

## FOURTH PLENARY ASSEMBLY: WORKSHOP DISCUSSION GUIDE

**THE LAITY AND THE FAMILY****INTRODUCTION**

The signs of the times of 1986 are telling the Church that in its apostolate in the contemporary life of Asia this young continent should be recognized not only for its size, but more so, for its people, its resources, its promise, and above all, its huge potential for good to the world as a whole.

Asia is people. A continent brimming with the keen desire to advance, to progress, to make good use of its resources, so that its millions of people can attain a happier, more meaningful life than what has been achieved in the past. Still partly dormant, Asia cannot remain so forever. The continent is in ferment with the people's eagerness to live a life that is truly worth living, where there is peace, justice, freedom, happiness and concern for one another. It is clear that the Church is a key institution that can transform Asia from just a huge mass of earth with people still to be developed, to be harnessed, to people realizing its God-given potential. The Church's role is well-defined and delineated: 1) evangelization, and 2) the pastoral care of the people of Asia with its divergent traditions, cultures, religions, languages.

A Catholic priest who has spent a number of years of mission work in Japan once wrote: "Christ must be presented in a kimono, not a Western-style suit. That means, the Church must be firmly Catholic and firmly Japanese." This telling statement gives us an inkling to how the Church has to proceed in its thrust to come into the lives of Asians and be firmly established. The Church must project itself not as a Western religion, but

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must penetrate the Asian home and blend itself in, make itself part of Asian life in its various identities.

## **I. THE FAMILY — THE PRINCIPAL AGENT OF EVANGELIZATION**

### **The Family is the Focal Point**

For the gigantic work of evangelization the Church has to focus on and begin with the Asian family. The family in a true sense is the hope of the Church in Asia. For the family is closely knit together and yet quite extended in Asia. The ties are close. Family interest has high priority for all. The honor and dignity of the family are paramount. The family, as a social institution, as an arena of love and growth, is well entrenched. There is so much willingness, desire and motivation to sacrifice for the good, for the benefit of the family. If the Asian can be convinced that the Catholic faith is essential and good for the family, this can be an effective entry point for the Gospel.

What is obvious and very apparent in the Asian family is its unity, which is, for all of us, the goal of marriage and family life. With this unity the family in Asia remains, as in centuries past, indestructible, united in times of joy, sorrow, triumph, crisis. The modern era, however, is a serious threat to the family in Asia, as the tidal wave of materialism, beckoning to a life of pleasure, convenience and self-fulfillment at all cost, continues unabated. The Asian family must be reached by today's primary evangelizers, the laity, and the Christian family itself, lest it fall before the onslaught of modern aberrations based on an instinctual life, giving in to the drive of the instincts for self-gratification.

### **The Family Is Not An Island By Itself**

The family's positive Christian elements of love, mutual interest and co-operation must be well-rooted and strong enough to be able to counteract the negative assaults on the Asian family today. Too much family closeness, however, can isolate the family from the social vortex in which it is supposed to be involved and actively participating in assisting other families and the community at large. The Asian family needs to be imbued with the understanding that it cannot be an island by itself, and should participate in the everyday life of the community. This isolation may be a tremendous obstacle for the Gospel workers, the laity, and the members of the Christian family, as they move to evangelize, to bring into the Reign of God the Asian family. If the latter closes in on itself and refuses to open outwards, this will not be surprising. For the Asian family

may still be enclosed in age-old traditions and customs, suspicious and cautious of any change, especially of other religions and beliefs.

In the work of evangelizing Asia these are the formidable obstacles which need to be recognized: the ancient customs, traditions of Asia which are deeply inherent in the Asian culture, and most of which can appear totally alien to our traditional Judeo-Christian religious concepts.

The family in Asia is the prime instrument of the Church in the transmission of religious values, mainly through the behavior of the extended family, of the spouses and their children, as they express their love for each other and share each other's lives. In this way, they act as models of behavior to the community outside. If Asian married couples can be brought into the work of evangelization, then many of the problems and difficulties may be minimized. The husband and the wife, being the key people, can serve as the propagators of the Gospel, God's own messengers, givers of the Good News.

### **Beset by a Strong Wave of Secularism**

What the Church should strongly be alert to in its evangelization process, with the laity and family spearheading the drive, is that there is a strong wave of secularism that is sweeping the Asian scene, which needs a positive, convincing reaction on the part of the Church. Family life in Asia can only be truly filled with Gospel values and vigorous if the laity of Asia work with creativity and militancy, using the family as its main vehicle. For the family has natural energies, tremendous strength, headed by a "couple power," which is closely linked with God through the Holy Spirit.

Family life must grow in a dynamic manner in Asia. This can be achieved if the individual family itself grows and prospers, coming closer to the Lord, so that its "couple power" can work and operate effectively on other non-Christian families. The spiritual capacity and growth of the family in Asia must always be guided, so that in spite of poverty, misery and other pressures and hardships of modern living, the average Asian family can still survive and not be swept by the tendency towards a kind of liberalization which is plain secularism, a drive away from God, religion and Christian values.

## **II. THE PASTORAL CARE OF THE CHURCH TO AND THROUGH THE FAMILY**

This brings us to the second point: the role of the Church towards the family. The Church and the family are inextricably bound together; they move together in the pilgrimage of life, with the Church serving as a beacon, a guide, an inspiration to the family. In this capacity the Church oversees the growth and development of the family. Its care must extend through every phase of an individual's life, attending to spiritual needs from baptism to the last sacraments. This includes formation in faith, instruction in the teachings of the Church, the liturgy, and a formation of the child of God, to reach one's potential to the fullest, to become the kind of person God meant the Christian to be — in the family.

