

THIRD PLENARY ASSEMBLY: WORKSHOP DISCUSSION GUIDE**THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH
AS A COMMUNITY OF FAITH IN ASIA****Introduction**

This particular workshop is specifically designed to be highly *process-oriented*, which means that its main content will unfold gradually following a step by step and a step after step process, the data being drawn from each and every participant's own fund of information, knowledge and experience, and from individual as well as group reflection brought about by group interaction and sharing. Each participant, therefore, must be fully and actively involved because it is a process of building together. Furthermore, it is necessary to follow each step in the sequence given, otherwise the conclusions arrived at would tend to be premature and the final impact minimal. Cutting corners, jumping ahead and skipping parts would in the long run prove ineffective and unproductive, because the various parts are interdependent. Hence all participants and the chairman are urged to undergo the process together, face each question squarely and come up with sensible answers based on solid facts. **IT IS EVERY PARTICIPANT WHO WILL MAKE THIS WORKSHOP REALLY WORK!**

This workshop has four parts:

- I. An overview of the present status of women in my country
- II. An overview of the present status of women in my local church
- III. An overview of the status of women in the four Gospels
- IV. Plans of action

This discussion guide has been prepared for the workshop sessions of the Third Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), held at the Lux Mundi Seminary, in Sampran, Thailand, near Bangkok, 20th-27th October, 1982. The theme of the Plenary Assembly is: "The Church — a Community of Faith in Asia"

It will follow this simple dynamic:

- I. Let us take a close and hard look at the actual situation of women in our respective countries. By so doing we may arrive at an Asian profile of the situation of women.
- II. Let us take a close and hard look at the actual situation of women in our local churches. We must not avoid the issue. Neither should we confuse *what is* with *what should be*. We must be aware that we are all men, and all clerics at that, with our own special biases who are viewing the situation. Let us therefore stick to the facts.
- III. Let us study and learn anew what Jesus said and did in relation to women as portrayed in the Gospels since we claim to be his followers. Let us discern what he is telling us men and leaders of the Church about the role of women in the Church as a community of faith in Asia today. How do the attitudes that we presently hold compare with his?
- IV. In the light of what we have discovered or rediscovered about the role of women, what can we do in our local churches so that women may be enabled to realize their full potential and to give their maximum contribution in building the Church as a community of faith in Asia? What are the suggestions we can offer to the various conferences of bishops in our region regarding this matter? What are the next steps I myself will take?

I. AN OVERVIEW OF THE PRESENT STATUS OF WOMEN IN MY COUNTRY

Part I will explore the following areas to determine the status of women in each country represented by the workshop participants:

- A. Educational and vocational training.
- B. Employment and other economic roles.
- C. Marriage and the family.
- D. Power and political participation.
- E. Health and nutrition.

Before going to the first meeting of the workshop it would be helpful if each participant would first go over the questions given below, and put down his answers in writing. This would facilitate and speed up the exchanges and sharing in the meeting itself enabling the group to move quickly to the second part.

- A. Taking the case of the children of an average family in your country, who gets a chance to go to elementary school, the boys or the girls? To secondary school or high school? To college or the university? Why so?

In general, for what careers, professions, jobs and tasks are the sons prepared for? What about the daughters? Why so?

Do you know the literacy rate of men and women in your country?

- B. In the rural areas, how are the women employed? What kind of jobs do they hold? Could you hazard a guess in terms of percentage distribution of women in the various jobs? Do the women get paid for their work? How much do they earn in comparison to the men doing the same or similar kind of work?

In the urban areas, how are the women employed? What kind of jobs do they hold? Under what kind of working conditions? Could you hazard or guess in terms of percentage distribution of women in the various jobs? Do they get paid for their work? How much do they earn in comparison to the men doing the same or similar kind of work?

How many lay women do you know who are holding executive positions in business firms or other institutions? How does this number compare with the number of laymen you know in executive positions?

Are there Export Processing Zones (EPZ) in your country? What kind of industries have been established? Who do they employ more, men or women? How well are they paid for their labor? Under what kind of working conditions do they work? Can they form labor unions? Are they allowed to go on strike? What benefits do they get from working there?

Is there a well-established electronics industry in your country? A garment industry? Are they transnational or national? Who do they employ more, men or women? How well are they paid? Under what kind of working conditions do they work? Health hazards? Sexual harassment from their bosses?

Have you noticed some forms of trafficking in women in your diocese such as massage parlors, sauna baths, sex tours? Are they

national or international in nature? How well established is the practice of selling women's bodies? Who are the victims? Can they get out of the system if they want to? Who gets the profits?

