and fittingly, even if finitely, mirror the divine.

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" (EA, 46).* 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 transformative 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*" [Message for the World Day of Peace, 1 January 1998, no. 3]. This would demand the just regulation of free market forces that are now effectively in the control of the better off and powerful economies of the world. Globalization must be regulated by international juridical norms and universal ethical principles that govern the use and development of the goods of creation and the distribution of the benefits of development. Certainly in the light of the Church's social teachings among such principles would be: the preservation of the integrity of creation, universal destination of the goods of creation, human development that is integral, equitable distribution of the benefits of development, and option for the poor, and their participation in development.

These principles have been insistently taught by the church in Asia especially through the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, particularly by the various Bishops' Institutes of Social Action and Faith Encounter Institutes of Social Action.

2. The Family and Cultural Globalization

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" (FC, 6). 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 (Eph. 4:15). 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. T*he 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 (RM, 37c) and has a moral dimension. Its tools provide "unlimited opportunities for information, education, cultural expansion, and even spiritual growth" (Pope John Paul II, Message for World Communications Day 2004, "The Media and the Family: A Risk and Richness", no. 2).*

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" (Loc. cit.). 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" (Pope John Paul II, Message for World Communications Day, 1980) 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'" (FC, 47 quoting LG 31). The work then of "ordering temporal affairs to the plan of God" or assisting at social transformation is part of the service or kingly mission of the family. *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" (see FC 44) 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, (see the enumeration of such rights in FC, 46), rights that are sometimes trampled by the State. For this reason Asian families should become familiar with, defend, protect and promote the Charter of the Rights of the Family that the Holy See has proposed to intergovernmental and international organizations (see Appendix). These rights are not peculiar to Catholic belief. They flow from the very nature of marriage and family and can easily be the object of inter-religious collaboration.

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" (RM, 57). Many indeed are the ways by which inter-religious dialogue can take place at the level of the family. In the first place is the witness to Gospel values

that Christian families must give daily in our times. Among these Gospel values are: the sacredness of life from conception to natural death, the dignity of the human person, the sanctity of marriage between man and woman, family and marriage as divinely instituted, acceptance and love of children, chastity according to each one's vocation, solidarity with the poor, the sick and the needy (see GS 51, *Evangelium Vitae* 58-67, FC 16). Mutual respect for common values will lead to mutual collaboration to protect and promote them. 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 (see *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 57). Finally, one should not dismiss as impossible that Christian families could bring the Good News of salvation to people who wish to hear and freely welcome it (cf. Rom. 10:14-15). The Christian family needs to do this proclamation at least through the catechism of its members *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 (see the situation given by St. Paul in 1 Cor. 7: 12-16). At the beginning of the loving encounter of man and woman of different faiths, the consideration of religious differences as well as reconciliation already begins. The dialogue of word and of love proceeds through courtship and marriage, matures into a loving dialogue of life in the ordinary and daily events of married life. The values and attitudes of such dialogue flows to their children. Despite religious differences, a bridge of love and reconciliation is built, a reality so significant in societies plagued by religious strife. There is likewise no doubt that in the anxieties, sorrows, joys, hopes, and love of marital and family life, there are opportunities offered by the Spirit for the humble, respectful, silent but eloquent proclamation of Christian faith.

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*" (*Ecclesia in Asia*, 25). 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 (cf. Acts 4:32). The solidarity of families in all aspects of human life in the BEC's as well as in the BHC's would, indeed, be the micro-level response to the phenomenon of economic and cultural globalization. It is these communities, at the level of the family, where the "globalization of charity and solidarity" begins [The Pope has often referred to the globalization of charity and solidarity in his World Day of Peace Messages]. This in turn would require a renewal of parish structures *and pastoral programs* as well *as* a redirection of priorities in ministry, lay and ordained. Faith formation in the family leading to family empowerment in the BEC/BHC mission toward a culture of life would become the overarching pastoral priority.

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.

D. Family Spirituality Toward a Culture of Integral Life

[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].

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. The birth of a child further enhances communion for the child embodies the meaning of the procreative marital union. Children bring joy to their parents; they are God's precious gifts and God's image. They strengthen conjugal relationships and also 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 (Jn. 17:21; Acts 4:32; Phil. 2:2; 1 Pt. 3:8) that in a human way reflects the communion of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – the triune God from whom the family came to be. By definition a culture of life traces its ultimate roots to the love and life of the Triune God. Hence a spirituality of communion leads the family to become an agent of a culture of *integral* life.

106. Communion within the family, however, reaches out to the wider community and impels the family toward a mission of service (Jn. 17:14, 18, 20) *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" (Jn 2: 5). It is a matter of listening to Jesus and discerning his will in family relationships, at work, or in the everyday events that impinge on family life. Indeed, it is through ordinary events, including 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. Theirs 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" self-giving 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" (GS 16), 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" (LG 50). *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 (GS 17).* But in these days of increasing secularism God is becoming an afterthought and His Church a "voice in the wilderness." *For this 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" (LG 50). 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 parental example of fidelity to responsibility evokes in their children the desire to emulate what they see in their parents. They would be more able to learn 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" (LG 48). In prayer or at work a vibrant awareness of this special grace of marriage will surely bear great spiritual and temporal fruit for the family and will constantly remind the family of the living presence of the Triune God.