The revelation and manifestation, the projection and presentation of the Reign of God to the millions of families scattered in the vast continent, are the great reality that confronts the Church today. It becomes imperative that the Church's pastoral care for the whole Asian family carry a high priority. How alive and strong the Church's pastoral concern is for the Asian family may determine to a large extent the success of the evangelization of Asia. The family, being the domestic Church, the living example of the Church of Christ on this earth, is in turn the stalwart of Christian evangelization.

### **The Family in a Pastoral Role**

In the pastoral work in Asia the family as the vehicle of Christian vitality can really work on Asia's millions effectively through a family life program that can best be designed to fit into the Asian milieu. If the pastoral care is shown through deeds, programs of action, in real, concrete terms and not only through preaching, then the average Asian family can be won over to enthusiastically embrace the Gospel values and become a paragon of Christian virtues.

### **The Husband and Wife Relationship as the Great Sign**

Millions of Christian families are not well-versed in the teaching of the Church on marriage and need instruction and education in marriage and family life. Christian marriages and the families they form really make up the Church. The human being is introduced into the world through the great love of husband and wife, the result of the procreative powers of the spouses, with God's will working in them. With the individual in the family fold from conception and birth, he grows and becomes a dynamic member of the family of God. And so, through history,

the family multiplies, evolves as time and the world God created moves on and on to life, empowered by love, the same love that Christ had for his people. Thus, the basis of the family is the loving relationship between husband and wife, who God willed to be together in this earthly paradise.

The communion of love and life between husband and wife has to be nourished like a plant, strengthened, so that it grows. It is a kind of love that is not only human, but superhuman, divine. It has to be a Christlike love, if it is to survive the onslaught of time. The wife is another Christ to the husband and the husband to the wife. Thus, the great mystery in Genesis: "For this reason a man leaves his father and mother, and clings to his wife, and the two become one flesh," is directed towards the reality of married life, the goal of Christian marriage which is unity. Thus, the Church has to give due emphasis to the marital relationship of couples.

### **A Family Thoroughly Christian**

The Church also must see to it that the family become thoroughly Christian not only in its approach towards the Lord in the matter of ritual prayers and ceremonies, but just as importantly, that the family really live the tenets of the Church, the commandments, the sacraments, so that each family be a model to each other.

Inspired by the early Christian communities, faithful to the ideals and principles of the Catholic faith, they can be the Christian prototypes for all Asia's families, although they are numerically fewer than the millions who belong to the different Asian religions and persuasions, given their proper inspiration, guidance, and example, according to each country's unique culture and family traditions.

### **Population Control and the Witness of the Catholic Family**

There are many moral problems that confront the Asian family. One of the most serious is the contraceptive mentality relative to procreation. Many in Asia strongly advocate the use of artificial means to control Asia's bursting population. They say: The teeming millions will multiply in the years to come, with dire predictions on the huge population increase by the year 2,000; multifaceted problems will emerge which will mean more hardships, sacrifice for the Asian continent. The resulting hunger, disease, and squalor are always being projected by the secular media.

What then is the response of the Church? To counter such a mentality of artificial contraception, the Church, through the laity and family as the model, has to be vigorous. Vatican II teaches that "marriage and conjugal love are, by their very nature, ordained towards the begetting of children." Marriage is under obligation to co-operate in the bringing up of children as God has gifted it with fruitfulness. "Children are really the supreme gift of man."

The forces of modern living under the banner of family planning and birth control are struggling hard to make some headway among Asia's hard-pressed couples. This makes it imperative that the real meaning of responsible parenthood be brought home effectively to the Asian couple.

Responsible parenthood is the responsible, mature decision of the spouses about the spacing of children and the number of children they would like to have. Again quoting Vatican II: "Certain modern conditions often keep couples from arranging their married lives harmoniously, and they find themselves in circumstances where at least temporarily the size of their families should not be increased." As to the number of children, the Council says: "The parents themselves should ultimately make this judgment in the sight of God. But in their manner of acting, spouses should be aware that they cannot proceed arbitrarily. They must always be governed according to a conscience dutifully conformed to the divine law itself, and should be submissive to the Church's teaching office which authentically interprets that law in the light of the gospel, so that divine law reveals and protects the integral meaning of conjugal love and impels it toward a truly human fulfillment."

Many couples make use of outside agents that interfere with the workings of nature as ordained by God in the creation of a human being through the act of love of the couple, which debases the human being created in the image and likeness of God.

Not only the pill or artificial contraceptive threatens the family in Asia. There is also abortion, legalized in Asian every country, with the exception of the Philippines.

There is a strong desire, amply aided by media, to make man conscious of a limitless emancipation in the name of individual freedom, and in the process, man is manipulated as he is encouraged to satisfy his sexual instincts, much like the animal. In the process, his religious beliefs are thrown overboard.

## **The Family Shows Forth the Moral Dimension of Life**

In this respect, the vast problems of Asia are not only political or economic but also moral. Hedonism, disguised as one of the tenets of a secular humanist philosophy which espouses self-realization and the satisfaction of the instincts, to live an instinctual life, causes the disintegration of the moral fiber of the family in Asia. As far as sexual morality is concerned, Asia, including the Philippines, is suffering from a moral malaise. Herculean efforts in this part of the world must be exerted to respond effectively and meaningfully in this fight against our modern ideology, which will convert Asia into a jungle of men and women roaming the world freely in the name of untrampled license and self-gratification. The family, its beauty, its mission, may fall by the wayside.