- C. What is the marriageable age for girls in your country? Is polygamy a common practice? Who arranges marriages? Who decides on the marriage? Where or with whom do the newly married couple live? What is the source of their economic support?

Who is the final authority in the family — the husband, the wife, the father-in-law or the mother-in-law? Who decides which matters?

Do the husbands generally help in the household chores, especially if the wives are also holders of regular jobs outside the home? Why so? Do they help in the care and upbringing of the children? How do they help?

Do daughters inherit property from their parents? Can she keep this property when she gets married? Can she acquire property while married? Who has authority over conjugal property? Is she held responsible for her husband's debts? If her husband dies, can she inherit his property? In case a couple decide on a divorce, who initiates it — the man or the woman? Who gets custody of the children? Does the divorced wife get adequate economic support for herself from her ex-husband?

- D. Do the women in your country have the right to vote? The right to be voted upon and elected? How many percent of the women actually exercise their right to vote? Why so? How many women do you know have been elected into office on the local level? Among how many men? On the national level? Among how many men? How many women do you know are holding high positions in the executive branch of government and in your country's judiciary? Among how many men?

- E. In your country are there health services meeting the needs of women? Are male doctors allowed to treat female patients? What is the ratio of female medical doctors to male medical doctors? Are women encouraged to pursue the medical profession?

Do you notice a difference in the nutrition of men and the nutrition of women in your country? In serving food at table, who is served first? Who comes next? Who comes last? What are the implications of this practice?

ALL THINGS CONSIDERED, HOW WOULD YOU PLACE THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN YOUR COUNTRY?

After each participant has answered the above questions from his own experience, it would be helpful to go over some excerpts taken from the shortened version of the World Plan of Action for the Decade for Women, adopted by over 100 nations meeting at Mexico City at the United Nations World Conference for International Women's Year in July 1975, just to compare one's observations with the summary observations of a world conference.

The World Plan of Action for the Decade of Women

The international community has, since the signing of the United Nations Charter in 1945, repeatedly tried to reinforce the fundamental principles of human rights contained in that Charter, such as the dignity and worth of the human person and the equal rights of men and women.

In a succession of conventions, declarations and formal recommendations, it has expressed its growing awareness of the uneven development of peoples and the tragedy of all forms of discrimination. It has declared that all human beings without distinction have the right to enjoy the fruits of social and economic progress and should, for their part, contribute to it. It has condemned sex discrimination as fundamentally unjust, an offense against human dignity and an infringement of human rights. But despite these solemn pronouncements, the translation of these principles into practical reality has been slow and uneven.

History has attested to the active role that women have played, together with men, in accelerating the material and spiritual progress of peoples. In our times, women's role will increasingly emerge as a powerful revolutionary social force.

There are significant differences in the status of women from country to country, rooted in the cultural framework or tied to the level of development, as there are within a given country, according to the social category of women within it. Yet basic similarities unite women in the fight against differences wherever they exist in the legal, economic, social, political and cultural status of women and men.

The 5 Year Minimum

By the end of the first five-year period (1975-1980), these minimum goals should be achieved:

A marked increase in literacy and civic education of women.

- Especially in rural areas.
- Coeducational technical and vocational training extended to women and men in the industrial and agricultural sectors.
- Equal access to education at every level, compulsory primary education for all, and action taken to prevent school dropouts.
- Increased employment opportunities for women, reduction of unemployment and greater efforts to eliminate discrimination in the terms and conditions of employment.
- Equal eligibility to vote and to seek elected office.
- Greater participation of women in policymaking positions at the local, national and international levels.
- Increased provision for health education, sanitation, nutrition, family education, family planning and other welfare services.
- Recognition of the economic value of women's work in the home, in domestic food production and marketing and voluntary activities not traditionally remunerated.
- Direction of formal, nonformal and lifelong education toward the reevaluation of man and woman, in order to ensure their full realization as an individual in the family and in society.

Education

Access to education is not only a basic human right; it is a key to social progress. Illiteracy and lack of education and training in basic skills contribute to the vicious circle of underdevelopment, low productivity and poor conditions of health and welfare. In a great many countries illiteracy is much more widespread among women than among men, and the rates higher in rural than in urban areas.

In most countries female enrollment at all levels of education is considerably below that of men. Girls tend to drop out of school earlier than boys, and boys are given precedence over girls when parents have to make a choice if education is not free. There is often discrimination in the nature and content of the education provided and in the options offered. Girls' choices of areas of study are dominated by conventional attitudes toward the roles of men and women in society.