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" (Pope John Paul II, *Letter to Families*, no. 4). 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, devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mother of God, Queen of the Family, especially the regular and prayerful recitation of the Rosary would be very fruitful for the life of the family.* 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. Devotion to Mary, Queen of the Family,

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" (LG, 49).

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" (FC, 57). For the Eucharist is the memorial of the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Christ, the Paschal Mystery, the font of our salvation. Even as Christ rose from his suffering and death, so through the Paschal Mystery sacramentalized in the Eucharist families are empowered to rise from the daily trials, anxieties, discouragement, even hopelessness -- the many kinds of "death" that daily marital and family life is heir to. Certainly joy, hope, forgiveness, reconciliation, and strength for couples and their families come from the Eucharist.

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*" (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 40). It is at the Eucharist that husband and wife and their entire family celebrate the mystery of their oneness in the Body of Christ, and their oneness with one another. As St. Augustine said: "If you are his body and members of him, then you will find set on the Lord's table your own mystery. Yes, you receive your own mystery" (*Sermo* 272: PL 38, 1247, quoted in EE, 40). *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 it the celebration of the Eucharist should be a *family event* with the participation of all members of the family, including children and infants *[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].*

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";*
  • *that "marriage is the natural institution to which the mission of transmitting life is exclusively entrusted";*
  • *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 pre-nuptial 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 –

- *training for family prayer, bible reading and reflection or Lectio Divina in the family;*
- promoting integral faith formation in the family*, including missionary formation,* leading toward a spirituality of communion and mission;
- empowering parents through proper faith formation, family counseling, marriage enrichment, and other means to fulfill their calling as the primary educators, catechists, and *missionary formators* of their children;
- strengthening Catholic values of marriage while remaining open to respectful dialogue with the beliefs and values of other religions;
- on-going faith formation of husband and wife, parents, and children toward a culture of *integral* life;
- promoting functional knowledge of the Charter of the Rights of the Family (the Holy See, October 22, 1983) as an essential component of family ministry;

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

- restoring equality of dignity, complementariness, and co-responsible partnership of husband and wife in various roles in the family;
- eradicating the evils of patriarchy and liberating women from oppressive and traditional values and structures that do not recognize their equality of dignity with men;
- providing adequate formation regarding the role of male and female sexuality in human and family relationships;

- *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 –

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

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

- establishing support groups in the parish to help in all aspects of integral mission;
- using the couple to couple approach and family to family approach for mutual assistance, support and encouragement;
- producing materials for sex education, moral issues in conjugal relationships, Christian parenting, *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;
- 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;
- stopping the use of children and minors in war;
- 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 DRAWN UP BY REGIONAL GROUPS AT 8TH FABC PLENARY ASSEMBLY:

122. **(1). Reorganize 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.**

2. Promote 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.)

3. Provide specialized Healing and Pastoral Care for families in special situations (divorced, addiction / violence-affected)

4. Provide special care for children of deprived families

5. Address –

   - status of women
   - families of migrant workers / white collar and other professionals facing frequent separations because of job demands

6. Ministry for Men
   - Develop Spirituality for Men
   - Transform distorted, corrupted, deformed masculinity and fatherhood so that men radiate their own beauty and splendor as willed by God' divine plan
   - Bring them back to assume a responsible role in family life.

123. Some Specific Plans from Regional Groups:

1. New Century, New Evangelization – the Family as Evangelizer

2. Focal Point of Evangelization in the diocesan plan

3. Family as Domestic Church

   - Church witnessing to family life through education reform, support of right social policies, etc., is integral to New Evangelization through Family Life
   - Create awareness of family's role in social transformation
   - Prepare families for dialogue of life and action through neighborhood involvement, collaboration with the like-minded

- Develop Family Life Liturgies and Prayer Books for celebrations like eve of wedding ("roce'), anniversaries, First Holy Communion, etc.
- Promote Faith Formation through:

  - Home Missions / Family Councils / Cells in parishes and dioceses;
  - BECs / BCCs / SCCs / sharing in small groups
  - Bible study in families / family groups to counter Pentecostal cults and keep families together
  - Provide ongoing formation for pastors as animators in Family Ministry

- Encourage public witnessing to values of good and stable marriages at family milestones through liturgies
  - Institutionalize contact programs for couples in first five years of marriage
  - Promote programs that families see benefits in attending – like better parenting, relationship-building with siblings, parents, in-laws, conflict resolution

124. 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 Inter-Religious / Intercultural 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 concern for:

  - Marginalized / vulnerable groups
  - Families of migrant workers (encourage employers to adopt family-friendly attitude towards domestic helpers)
  - Develop neighborhood extended-family support for elderly / senior citizens
  - Trafficking in women and children
  - Pastoral care for Same Gender Oriented (SGO) persons to live as full members of the Church by responding to the universal call to holiness and service.