### **Apostles within the Catholic Family**

What about the lay person, specifically, in the context of the family? What is his/her responsibility to the life of the Church and its mission in the transformation of society? What really is the mission of the married couple and the family in Asia?

God expresses himself through the love of the spouses. This spousal love is the "Good News" proclaiming God's love to the world. It is this great love of the couple for each other which is vital to the Church. It is in this way the spouses play a leading role in the whole evangelization process of the Church. When the couple commit themselves to mutual exclusiveness and permanence, a domestic Church is created.

### **The Responsibility of Married Couple to Each Other — The Witness of Love to Others**

If the couple fulfills in day-to-day living this statement of St. Paul to the Corinthians that husband and wife are consecrated through the believing partner, then their service to each other, their family, to the community and to Christ is a foregone conclusion. Consecrating each other through each other takes place daily in large and small happenings. The main thing in this sharing of each other's life is that the spouses become an inspiration to each other, having in mind always that God's eternal love is there in their married lives, and that each is God's gift to the other.

St. Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, writes: "Husband, love your wives, as Christ loves His Church." This links Christian man with the paschal mystery, Christ's own passion, death and resurrection. The love

of Christ for his bride, the people, finds its supreme expression on the cross, as he gave his life for his people. Dying to oneself as Christ did is the kind of Christlike love that marriage requires. The cross, therefore, is the symbol of married love. Christ's love meant suffering, sacrifice, and married life is full of these.

Marriage is made up of cycles of passion, death and resurrection. These take place every day in the life of the spouses. To be able to respond to this human cycle of married love, couples must have a high level of maturity to be able to adjust, to accept, to reconcile. Love in marriage accepts everything, and forgives all remissions and omissions. It does not brood over the past, is mainly concerned with the present and the promise of the future. It is a kind of love that is forever based on fidelity and chastity. Fidelity and chastity are sources of joy, but they require sacrifice. And this is another proof of married love in its "ups and downs," its romance, disillusionment and eventual joy.

### **Responsibility of Parents to Their Children — the Family Dialogue**

Family life has to grow, and this is achieved first through the couples themselves and then with their children. If father and mother fulfill this mission of mutual love in their own relationship, then their relationship with their children enhances and grows. To be truly alive, the family in Asia, as anywhere else, must have that group personality of "family as Church." Family as Church can be fully realized through family dialogue — a free and sincere exchange of communication between members, acceptance of each other, encouraging the children to become the kind of person God meant them to be, and not what the parents want. God sometimes speaks through the different members of the family, so listening to each other is listening to the word of God. This, then, is the example that must be projected to the non-Christian families of Asia. That there is life in a Christian family through dialogue.

### **III. THE FORMATION OF THE FAMILY FOR LIFE AND MISSION**

The objectives in any family life formation program are: a) to make the Asian family united, strong, and alive for a united family is the best asset a nation can have; b) to make it truly Christian, united with Christ, and a living expression of the Reign of Christ on earth; c) to prepare the Asian family to meet the threats to destabilize the family, such as the permissive concepts and the capitulation to instinctual desires in an unlimited manner; d) to reinforce family values like religiosity, solidarity, respect for elders, and other traditional values of the country or region concerned.



## **1. The Beginning of a Program in Family Education**

An overview of family life in the world is first needed. In this world of ours contraception, live-in relationship, pre-marital sex, abortion are killing traditional family values. In the First World there are more deaths than marriages and births, resulting in a dying population. In most of Asia family life is still strong and healthy; for by nature and historically the Asian family is a closely knit family. Its potential for being the focal point for conversion to Christian values is large and promising. In fact, Cardinal Joseph Hoeffner of Cologne, has pointed to Asia as "the best hope of the Christian family in the world."

### **The Family — the Prime Value**

In the Philippines the family is the "No. 1" value, the most precious entity. A local psychologist has characterized the family as "a defense against a potentially hostile world, an insurance against hunger and old age, a place where one can be oneself." With the family, the Filipino feels a sense of belonging. Even if he leaves the family hearth for greener pastures, he always longs to return to the family where he feels secure.

The Asian too has a tremendous respect for the family. To the Asian the family is his anchor in life. He grows with the family; depends much on the family; he falls back on the family when he meets failure. His whole life centers on the family from birth to death. The influence of the family on the Asian individual is incalculable.

In the overall introduction to formation, the family, its role, functions, goals in society are taken up. The traditional family values and practices of the particular region will be introduced and should also be discussed, with particular emphasis on the positive values to be encouraged. Due importance should be given to the family as a whole. As the late historian Will Durant, said: "the family was ahead of the state." Therefore, it is the duty of the state to strengthen and protect the family.

## **2. Overview of Marriage**

Despite the inroads of some modern trends, most of which are anti-marriage, Christian marriage remains the most vital, most satisfying human relationship. As an arena of growth, where the principals will have the opportunity to become more as persons and advance as human beings, marriage cannot be equalled.

Marriage as a vocation, a call from God and not just an earthly partnership, has to be pointed out. To realize that the spouse is a gift of God to the other, and every good thing one does for the other is an expression of appreciation to the Giver, is to lift marriage to its divine aspect. That is why conjugal love of husband and wife, with the apostolic love of the religious for the people of God, are the two dearest kinds of human love to Christ.