As long as women remain illiterate and are subject to discrimination in education and training, the motivation for change so badly needed to improve the quality of life will fail — for in most societies it is the mother who is responsible for the training of her children during their formative years.

Governments should provide equal opportunities for both sexes at all levels of education and training within the context of lifelong education, and on a formal and nonformal basis, according to national needs. Target dates should be set for the eradication of illiteracy, and governments should be joined in this effort by social institutions, such as cooperatives and voluntary organizations.

Free and compulsory primary education should be provided without discrimination for girls and boys. Where possible, textbooks, school lunches, transport and other essentials should be provided free of charge.

Textbooks and other teaching materials should be reevaluated and, where necessary, rewritten to ensure that they reflect an image of women in positive and participatory roles in society. Research should be carried out to identify discriminatory practices in education and new teaching techniques to correct them encouraged.

Vocational programs of all types should be equally accessible to both sexes so that girls and boys will have a wide choice of employment opportunities. Both sexes should have equal opportunities to receive scholarships and study grants.

Special measures should be developed to help women who wish to return to work after a long absence, owing in particular to family responsibilities. Multipurpose training centers could be established in rural and urban areas to provide education and training in various disciplines and to encourage a self-reliant approach to life.

Girls and boys alike should be encouraged through vocational and career guidance programs to choose a career according to their real aptitudes rather than on the basis of deeply ingrained sex stereotypes. They should also be made aware of the education and training required to take full advantage of the employment opportunities available.

Employment

This Plan seeks to achieve equal opportunity and treatment for women workers and their integration in the work force in accordance with the accepted international standards recognizing the right to work, to equal pay for equal work, to equal conditions of work and to advancement.

Available data show that women constitute more than a third of the world's economically active population; approximately 46 percent of the women between 15 and 64 years old are in the labor force. Yet the vast majority of women are concentrated in a limited number of occupations at

lower levels of skill, responsibility and pay. Women frequently experience discrimination in pay, promotion, working conditions and hiring practices, and, even where policies of nondiscrimination are in effect, cultural constraints and family responsibilities further restrict their chances for employment.

Governments should formulate policies expressly directed toward equality of opportunity and treatment for women workers and the guarantee of their right to equal pay for equal work. Special efforts should be made to foster positive attitudes toward the employment of women, irrespective of marital status, among employers and in society at large, and to eliminate obstacles based on sex-typed divisions of labor.

Governments should seek new sources of self-help activities, such as training programs in community development and entrepreneurial skills, which should be open equally to both sexes.

In order to extend women's range of economic roles, cooperatives and small-scale industries could be developed and encouraged with government support. Cooperatives should be organized, especially in areas where women play a major role, such as food production, marketing, housing, nutrition and health. Cooperatives may also be the most appropriate and feasible arrangement for child-care and could provide employment opportunities as well. Essential to the success of such cooperative ventures, however, are training and access to credit and seed capital.

Special target dates should be established for achieving a substantial increase in the number of qualified women employed in skilled and technical work. Special efforts should also be made to increase the number of women in management and policymaking positions in commerce, industry and trade. Discriminatory treatment of women in national social security schemes should be eliminated to the maximum possible extent.

Trade unions should adopt policies to increase the participation of women in their work at every level. They should have special programs to promote equality of opportunity, including leadership training for women.

Marriage and The Family

In the total development process the role of women, along with men, needs to be considered in terms of their contribution to the family as well as to the society and the national economy. Higher status for the role in the home — as a parent, spouse and homemaker — can only enhance the personal dignity of a man and a woman. Household activities that are necessary for family life have generally been perceived as having low economic value and

prestige. All societies should, however, place a higher value on these activities, if they wish the family group to be maintained and to fulfill its basic functions of the procreation and education of children.

The family is also an important agent of social, political and cultural change. If women are to enjoy equal rights, opportunities and responsibilities, and contribute on equal terms with men to the development process, the functions and roles traditionally allotted to each sex within the family will require continual reexamination and reassessment in light of changing conditions.

The rights of women in all the various forms of the family, including the nuclear family, the extended family, consensual union and the single-parent family, should be protected by appropriate legislation and policy.

Legislation relating to marriage should be in conformity with international standards. In particular it should ensure that women and men shall have the same right to free choice of a spouse and to enter into marriage only with their free and full consent.

