

Sixth Plenary Assembly: Workshop Discussion Guide

## **WOMEN AND THE CHURCH'S SERVICE TO LIFE IN ASIA**

by  
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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

"Christian Discipleship in Asia Today: Service to Life" as theme of the Sixth FABC Plenary Assembly could not be more timely. Crucial life/death issues confront the millions of human beings on this continent. Profound political and technological processes intersect with traditional mores and attitudes, throwing many countries and cultural groups into radically new, but sometimes confusing, directions for the future. There is a need to reflect on the transition in both the material and mental environment, in order to respond with greater effectiveness and understanding to the needs of our Asian peoples to "have life, and have it more abundantly" (Jn 10:10). Life is what the Gospel is about.

We need to probe into our continent to see where the Gospel message of more abundant life is being obstructed and strive to enhance new life where it is appearing.

The image of woman is directly and spontaneously associated with human life and its biological and psychological processes, for it is woman who is more directly and intimately connected with the gestation, birthing and nurturing of life. As Pope John Paul II wrote: "Parenthood is realized more fully in the woman," for it "literally absorbs the energies of her body and soul." And: "Motherhood involves a special communion with the mystery of life." Beyond the actual experience of motherhood, because of what they are and because of their bodies, "women are more capable than men of paying attention to another person."<sup>1</sup> The Bible indicates the intimate connectedness between woman and life when Man, threatened by

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death, calls Woman "Hevah," from "Hay," "life." Woman, then, is "life bringer" (Gen 3:20).

Analogies are found, on many levels, of the act of woman bringing forth biological life. Jesus himself referred to the moment of his giving of his life in death as the hour of a woman's giving birth (Jn 16:21).

Woman's gift of life does not end with the more elementary function of transmitting and nurturing life. Woman's being creates hospitable space for others and bonds them into a unity. This is why nation and Church are both feminine. She also has a transformative function, leading one to a higher plane of thought and behavior. As inspiration and wisdom, she is *Sophia*.

But as one surveys the Asian landscape, one sees that this "bringer of life" carries a terrible burden, not only of bringing and sustaining life, but of daily suffering little deaths because of her sex. One small example comes from a miner's wife in a village in Korea:

Miners have a superstition that a woman crossing the road in front of them brings bad luck, so women must be careful, particularly at the change of shift. Miners have three shifts in rotation, so the wife's pattern changes accordingly. However, it's easy to forget, after our husband has gone off for his shift, to be careful about crossing the road. If a woman does happen to cross in front of a man, he will shout abuses at her. Usually, the woman will kneel in front of him and beg forgiveness. If she answers back instead, he is apt to beat her. If a woman has crossed the road in front of a man and there is an accident at the mine, the workers will be sure that is the reason.<sup>2</sup>

Over the past years, stories of women have gradually been heard and a worldwide women's movement has awakened people everywhere to the *dignity and rights of women*. Various responses have come from the Christian community. In 1963 John XXIII, in his encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, wrote: "Women will not tolerate being treated as mere material instruments, but demand rights befitting a human person."<sup>3</sup> The world's bishops, in the document of their synod on *Justice in the World*, addressed the issue as one of justice, and called on the Church to act justly in relation to women:

Anyone who ventures to speak to people about justice must first be just in their eyes... We also urge that women should have their own share of responsibility and participation in the community life of society and likewise of the Church.<sup>4</sup>

The bishops of Asia themselves, in their plenary assemblies of 1982 and 1986, have urged the "Gospel imperative that the feminine half of the world's population be recognized and their dignity restored." It acknowledged that "the Church cannot be a sign of the Kingdom and of the eschatological community if the gifts of the Spirit to women are not given due recognition, and if women do not share in the 'freedom of the children of God'."<sup>5</sup>

## 2. THE SITUATION OF WOMEN IN ASIA

In order for the Church in Asia to discern the call of the Spirit in this "sign of the times" and be able to support women in their vocation as "life bringers," it needs to know the actual situation of women in Asia, see what institutions have done and what more needs to be done.<sup>6</sup>

Fifty-five percent of the world's women now live in Asia, and about half of these women in Asia are *inadequately nourished* — a reality that threatens their health and physical well-being, as well as that of their children, producing the vicious cycle of malnutrition and poor health through generations. This cycle begins with the girl child who is discriminated against in the family, leaving her with less food, less education and training than boy children. Some cultures impose early marriage and childbearing on girls, and pregnancy becomes a terrible burden on an adolescent girl's still maturing body.