### **3. The Individual — Self-Awareness, Self-Worth, Self-Acceptance**

Before a man or woman can understand another human being and commit himself or herself in marriage one must first be aware of, accept and respect oneself. The first main subject, therefore, is an understanding and appreciation of the individual self, man and woman, created in the image and likeness of God. The dignity of the person needs to be respected, irrespective of his/her station in life. Emphasis is on the self, the human person, his/her character, his/her values, his/her beliefs, his/her freedom to choose the good from the bad through the use of the mind, the will, the faculty of reason vested by God in him/her, with an eternal destiny awaiting him/her in the hereafter.

### **4. The Six Dimensions of Husband-Wife Relationship**

After a thorough understanding and appreciation of oneself, the dynamics of marriage are discussed. The six dimensions of husband-wife relationship are: spiritual, psychological, physical, economic, social and educational. The goal of marriage is unity — not only in the physical sense of two bodies becoming one, but it comes alive in the other areas of marriage, psychological and emotional.

#### **a) The Spirituality of Marriage**

Marriage is not a simple contract for a definite period of time, but a covenant. It is forever, till the death of the spouses. The relationship of husband and wife is based on love, the same kind of love that Christ has for his Bride, the Church. Dying to oneself, for the benefit of the spouse, placing his or her welfare before one's own, is the daily rhythm of a genuine Christian married life.

The spiritual reality of marriage in the everyday life of the couple is projected through: (i) A realization and appreciation that it was God who brought them together. Both spouses courted and were courted or engaged to other young men and women. How is it then that they ended

up with each other? Thus, God must always be present in that relationship, for he had a hand in their marriage. (ii) Modeling by husband and wife of a good Christian marriage in the community, as examples of Christian marital behavior for others to emulate. (iii) Readiness to make sacrifices for each other; for love is sacrifice and sacrifice is love. Like Christ's use of the Cross to demonstrate his love for us, the daily crosses of married life can be used as their vehicle of love and their salvation — in fulfillment of Christ's great commandment: "Love one another, as I have loved you." (iv) Appreciation of the world they live in, the beauty of the world God created for them, together with the gift of life itself. The economic and social conditions in Asia are such that an ordinary couple may have a dark outlook on life, full of hopelessness as they go on living with no drive. This is where boredom and loneliness will creep in, and this can be disastrous.

### **b) The Psychological Dimension**

The psychological union covers communication, adjustment, male-female differences, the nature of conjugal love and how it operates in marriage.

The life and death of marriage is communication. For on communication, verbal and non-verbal, marriage as a companionship will depend. Marriage lives on words. Silence can be deadly in marriage, for it can lead to boredom — the enemy of marriage. Verbal communication which enlivens the marriage should really be in the form of dialogue, both sending messages and responding to those messages. Both spouses should be effective listeners, for listening is a form of giving oneself to the other, a concrete way of saying "I love you." Non-verbals — hugs, kisses, etc. — are signs of warm affection and can effectively enhance the relationship.

Being able to adjust to each other is a sign of maturity. For continuous adjustment requires a high level of maturity, the kind that does not regress when faced with unpleasantness, difficulties, pressures.

The Church's teachings on the equality of the sexes must be pointed out. The women of Asia are still below their male counterparts. In countries like Japan, China, and India, the women are just beginning to emerge from their cultural servitude. Japanese women are getting modernized, taking more jobs and positions previously manned by the male. Still, Japanese culture treats the women lower than the men. In the Philippines the family is mainly matriarchal, and the women are occupying top positions both in government and private firms, although there are still laws favoring the male.

The differences between man and woman can be a source of potential discord between the spouses. Awareness of their differences and traits can avert conflicts and disagreements in marriage. Man and woman are equal though they have differences. They can never be the same. They are equal in the eyes of God — equal in goals in life, in the redemptive plan of God, and in their worth as human beings created in the image and likeness of God, equal in the dignity of their personhood. Their differences on the other hand make them complementary to each other, making them more attractive and interesting to each other, making their day to day interaction exciting in many ways.

The nature of conjugal love is based on the love of Christ for his Church, and the couples makes this visible to their fellowmen and women through their own dynamic interaction, their loving behavior towards each other. With this kind of interaction, conjugal love is alive, exudes vibrancy, enlivens the lives of the couple.

The stages of married love, which all married couples go through in cycles, are the passion, death, and resurrection of married life. They are: (i) romance; (ii) disillusionment; (iii) misery; (iv) awakening; (v) mature love.

Romance in marriage is not the romantic setting of a lovely evening, bright moon, starry skies, music. Romance in marriage is the reality of two people living together, day in and day out, with many things to talk about together, and many things to do together. When the couple begin to know each other better, their true character and idiosyncrasies begin to surface. Disillusionment sets in, bringing loneliness, which is more deadly in a marital relationship. If not handled maturely, the result is misery, which is the pit of disappointment and despair. If not recognized as just a stage, the couple could separate at this point. However, if they are mature, one or both spouses should sit up and take action, to move up the marriage to the next level, awakening. Awakening is a most satisfying stage, where a couple at loggerheads find themselves and begin their climb towards mature love by dying to their selfishness and self-interest for the good of the spouse, a total giving and surrender to the other for the good of the relationship. The resolution of such a crisis in marriage is the development of mature love which can accept unpleasantness and difficulties and still emerge strong and alive.

The process of marriage describes how love operates in the life of a couple. Love operates through the decisions, small and big ones, couples make daily. There are two persons, husband and wife, but three personal-

lities: I, You, and We or Us. Each works for the good of the other two. Thus, the I will do the very best for the welfare of the You and the Us. The You will do the same for the I and the Us. The We will do everything for the good of the I and the You. The objective is to enrich the loving relationship which should grow and progress through the years.