Legislative and other measures should be taken to ensure that men and women shall enjoy full and equal legal capacity relating to their personal and property rights, including the right to acquire, administer, enjoy, dispose of and inherit property (including property acquired during marriage). During marriage the principle of equal rights and responsibilities would mean that both partners should perform an active role in the home, and share jointly decision-making on matters affecting the family and children. At the dissolution of marriage, this principle would imply that procedures and grounds of dissolution of marriage should be liberalized and apply equally to both spouses; assets acquired during marriage should be shared on an equitable basis; appropriate provisions should be made for the social security and pension coverage of the work contributed by the homemaker; and decisions relating to the custody of children should be taken in consideration of their best interests.

Political Action

Despite the fact that women make up half the world's population, in the vast majority of nations only a small percentage of women hold leadership positions in government. Consequently, women are not involved in the decision-making and their views and needs are often overlooked in government planning.

Many women also lack the education, training, civic awareness and self-confidence to participate effectively in political life — participation as

voters, lobbyists, elected representatives, trade unionists and public officials in all branches of government including the judiciary. Where special qualifications for holding public office are required, they should apply to both sexes equally.

Governments should establish goals, strategies and timetables for increasing within the decade 1975-1985 the number of women in elective and appointive public offices. Special efforts in this direction could include:

- Reaffirming and publicizing official government policy concerning equal political participation by women.
- Issuing special governmental instructions for achieving equitable representation of women in public office, then compiling periodic progress reports.
- Making a special effort to recruit, nominate and promote women, especially to fill important positions, until fair representation of the sexes is achieved.

Health

Improved access to health, nutrition and other social services is essential to the full participation of women in development activities, to the strengthening of family life and to a general improvement in the quality of life.

Comprehensive simple community health services could be developed in which the community identifies its own health needs, takes part in decisions on delivery of health care in different socio-economic contexts and develops primary health care services that are easily accessible to every member of the community. Women themselves, especially in rural areas, should be encouraged through adequate training programs to provide such health care services to their communities. Provision should be made to ensure that women shall have the same access to that care as men.

Improved, easily accessible and safe water supplies, sewage disposal and other sanitation measures should be provided both to improve health conditions of families and to reduce the burden of carrying water, which falls mainly on women and children.

Governments should pay particular attention to women's special health needs, by providing prenatal and postnatal and delivery services, gynecological and family planning services during the reproductive years, comprehensive health services to all infants, preschool children and school-children without prejudice on grounds of sex, specific care for preadolescent and adolescent girls and for the post-reproductive years and old age, and research into the special health problems of women.

II. AN OVERVIEW OF THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN MY/OUR LOCAL CHURCHES

Part II will explore the status of women in the local churches represented by the workshop participants on various levels, namely, the level of the basic ecclesial communities, the parish level, the diocesan level and the national level.

Before coming together for a workshop discussion session, it would be helpful if each participant goes over the questions given below and jots down his answers to facilitate the sharing in the meeting. After sharing and exchanging answers at the meeting, the group can reflect together and see where similarities and differences occur. The group can also focus on the common patterns that may have emerged. This would be the Asian profile of the role of women in the local churches.

Again, all participants are urged to look at the present situation as it really is and not to confuse it with what they would like the situation to be. (This will be taken up in Part IV). The effectiveness of this part depends on how real and how factual the participants' answers are. There is no need to be defensive at any stage.

- A. If basic ecclesial communities already exist in your diocese, what percentage of their composition are women? What percentage are men?

Divide a sheet of paper into three columns. In the first column (far left) list all the tasks that only the women do. At the bottom of the column write the positions they hold in the basic ecclesial communities. In the third column list all the tasks that only the men do. At the bottom of the column, write the positions that the men hold. In the second or middle column write down all the tasks that both the women and the men do, as well as the positions that both actually hold.

What is revealed by this listing?

- B. Repeat the same procedure given in A but apply it to a typical parish in your diocese.

Do the women participate in decision making on the parish level? In what way and on what matters?

- C. Name all the Church bodies or commissions functioning in your diocese which you regard as vital organs of the Church. Who are the members of each body and how many are they? How many women are actively involved in each of them?

What does this fact show?

- D. On the national level who are the Catholic women you know whom you believe are truly influencing the life of the Church as a community of faith? How do these women contribute to the life of the Church in your country? How many are they as compared to the total Catholic population in your country? As compared to the total population of the nation?

WHAT THEN DO YOU CONCLUDE IS THE PRESENT STATUS OF WOMEN IN YOUR LOCAL CHURCH?

IS THERE ANY DIFFERENCE WITH THE GENERAL STATUS OF WOMEN IN YOUR COUNTRY?

SHOULD THERE BE A DIFFERENCE?

- E. For further discussion, consider these statements taken from a brochure on Women and Ministry:

For 2000 years women have felt discrimination in the church:

Women transmit the faith but do not develop doctrine.