Maternal deaths in South Asia are over 30 times those in developed regions. Aside from the frail health of the mothers, these deaths are often due to *lack of health service* facilities and personnel, and too frequent pregnancies that wear out women's bodies and psyches. Improvement in health care for women and children has been undertaken in most countries by their respective governments but due to cultural valuing of men and boys over women and girl children, even in matters of food, girls and women in many countries suffer from poor health and physical development. Governments, on the other hand, have drawn up health information programs to combat rising alcoholism, drug abuse and the spread of AIDS.

*Violence or the threat of it* is a common factor in the life of many women, beginning in their families. Women are victimized at work and in public places, but due to secrecy and legal and social barriers, domestic violence is believed to be the most underreported crime. This violence is manifested in physical or psychological abuse, sexual assault or the deprivation of basic needs, with long-term consequences for women and children. In South Asia there is an alarming increase of bride-burning and female infanticide, in spite of government action and education.

Many NGOs and women religious have responded to the situation with clinics and other projects, providing education, temporary shelter for battered women, financial assistance and rehabilitation.

Women's work often include *unpaid housework* as well as economic activities, thus requiring them to carry a double burden of longer hours of work than men. There are wide gaps between the *working hours* of women and of men. Studies show that in Asia women average 12 to 13 hours of work a week more than men. They usually retain total responsibility for child care and for household chores, even when they have economic responsibilities within and without the home. Breakdown of traditional family life and structures, migration and industrialization cause great stress for women. In times of economic crises, women have had to work harder and longer in order that their families may survive, often resorting to migration which often leads to greater discrimination and physical and psychological distress. In some countries, prostitution not directly connected with poverty seems to be on the rise.

*Discrimination* in the workplace is a general phenomenon in Asia. This is shown in disparities in wages, benefits, promotion and appointment to high-paying and more prestigious positions. Occupational segregation and cultural norms also often shut women out of jobs without sufficient reason. Training and capital are often denied to them, thus maintaining the cycle of poverty for many women. Financial undervaluing is translated into social undervaluing of work done by women. A recurring theme in the lives of many women is that of sexual harassment by their employers, bosses or co-workers, which often goes unreported for fear of losing employment.

In most parts of Asia democratic educational systems have given more access to formal education to women, although there are still gaps between men's and women's *educational achievement*, due to unequal access to resources. In most of Asia, girls achieve primary and secondary education but not in South Asia, where illiteracy rates are highest; three-quarters of women aged 25 or over are illiterate. The huge historical deficit of literacy for women needs to be overcome if women are to be made more productive members of society. There are increasing numbers of university-trained women. However, women are often still denied access to advanced training that would allow them to make contribution to economic development.

Discrimination is found in schools where textbooks and curricula present *stereotypical images* of women and men, thus reinforcing oppression of women. Women-teachers themselves often subtly give greater recogni-

tion and privilege to boys than to girls.

Obvious disparities are found in *public life and leadership* between men and women in spite of there being some women heads of state and ministries in Asia. They are often shut out of elective office or top positions in political parties, government or business, because access to leadership depends on the recognition of women's abilities and sexual equality in society. However, women have found venue for creative leadership in many grassroots movements, particularly those for housing and services, for peace and for protection of the environment.

Since religions mirror cultures, the same gender inequalities are found in *the religions in Asia*, both in Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, and others, and in Christianity. In addition, religions are by nature conservative institutions, generally tending to *maintain and reinforce* the inequalities more strongly than civil institutions through the use of sanctions and religious legitimization. Decision making in these religions is reserved to males, and dogma and ritual often do not adequately recognize the dignity and equality of women. Often the discrimination is found in a *segregation* of the sexes, particularly in the religions where there is a practice of celibacy. Nevertheless, a prophetic thrust embedded in the higher intuition of religions can sometimes be powerful enough to counteract resistance to change.

### 3. THE NEW ENLIGHTENMENT

Though the situation of women in Asia is still in great need of alleviation, there is a heightened awareness among groups and individuals, governments, NGOs and Churches, which have created structures and programs to improve the situation. Some national Churches, like those in India and Sri Lanka, have set up commissions in order to facilitate the promotion of women within the Christian community. Religious congregations of women and associations of major superiors have been in the forefront of raising consciousness and advancing the cause of women. In certain countries, however, where religious fundamentalism has intensified, forces are emerging that attempt to set back the progress that women have made.

#### 3.1 The Church' Response

The Christian response to all forms of oppression must involve *profound commitment* that goes to the roots of problems, not only to the allaying of symptoms. We must not be too quick in looking for facile solutions in terms of projects and other activities. Deep human problems require a wrestling with ourselves to find out if we are part of the problem, and to try to effect a change in our mind set before attempting solutions.

Only when we see ourselves within the context of the problem can we emerge with long-term responses that are in accord with human and Gospel values.