### c) The Physical Dimension

The physical aspect of marriage makes a reality of the “two in one flesh” dictum. With procreation as its primary goal and the strengthening of conjugal love as the secondary aim, sex in marriage is one of the best expressions of love between husband and wife. Though it is indispensable in marriage, sex is not the most important ingredient in marriage. It is love. A very loving sexual act between husband and wife powers the marriage and strengthens the relationship.

To make the sex act between husband and wife an authentic act of love, the Asian couple need to be reminded of several points: (i) the love act must be satisfying to both husband and wife, not only to one, usually the husband. If this is so, an injustice is committed, and the act is distorted and meaningless. (ii) For the love act to be satisfying to both, they must be aware of the differences between man and woman in sex. The nature of woman is such that it is necessary for the man to arouse her in foreplay so she can be psychologically and emotionally primed, especially if she belongs to the traditional Asian family with prudish, puritanical concepts of sex. Man is different. He does not need much stimulation for him to enjoy the act. Therefore, the husband has to accompany the wife in her climb to her emotional summit with loving acts. After her climax or orgasm, the husband has to bring her down gradually with warm, tender affection. That is why the sex act needs tenderness, gentleness, generosity and consideration for each other, especially on the part of the husband. (iii) An unsatisfactory sexual relationship between husband and wife will adversely affect other areas of their relationship and should therefore be worked at lovingly and patiently.

It is in the physical union that the chastity of married life is brought into focus. It has a holy dimension, for it is likened to Christ's giving of himself in the Last Supper to his Bride, the Church. It is a total surrender in love, and not dominated by lust and passion without love. Marital chastity is preserved as long as the sexual act is performed only within the context of marriage, not before, or after with a different sexual partner.

#### **d) The Economic Dimension**

Money is power, and can be the onus of the struggle between the partners. In Asia an overwhelming majority of wives are full-time housewives, but the number of working wives is rapidly increasing. In countries like the Philippines and Japan, especially in the former, the woman is fast taking her place of equality with her male counterpart.

Money is good and has an important place in the daily family life. But when it is given exaggerated importance as the be all and end all, then money can do harm. Many couples, who were simply working as employees, then decided to go into business which flourished tremendously, found that their newly acquired possessions begun to grip them, and soon they lost all sense of values. The lure of more wealth resulted in the detriment of their once happy relationship.

In the Philippines, the woman traditionally holds the purse-strings. But when both husband and wife are working, the managing of two purse-strings can be a strain on the marriage if they are not mature. Since the working wife is now emerging as a prominent figure in Asian society, the pros and cons of a wife working full-time and how it affects her family should be fully explored.

Budgeting is good practice for the couple to follow. Discussing the income and expenses will promote communication and prevent any misunderstanding regarding the proper management of their funds.

#### **e) The Social Dimension**

Marriage is a social sacrament. As such, it extends or spreads its influence to others — the children, the community.

In the hierarchy of love in marriage, the spouse is first to the other, the children second, and the parents, third. In Asia, particularly the Philippines, there is an old belief that the parents come first before the spouse. This traditional thinking should be clarified and explained according to Christ's teachings: "For this reason, a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two become one flesh." The spouses have to prepare for the eventual separation from the children

children when they establish their own communities of love, by being first to each other. So, the intimacy of the couple should deepen through the years by clearly establishing their priorities in the hierarchy of love.

The bond of love with their parents is never severed. Only, the married children move away from their origins, their roots, their parents. One of the basics in the relationship between the married children and their parents is that the former should not depend financially on their parents, or their autonomy will be lost. A good rule to follow regarding in-law relationships is a policy of: not too far and not too near.

The marital couple has a responsibility to the community they live in, as the family cannot be an island by itself. Their love has to radiate not only to their family but to the community, rendering service to their fellowmen — being a couple for others.

#### **f) The Educational Dimension**

The last dimension in marriage, educational, deals with parenthood. The home, as the true school of living, is emphasized through the five essentials of human adjustment that can only be learned in the home. These are: (i) to love and be loved; (ii) security and acceptance; (iii) respect for authority; (iv) discrimination between right and wrong; (v) discipline, responsibility, self control.

The child first experiences love in the home. Finding security and acceptance of who he is, he begins to love himself, which forms the basis of love for others. The parents are the first authority figures and on how he respects them will depend the kind of respect he will pay to all forms of authority. Through the behavior of his parents and their attitudes he will learn to discriminate between right and wrong.

Parents do not own their children. They are stewards, trustees. God really owns them. In Asia, children are of great value to parents and the latter have the tendency to extend their lives through their children. The hold of parents on the Asian children is quite tight, but the modern trend — full emancipation of teenagers — is gradually seeping in. What is needed is the moderate “Back to Balance” way of treating children — enough freedom to express themselves, while respect for their parents is not diminished. Gradual emancipation is the byword in giving the child the freedom he is crying for.

##### *1. The “Closed and the Open Family System.”*

**Closed Family System:**

*Communication* is indirect and unclear;

*Rules* are fixed and out of date;

*Outcome* is chaotic relationship;

*Self-Worth* of the child grows more doubtful and leans heavily on outside support.

**Open Family System:**

*Communication* is direct and clear;

*Rules* are up-to-date, changed when need arises;

*Outcome* is constructive;

*Self-Worth* grows, becomes self-confident and draws increasingly from the self.

The three agents of the socialization process in the education of the child are: the home, the peer group, and the school, church and media.

The religious, social, psychological and sexual development of the child belongs to the home, to the parents. The parents' role in the religious education is essential. It is they who first introduce God to their children, and how the father behaves as earthly father will reflect on the goodness of the Heavenly Father he represents.