Women decide what goes in the collection but not what happens to the money.

Women carry the workload as volunteers but have no role in making decisions.

Women can plan the liturgy but not celebrate the sacraments.

Women can only sit in the pew to hear the word of God preached from a male point of view.

III. AN OVERVIEW OF THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE FOUR GOSPELS

Part III will consist of carefully reading certain passages from one of the Gospels, reflecting on them, praying over them and sharing insights with one another based on these passages in the hope of rediscovering what the Lord might be telling us Christians how he sees the role of women in the Church as a community of faith in Asia today. Please note that the accent is on the Church as a *community of faith in Asia today*.

Once again, before the workshop discussion session, all participants are urged to study the given passages from the evangelist of their choice. It is a helpful Biblical Study practice to take just one Evangelist at a time so as to have one consistent frame of reference for one's own study and understanding of the subject matter. In the workshop discussion proper the participants can compare findings and insights gleaned from the various evangelists. The passages marked with an asterisk (*) should be studied from the point of view of the journey in faith that unfold in the characters therein. The passages are given below. Please choose only one set.

MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE	JOHN
1:1-16	1:29-31	1:26-38	*2:1-11
5:27; 31-32	3:31-35	1:46-55	*4:7-30
8:14-15	5:21-24; 35-43	2:17-19	7:53; 8:1-11
*9:20-22	*5:24-34	8:19-21	11:2
12:46-50	*7:24-30	7:11-17	*11:17-44
13:33	10:1-12	7:36-50	12:1-8
*15:22-28	12:41-44	8:1-3	*19:25-27
19:4-9	14:3-9	*10:38-42	*20:1-2; 11-18
26:6-13	*15:40-47	*13:10-17	
*27:55-56; 61	*16:1-11	15:8-10	
*28:1-10		21:1-4	
		*23:49	
		*24:1-11	

- A. After reading the given passages from the Gospel written by the Evangelist of your choice, what are the attitudes of Jesus towards women that you noticed. Are his attitudes the same or different from those held by the men of his time? Illustrate the cultural context of his time by citing some specific examples from the passages you read. For instance, those who read Matthew and Mark could show the attitude of Jesus towards the woman with the issue of blood, and towards the Canaanite or Syro-Phoenician woman. Those who read Luke and John could show the attitude of Jesus towards his own mother, towards Martha and Mary and towards the Samaritan woman.
- B. What were the attitudes in turn of the women towards Jesus? Cite specific examples from the passages you read. What was the strongest attitude held in common by the women you read about? Those who read John could show the journey in faith of the Samaritan woman and of Martha and Mary.

- C. When Jesus said "those who hear the word of God and keep it, these are my mother, my brothers, my sisters" where does this place Mary his mother? Correlate with the texts from Luke and John. What was Mary's greatest strength?
- D. What are the implications of the teachings of Jesus on marriage and divorce (Matthew and Mark) on the status of women of his time? What about its implications on the status of women in our place and our time?
- E. Those who read Matthew, what significance did you draw from the women cited in the genealogy of Jesus? Those who read Mark, what significance did you draw from the dialogue between Jesus and the Syro-Phoenician woman? Those who read Luke, what significance did you draw from the woman and the lost coin? Those who read John what significance did you draw from the story of the woman caught in adultery?
- F. What significance do you see about the presence of the women at Calvary and at the tomb on the first Easter morning? What implications on the role of women in building a community of faith do you draw from this reality?
- G. From all the texts that you have read from one Evangelist, what implications do you draw regarding the ministries of and for women?

Some Observations on The Gospel Texts

In the encounters of Jesus with women, what he gave primary importance to was *the person* before him. He showed acceptance, respect, and compassion *for persons*, setting aside ethnic, racial, cultic and sexual prejudices and taboos commonly held by the people of his time. For instance, the Jewish men of that period would not want to be seen talking to a Samaritan and a woman at that in public, nor take a drink from a cup used by her, nor touch a dead person — a son of a widow, nor be touched by a hemorrhaging woman and heal her, nor straighten up a bent and crippled woman on a Sabbath. Jesus overcame all these barriers, quite radical actions for his time, because he *valued persons* over and above their circumstances.

On the part of the women, the most outstanding attitude that they showed towards Jesus was the *attitude of faith*. This was also the attitude that Jesus appreciated most in them which moved him to heal them physically and spiritually or to do what they were pleading for. We see this strong

faith in Syro-Phoenician women, the woman with hemorrhage, the woman who washed his feet with her tears, the sisters of Lazarus — Martha and Mary, the women at the crucifixion and at the tomb on the first Easter morning, and most outstanding of all in Mary his mother.