Values are captured from the parents in the home where the most important value, love, must reign. When the child reaches the school, his values are already formed and set. The values he learned at home are now pitted with those of the peer group. The school can do much to rectify, harness, and develop the values learned at home.

The ages of 1-10 years' old is the limit-setting stage, when through the do's and don't's, values are formed, shaped into a framework called character. The adolescent stage is called the behavior or example setting stage, where the behavior of the significant adults around him, principally the parents, speaks louder than words. The child with his great potential must be encouraged to be a Good Samaritan to his fellowmen, an asset to society.



## **2. Integration of Home and School**

Home and school should team up to produce mature, responsible human beings with values, character, to know how to choose between good and evil, by: (i) co-operation between parents and teachers so they can discover and harness the learning capacity of the child; (ii) jointly deciding the extent of the freedom to be given the child, commensurate with the maturity, responsibility, and ability of the child to obey rules and regulations; (iii) jointly showing love and concern for the child so he can feel accepted and his self-esteem developed; (iv) regular consultation between parent and teacher so problems can be nipped in the bud, and parents are made aware of what the school is teaching the child, new trends in parenting, etc. The school should also contribute to the educational development of the parents through marriage and family enrichment seminars.

## **3. Church and the Home**

Church and home need to co-operate to assure the religious upbringing of the child, although the school plays an important part here, particularly if the school is Catholic. Through the laity, the lay catchists in the parish, the Church can indoctrinate the child in the Catholic faith. This is happening now all over Asia. The parents may find interest in what the parish is teaching their children and may themselves attend. Emphasis on child attendance at the Eucharistic celebration may bring the parents, too.

One potent religious practice which surely should be emphasized to the Asian family is prayer — personal, couple, and family prayer. One form of prayer ideal for the family, especially in its evening get-togethers in the urban or rural areas, is the family rosary. These mysteries of the rosary project likewise the rhythm of family life. For the relationship of husband and wife, parents and children come in cycles of joy, sorrow and glory. Since it fits the everyday interaction of the family members, the meditation on these scenes in the life of Christ can inspire and strengthen family ties. If this relevance is pointed out, prayer, specifically the family rosary, will form part of the daily ritual of the Asian family.

## **4. Early Adulthood and Boy-Girl Relationship**

Home and school must encourage the young adult to expand the circle of friends, interact with both sexes, participate in activities in the school, Church and community.

Coeducational high school is good and healthy for both sexes. Joint activities, like soirees, should be encouraged so boys and girls get to know each other in meaningful friendships before they become emotionally involved in a one-to-one relationship.

*Dating.* One-to-one dating is not to be encouraged in high school, for this might lead to premature closeness and intimacy. Rather, group dating through group activities is recommended. Parents can allow friendly visits at home for their daughter, but there should be honest and open communication between parents and children at this stage.

*Courtship.* This is the period of getting to know each other better. There is no commitment, and boy and girl are free to court others and be courted by others. Courtship begins with physical attraction, then with time and knowledge, this interest expands to the psychological and emotional dimensions. In time, trust is developed, which is the basis of love.

*Engagement.* This means a commitment has been made, and a definite distant date for the wedding has been agreed upon. Both are no longer free to be courted or to court another. This period is also the beginning of adjustment with each other. Sexual intimacies should still be avoided during this period, which should only last for a reasonable period of about six months to one year.

*Selecting a Partner.* The biggest decision of boy or girl is the choice of a partner in life. Qualities to look for in a girl are: religiosity, generosity, femininity, kindness, that she be knowledgeable and interesting. Qualities to look for in a boy are: religiosity, interesting person, leadership qualities, knowledgeable, mature, sense of responsibility, good sense of humor.

## **5. Youth and Premarital Sex**

Without a free and open communication on sex with their parents, the youth of Asia is faced with the serious problem of how to handle the lure of premarital sex and live-in relationships, including so-called trial marriage, which is nothing but trial sex.

There are more than a dozen reasons against premarital sex and the harm it does, even if the young couple succeed in marrying each other, like their guilt feelings, feelings of insecurity, jealousy, etc. Many who indulge in premarital sex do not even end up being married; they go their

separate ways, and an unwanted pregnancy can be the dire result. Usually it is the female who gets hurt most, for the honor and reputation of the Asian female is still held in high regard.

Premarital sex is a serious moral offense. It is an immature, irresponsible act — wanting to enjoy the delights of marital sex without assuming the corresponding responsibilities. The upper half of the body, the mind, the will, the faculty of reason, should dominate the lower half. Any action where the sexual faculties are involved has to be preceded by a public manifestation, a wedding ceremony where a commitment, the marriage vow and covenant, are pronounced and sealed before Christ and the community.

Live-in and trial marriage are casual relationships from which either of the two parties can simply walk away, when another more attractive, more interesting partner is found, or when the burden of the relationship becomes too heavy. Its very casualness is its weakness. There is nothing that binds the immature couple, except words of supposedly profound love they have for each other — a love without commitment. Thus, the partner, usually the young man, becomes a sexual athlete, jumping from one female body to another, using the creation of God as an instrument, an object of pleasure — an insult to the Lord.

#### IV. CHRISTIAN SEXUALITY

A thorough Christian version of Christian sexuality based on the value of the human body created in the image and likeness of God, the dignity of the personhood, the non-abuse of the human person for self-gratification, should be stressed. The modern version of sex, founded on the secular humanist principle of sex for pleasure and eroticism, is making inroads in Asia.