The few times that Mary appears in the Gospel scenes she always comes through as a woman of great faith — at the annunciation, with Elizabeth, in Bethlehem, at the temple, at the wedding feast in Cana, and at the foot of the Cross. "She pondered all these things in her heart," wrote the evangelists. Her son says, "Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it. They are my mother, my brothers, my sisters." He valued her faith more than her physical mothering of him! Mary is truly the mother of believers! Francis J. Moloney in *Woman In The New Testament* writes about our Lady in this way: "In so far as we can speak of a history of salvation it is a woman who is both chronologically and qualitatively the first among those who believe."

It is interesting to note that in all four Gospels Jesus is never put to test by women. It seems that with their usual womanly intuition the women of his time quickly perceived who he was and believed! The men like the apostles seemed to have a harder time believing in Jesus.

The interaction between the Samaritan woman and Jesus at Jacob's well is a beautiful illustration of how the Lord himself led a sinner, an unbeliever, from the stubborn darkness of unbelief, to the light of faith and even to the active zeal of a missionary. As we follow the process of interaction between them, let us not fail to notice the delicacy of approach of Jesus, his manner of requesting for help, the friendly respect he accorded her and the directness, frankness, and openness with which he dealt with her. All these, plus the warmth of Jesus' personality, in turn helped the Samaritan woman to respond with equal openness, directness, honesty, helpfulness and eventually with faith, zeal and concern for her fellow countrymen. This particular encounter is a classic example from which all evangelizers can learn. Let us not forget that the content of their conversation was theology.

The encounter with the woman taken in adultery and the teaching of Jesus on marriage and divorce illustrates another facet of Jesus attitude towards women. In both instances Jesus takes an egalitarian stance. Not that he condones adultery committed by women, but rather that he rejects the double standard so that what's wrong for a woman is also wrong for a man. Where the old law allowed the men to write off their wives with a mere certificate of divorce, Jesus now explicitly puts the burden of the sin of adultery not only on the woman's head but on the man's head as well. With the woman taken in adultery, Jesus turns the tables on her accusers, who happened to be all men, by simply suggesting that those without sin may cast the first stone.

Lao People's Dem.	1.8	6.2	-	42/45	188/161	44	81	12/11	61/48	19/11	30/27
Malaysia	6.9	4.4	17	60/63	50/38	31	62	28/28	94/91	55/45	59/48
Philippines	23.6	5.0	11	59/62	88/72	32	31	34/35	78/78	60/60	84/81
Singapore	1.2	1.9	5	68/72	14/9	27	2	100/100	100/100	58/56	83/54
Thailand	23.8	4.5	18	58/63	75/61	46	82	14/14	80/76	39/29	87/70
Vietnam	26.5	5.8	-	46/49	127/103	42	75	21/20	-	-	-
China, People's Republic	478.0	2.3	-	62/66	53/49	38	73	24/23	-	-	-
Hongkong	2.3	2.6	3	68/74	16/12	34	2	90/90	89/89	83/79	90/64
Japan	59.2	1.8	1	73/77	9/7	40	18	75	100/100	95/95	99/97
Korea, Dem. People's Rep.	9.1	4.5	-	60/65	78/62	46	62	55/55	-	-	-
Korea, Rep. of	18.9	3.2	3	60/65	42/34	33	55	48/48	100/100	70/56	94/81

SOURCE: UNICEF

ASIAN WOMEN DATA SHEET

	Total Women mid-1980 (millions)	Total Fertility Rate (i.e. no. of pregnancies) Percent married women aged 15-19	Life expectancy at Birth, Male/Female (years)	Infant mortality rate, male/female	Women as Percent of Total labor force 1980	Employed Women in Agriculture, 1975, (%)	Percent Urban, 1975 Male/Female	% Enrolled in School 1975: ages 6-11 Male/Female	% Enrolled in School 1975: ages 12-17 Male/Female	% Adult Literature Male/Female
Afghanistan	7.8	6.9 49	42/43	244/208	19	87	13/13	26/5	23/4	19/4
Bangladesh	43.8	6.3 72	48/47	151/155	17	90	10/8	70/31	30/8	33/9
India	326.1	5.3 56	52/51	135/133	32	79	22/20	73/49	36/19	47/19
Nepal	6.9	6.4 60	44/42	144/122	39	96	5/4	44/10	17/4	35/5
Pakistan	41.9	6.3 31	52/52	145/139	11	69	27/25	58/26	18/6	24/6
Sri Lanka	7.2	3.4 7	62/65	47/36	25	65	25/23	61/63	54/54	86/68
Burma	17.3	5.5 21	51/54	151/128	36	40	25/24	65/61	30/32	80/40
Dem. Kampuchea	3.0	4.7 -	47/50	162/138	39	44	13/13	78/59	43/18	62/10
Indonesia	72.8	4.1 32	49/51	98/84	30	61	19/18	66/58	42/32	70/45