##### Sex Education

With a very young population, 50% below the age of 20, education on Christian sexuality is especially vital to the youth of Asia in these times when irresponsible sexual pleasure is being dangled constantly before the young by the secular media. According to a study, the children of the poor assume the responsibilities of adulthood early, due to economic difficulties. Faced with poverty, shortage of jobs, and sex-related traditional practices obtaining in many countries, the youth are exposed to economic and sexual exploitation. Economic hardships drive many an Asian girl to early marriage. Early marriages also occur due to strict Asian traditions

regarding boy-girl relationships. Early marriages mean early pregnancies. Teenage births are common in Asia.

Despite strict customs and traditions, there is a growing number of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and abortions among adolescents, which is becoming a serious problem in many Asian countries, even in a predominantly Catholic country like the Philippines. Thus, sex education for the young may be a big help to the Asian youth in recognizing that sex is good, holy, beautiful, to be enjoyed, but only within the context of marriage. As stated in a report on sex and the Asian adolescent: "What we want is to teach the young people to be responsible with their bodies and their relationships, and to enable them to make intelligent decisions about themselves and their lives."

### **Sex and Sexuality**

Sex refers mainly to the unique sensation experienced after due stimulation in the sexual intercourse between man and woman. Thus, sex covers the sexual organs and faculties, but they are all part of sexuality.

Sexuality covers the whole person from head to foot. Everything one does from day to night is linked to his sexuality, based on one's being a man or a woman. Either way, male or female, one has to be happy and comfortable with his/her sexuality.

Chastity is the purposeful direction of the sex drive in a man or woman to his/her vocation or state of life. In the case of married people, their sex drive is directed only towards their act of love with their spouse. The religious and the single, who are meant to lead celibate lives, sublimate their sex drives and channel these towards activities which keep them fulfilled. In this way, their energies are released not through sex acts but through activities designed to help their fellowmen and women.

### **How to Impart Sex Education**

The best educators in sex are the parents. Since sex education is education about one's self, or what makes a man a man, a woman a woman, it begins at birth, when the infant learns to distinguish his mother, a woman, from his father, a man. It is given as early as when the first question is asked. Answers should be simple and truthful, and only cover what the child wants to know, gradually imparting to the child as much factual information as his ability to absorb. With a sex-obsessed media young children are learning everything about sex from what they see and read,

and from their peer group, so that it would be safer if the parents acquaint them with the right version of sex.

Much depends on the parents' attitude about sex. Any shyness or embarrassment on their part will inhibit the child from asking questions. A healthy attitude is that sex is good, holy, wholesome, God-given, and therefore nothing to be ashamed of. The purposes for which sex was given — procreation and strengthening of conjugal love — requires that it be used within the context of marriage.

The loving relationship of the parents as a married couple is the best form of sex education for their children. From their loving behavior with each other, the young can easily feel, catch, and surmise that sex is a good thing, and can be theirs at the proper time, when they get married.

### **Masturbation**

Masturbation is part of the development of youth, especially from pre-adolescence on to the youth stage. While the ill effects of masturbation must not be exaggerated, like saying it causes insanity, impotency, etc., the psychological and emotional maleffects of habitual masturbation have to be underscored. What is sought to be prevented is habitual masturbation, for this could adversely affect future sex relationship with the spouse. Masturbation is a self-centered act — the gratification is towards self, while the act of love should be an unselfish act, directed towards the satisfaction of the spouse. This is where future marital sexual relations can be hurt.

### **Homosexuality**

This is the condition of a person where his sex drive is directed towards a person of the same sex instead of to the opposite sex. Homosexuality is on the increase in the Asian continent, as evidenced in the Philippines. Modern trends and thinking present homosexuality as an acceptable life-style, as a matter of preference of the individual, a matter of choice. But this is not so, as proven by research and studies.

The Church declares that homosexual acts are “intrinsicly disordered and can in no way be approved.” “There can be no justification for homosexual acts, which oppose the moral sense of mankind, the teaching of the Bible and the objective moral order.” But it strongly urges that the homosexual be treated with understanding.

## Control and Regulation of Fertility

The marital couple is gifted by God to use their sexual faculties in the act of love, freely and with responsibility. The sexual intercourse of husband and wife is a unitive factor; that is, every act of love strengthens their loving relationship, makes it more loving and alive. The sexual intercourse is not only unitive but procreative.

When the couple elect to have the act of love during the fertile period of the wife, they must assume the responsibility of having a child, if God so wills. The transmission of life should be open at all times. So long as the female partner is fertile, the spouses should agree that their mutual self-giving can lead to conception and birth. No outside agents like the various artificial contraceptive methods — pill, IUD, etc. — should interfere with the workings of nature.

If the couple do not wish to have a child right away or desire to space their children, then they should perform their act of love when the wife is infertile. Withholding the sex act during this period is in itself an act of love. When done during the infertile period of the wife, the act simply becomes a unifying force, to make the couple more intimate and loving with each other.

Selfishness and immaturity are behind the desire for sex at all times, irrespective of the fertile or infertile period of the wife. This lack of motivation and education are causing the ruin of Asia's families today through a runaway population growth rate and irresponsible parenthood. Submission to the sex instincts and impulses are rising in alarming proportions, while the spirit of self-sacrifice in sex is decreasing.

The Church, specifically the laity, has a tremendous task in this particular dimension of family life. A concerted information drive, led by the Church, on the methods of Natural Family Planning is of utmost importance. Couples practicing Natural Family Planning methods should conduct seminars for couples, especially newlyweds. These should be available in all parishes, complete with data, slides, movies, citing the advantages and ease of using the new updated methods of Natural Family Planning. The maturity and responsibility of the couples should be challenged, so they can respond to the call of God to man to share in his eternal love through submission to the moral laws and teachings of His Church.