This egalitarian stance of Jesus towards women is further illustrated in his dealings with the two sisters of Lazarus — Martha and Mary. Though they held him in deep reverence as Rabbi and Master, still they felt free enough and close enough to be able to chide him for not being around when their brother died. Martha likewise felt familiar enough with Jesus to ask him to remind her sister, Mary, to help her. Jesus in turn could freely comment on Martha's many housewifely preoccupations, perhaps even to go as far as to suggest that woman was not made for the kitchen alone, because he approved of what Mary was doing, which was to sit at his feet and listen to him. In effect, Mary was behaving as one of his students in theology, a field from which women of his time were definitely excluded, because both the altar and the Torah were off limits to Jewish women.

Biblical scholars say that the texts with Martha and Mary are texts on discipleship. That being the case, let us not forget that the examples being addressed are women which could not be an accidental matter for Jesus or for the evangelists. In John's text Martha makes a proclamation on who is Jesus which parallels Peter's proclamation at Caesarea Philippi. She says of Jesus: "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ the Son of God, the one who was to come into this world" (John 11:27). Further on, we see Mary, at a dinner they gave for him, anointing him with pure nard, about which in answer to protests of Judas Jesus said, "Leave her alone; she had to keep this scent for the day of my burial" (John 12:7-8).

Here we see women involved in the ministry of the word and the ministry of unction. Again, it is interesting to note that in all four versions of the Gospel, only angels and women minister to the person of Jesus himself. Among them were Mary, his mother, Peter's mother-in-law, Martha and Mary, and women who travelled with Jesus as mentioned by Luke (Lk 8:1-3).

In the Gospel accounts there are two particular shining moments for these women-disciples who followed Jesus. One was when they followed Jesus to Calvary, stood close by till he breathed his last, was taken down from the cross and buried. The other was when they went to the tomb on the first Easter morning, found it empty, and then met the risen Jesus who commanded them to "go and tell my brothers. . . ."

In the first instance, one realizes that it took a lot of courage, perseverance, faith and love for the women to be at Calvary at that time, to witness the crucifixion of their Master, something which we think women are not capable of. In the second instance, one realizes that they must have been frightened by the men in brilliant clothes, thoroughly mystified by the empty tomb, and then completely overjoyed at seeing the risen Lord. It was the special privilege of the women-disciples to be the first to see the risen Lord.

What is noteworthy is that the women were the first to believe in the Easter event, while the men needed more evidence and more time.

As regards the Easter event and discipleship, Mary Magdalene seems to have a singular place (John 20:1-18). She recognizes the risen Lord when he calls her by name. Then she is commissioned to "go and find the brothers and tell them: I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." And Mary Magdalene goes forth proclaiming that she has seen the Lord and that He had told her these things. Thus the Church calls her the *apostola apostolorum*. Of her Biblical scholar, Raymond E. Brown, in his article, in *Women in the Fourth Gospel*, writes as follows:

Another proof that women could be intimate disciples of Jesus is found in Chapter 20. In the allegorical parable of the Good Shepherd John compares the disciples of Jesus to sheep who know their shepherd's voice when he calls them by name (10:3-5). This description is fulfilled in the appearance of the risen Jesus to Mary Magdalene as she recognizes him when he calls her by her name "Mary" (20:16). The point that Mary Magdalene can belong to Jesus' sheep is all the more important since in 10:3-5 the sheep are twice identified as "his own" the almost technical expression used at the beginning of the Last Supper: "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end." (13:1) On the analogy of the Synoptic Gospels, conservative scholars have agreed that the participants in the Johannine Last Supper scene were the Twelve. Be that as it may, it is clear that John has no hesitation in placing a woman in the same category of relationship to Jesus as the Twelve would be placed if they are meant by "his own" in 13:1.

What are all these Gospel texts leading up to? Simply put, **THAT IN THE LIFE OF FAITH WOMEN HAVE NOT ONLY AN ORDINARY ROLE BUT ARE CALLED TO PLAY A LEADERSHIP ROLE.** Do the present leaders of the local Churches in Asia today see this reality? How is this leadership role to be exercised?