## **Abortion**

There is a high frequency of abortion in the Asian countries, where it is legalized in every country, with the exception of the Philippines. Evidence by the medical people must be presented to convey the idea that the fetus inside the mother's womb is not a mere piece of flesh or vegetable, but a well-formed human being. Dr. Herbert Ratner of Chicago and Dr. Nathanson, a former advocate of abortion, explain this reality in convincing terms that can be easily understood by the couple:

Abortion is so widespread world-wide, and its proponents are so definitive in their thinking that there is no human life in that fetus, especially in the first trimester, that the Church, with the help of the laity, has to present strong arguments against it, using simple terms that the average Asian couple can easily understand. Indeed, one of the strongest objectives of a revitalized family life in Asia is the proper understanding that abortion is murder, plain and simple.

## **Separation, Divorce, Annulment**

What happens when a marriage fails? The Church allows separation, which in legal parlance is relative divorce, separation of board and lodging. The conjugal bond is not severed, but a division of conjugal properties and custody of the children are agreed upon.

In absolute divorce, the marital bond is legally cut, which means the separated couple can legally remarry other partners. There are more than a dozen reasons against divorce, even from a sociological viewpoint, which have to be explained to our newly married.

The difference between a declaration of nullity and absolute divorce should be underscored. A declaration of nullity by the Church means dissolution of the legal marriage caused by grounds existing before the marriage, meaning, there never was a marriage. Absolute divorce dissolves the conjugal union on grounds existing during a marriage that is valid.

The Church's reasons for the declaration of nullity are more advanced than those contained in the local laws, like the civil code of the Philippines. Certain social and psychological grounds can be valid reasons for the declaration of nullity by the Church, but not by the civil law. The Church holds that every Catholic who opts for marriage must fully understand what Christian marriage is, the obligation, especially the require-

time of the marriage there be a true consent on the part of the bride and groom, that there be not the slightest real doubt on the part of either to commit themselves in marriage. They must fully understand the nature of love in marriage and be certain that what exists between them is that true, genuine love.

### **Finally, a Full Communications System of Family Values**

Any recommended family life education program has to be accompanied by training aids that will assist those who will conduct the seminars and workshops. Among the aids and materials are:

1. Pamphlets, handouts given to the participants in the workshops and seminars.
2. Publication of a regular newsletter to supplement the program.
3. Films, slides, cassette tapes.
4. Convocations, lectures, forums to be held in schools, parishes, civic groups, in support of the program.
5. Media — newspapers, magazines with features and articles on family life, radio and TV programs and movies which emphasize or illustrate positive family values. Family life oriented organizations, such as those that exist in the Philippines, should be organized in the different communities. Among these are:

1. *Christian Family Movement (CFM)* — an organization of couples, husbands and wives, meeting fortnightly in each other's homes, confronting issues of family life.
2. *Marriage Encounter* — a weekend process for couples, based on spiritual renewal with emphasis on couple communication, dialogue. This is conducted by a team of a priest and two lead married couples.
3. *Discovery Weekend* — similar to the Marriage Encounter, but for engaged couples. One of the aims is to find out if the engaged couple are really meant for each other.
4. *Marriage Enrichment and Family Life Seminars* — these are one-day or two-day seminars for couples, parents, based more or less on family life education programs.



## CONCLUSION

Asia will always be a great challenge to the Church, the laity and the Christian family. The continent is like the summit of a huge mountain range, its own Himalayas, beckoning all to come up and savor that feeling of conquest. It is a formidable task to reach this objective — the evangelization of Asia through the family.

And so, the laity and the family have to begin their own mountain climbing, for the Asian continent will not change by itself easily. There are barriers, obstacles looming large in the Asian horizon. Poverty, different languages, varied religious beliefs, customs, traditions, resistance to change — all these have to be acknowledged, understood and appreciated. Only then perhaps, can the conversion to the Lord really begin and move forward.

For this gigantic job, we have presented a plan of action, including the dimensions required to evangelize the Asian family and make it realize fully the meaning of the Christian Gospel. The program of action, a family life education program, may turn out, we hope, to be something new and challenging enough to interest the Asian family. Learning about God's family, putting into practice its doctrines and tenets, will be quite an advancement for the Asian family which has been immersed in its own centuries-old beliefs and traditions and may be fast losing them.

The program contained in this paper has the main points; but there is still much to be explained. It will also be up to every country, region or community, which wishes to make use of it, to incorporate its own customs, traditions, and adopt the program to its own needs. We pray, much headway can be achieved towards our desired goal — bringing Christ and his Kingdom on earth to the Asian family.

## POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Is the family recognized as a basic unit of the Church's mission? Is this acknowledged by the formation of family apostolic groups?
2. Are there formation programs for couples in the teaching of the Church regarding the role of the family in mission? Are there theologically qualified persons teaching?
3. Do the structures in the diocese exist for the support of family action groups in mission?

4. Does the diocese(s) maintain and support research into family problems, dissemination of information?
5. Are there programs for the spiritual formation of families? Are these sufficient personnel for these?
6. Who directs the family apostolates? Priests, religious or lay persons?
7. What is the status of Natural Family Planning in the diocese? Does this program start early enough at the school level?
8. Is there a Christian sex education program, approved by the diocese, in our schools, parishes, hospitals, etc.?

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