IV. PLANS OF ACTION

Part IV consists in determining one's degree of satisfaction with the status of women in one's country, as well as one's degree of satisfaction with the quality and amount of participation and contribution of our Catholic women to the local church as a community of faith in Asia. It also involves a force-field analysis, action-planning and a formulation of proposals and recommendations for the consideration of the various conferences of bishops in Asia.

Using a 6-point scale as reference for measurement, with 1 indicating the lowest degree of satisfaction and 6 as the highest, rate your own degree of satisfaction with the status of women in your own country? Why do you give this rating?

Using the same scale, rate your own degree of satisfaction with the participation and contribution of the women in your local church? Why do you give this rating?

Identify the barriers in your local church which block women from fully participating and contributing. Which of these barriers can be eliminated? How? Which of these barriers can be minimized? How?

Identify the resources in your local church which will help the women to participate and contribute more fully? Which of these resources can be increased? How?

What are the various roles, ministries, positions, tasks, and functions that you think the women in your local church can be involved in? Why do you think so?

What steps will you yourself take to enable them to be involved?

What suggestions or recommendations would you like to propose to the various conferences of bishops here in East Asia regarding the role of women in the Church as a community of faith?

Postscript

(Francis J. Maloney, *Woman in the New Testament*, St. Paul Publications, Homebrush, Australia)

Although lengthy, my reflections are still far too sketchy. Any sort of approach to these texts which hoped to avoid superficiality should really go to even greater lengths. However, for the moment we must content ourselves with this introductory sketch. Through all of my analysis it appears to me that Christianity, as it is revealed to us in its earliest writings, has been a major moment in the history of women. The following areas seem central:

1. Woman has been released from the taboos and the myths which have surrounded her in a mystique, yet placed her on a side-track (and generally a lower track). This can already be sensed from the glimpses that our earliest texts give us of the life of Jesus, and it becomes especially important for Paul and Luke, even though Paul obviously had difficulties in the pastoral application of his theological principles.

2. The greatness of woman appears to emerge from a growing consciousness, especially reflected in the Gospels, that she is the first in faith, both in terms of her coming to faith (chronologically) and in the quality of her faith (qualitatively).

3. The infancy stories of Matthew and Luke have shown us that it is not only "a woman" (Luke), but also "women" (Matthew) who play a decisive role in the unfolding of God's salvation history, precisely because of the primacy of their faith.

4. The use of women in the Fourth Gospel, headed by the Mother of Jesus, as "models" of the possibility of a journey of faith, to which all Christians have been called, shows a clear consciousness of the fact that women are not only the *first* in this area, but they are also to be *followed*. This means that, in the order of faith, women assume the role of *leaders*.

These are the main conclusions which have come to me in the months that I have been preparing this paper. As I have gradually seen these themes emerge from my analysis, two serious questions have been bothering me more and more. I will simply leave them with you.

a) What can we do to make it clear to all — the women themselves, as well as the men who dominate the Christian Church — that we have re-mythologized woman? The study of the sources of our faith indicates that we must repeat in our own age what Jesus of Nazareth and the early Church appears to have done: a demythologizing. In the New Testament woman is clearly first in time and quality in the order of faith, and she thus assumes a leadership role in man's search for faith. Although many of us have had this experience in our own lives: mothers, wives, close female friends who have led us into our journey of faith, are we conscious enough that when it comes to faith women, not men, lead the way?

b) Even if we have arrived at that consciousness, given the structures and discipline of the Church as we have it today, is it possible for women to assume their role as leaders in the area of faith?

May I suggest, in conclusion, that authentic renewal in the Christian Church will come from our women. As we see from the New Testament evidence which we have examined, it is women who have the openness, softness, yet courage, intuition and staying power that is needed. God made women "receptive", and that is what gives them their primacy in the Kingdom (see, for example, Mk 9:33-37). A man wants his power and his security and far too many of them, now as in the past, have found it in the upper echelons of the hierarchical structure of the Christian Churches.

Of recent years there have been some valiant attempts to strike out along new paths, and here I would like to mention the prophetic quality of the lives of many Sisters and Religious Congregations over the past 20 years. However, it appears to me that we have arrived at a rather critical moment. In the face of criticism from all sides and the loss of many good, talented people, discouragement and division have crept in. May I conclude this little booklet with a plea? I am well aware that much damage has resulted from woman's presence in the front line in recent years — but that is where you have *always* been, in the Christian view of things! Please do not let us down now, when at last we males are beginning to see just how much we need you to guide us into a future which only God can determine. This is, ultimately, a journey of faith, and you must once again be prepared to assume the leadership for that particular journey.

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