As Christians bound to follow in the footsteps of Jesus of Nazareth, we find a key to the life and mission of Jesus in the programmatic text in Lk 4: 16-30. There he appropriates to himself the words of the Servant in Isaiah 61: 1-2:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has appointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of his *Abba* by bringing liberation and salvation to the poor and oppressed in his society. In Jesus we see the face of a God who loved and cared for human beings, particularly those cast aside by society, those who needed compassion most. As prophet of this compassionate God, Jesus expressed indignation, saying "no" to oppression and exclusion.

As disciples of Jesus, we continue this mission which is simultaneously mystical and societal. Proclamation of the Kingdom implies an unbreakable bond between worship of God and liberation, restoring dignity and worth to those who have been pushed aside.

This very commitment to live the "dangerous memory" of Jesus in our world renews the Church, made up of innumerable "contrast-societies" that attempt to eliminate social barriers and bring about a loving fellowship of equals.

### 3.2 Awareness and Acceptance of the Problem

If the Church is to act on behalf of women, it must first recognize a division in culture and religion that is often ignored. We need to bring this into consciousness and try to come to grips with this issue within each one of us, and to work to resolve the conflict in the Church groups we belong to. This division is not one between men and women, but between those who either deny or maintain the existence of oppression of women, and those who acknowledge it and want to change the situation.

Some women will say that they have never felt oppression in their lives. Not all women experience oppression as oppression because recognition is a painful process. It requires perceptivity and reflectiveness. Some men will ask, "Where's the problem?" Both these reactions reveal a lack of

awareness of the situation of women around them and a lack of knowledge of the systemic oppression of women in social and religious systems.

All over the world, and now particularly in Asia, women are identifying a restlessness in their lives. One woman writer described this problem as “a problem that has no name,” a “problem that lay buried, unspoken in women’s minds, a sense of dissatisfaction.” Are women afraid to ask these silent questions?<sup>7</sup>

The “woman question” runs the gamut from this “problem that has no name” among middle-class women in affluent Asian suburbia to the horrible shock of rape-murders of women and girls in developing countries like the Philippines.

The experience of oppression of women is no longer a private experience. It has been continuously given public witness in Asian countries, and men are joining their voices to those of women. One does not need to be a woman to listen to, hear, and even understand, that about which women speak. Even men who do not existentially share the experience of women are appropriating their objective situation.

However, there is a lot of resistance, both conscious and unconscious, for the issue of Woman reaches into the subliminal recesses of the human psyche. The issue is a very intimate one for both men and women, because it is intrinsically connected with sexuality and power.

Some social scientists have delved into intra-psyche and social structures, analyzing the patriarchal system built around sexual differences. A few scholars have dared to go beyond the visible and point to the roots of oppression of women in the human psyche, where, in both men and women, there resides a profound gynecophobia, a fear of Woman, which is unconscious but which is manifested in myths and symbols and channeled into societies through religious ideology. Religions have given rise to sayings such as: “A woman’s heaven is under her husband’s feet”; “The body of a woman is filthy, and not a vessel for the law”; “Man is above women as Christ is above man.”

This gynecophobia is so powerful that it has effectively blocked the movement towards the *humanum*<sup>8</sup> — the end point of the evolution of the human species towards a higher form of consciousness.

### 3.3 Consequences of Sexism for Individual and Society

Humanity is essentially dyadic as male/female, and each human being contains in himself/herself male and female polarities. However, cultures

have skewed the balance, making one polarity dominant and superior, and the other subordinate and inferior. A German theologian, reflecting on his own experience, wrote:

Patriarchy cut the male in half. It split him into a subject, consisting of reason and will, and an object, consisting of heart, feelings and physical needs. He had to identify himself with the former and keep his distance from the latter. This isolated the male and brought about a certain self-hatred. This division in the male is reflected and takes an aggressive form in the male subjugation and domination of the supposedly "frail," "emotional" and "physical" woman.

Liberation from oppression is needed. How is this possible for men whose ideas and feelings are deeply influenced by patriarchy and who seem to enjoy their privileges?

The starting point for us men, just as it is for women, is to become aware of the real situation and to realize the extent to which patriarchy cheats us out of the blessings of true life. Each man can achieve this anamnesis for himself by asking how he was trained as a child to "become a man," what feelings he was expected to suppress, what instincts he had to control, what roles he was taught to adopt. He was trained to be a worker, a soldier, a father, a breadwinner, a conqueror and a ruler. He was terrified of becoming a "nothing," a "nobody," and he was ruled by the desire to "make something of himself."<sup>9</sup>

The "macho" male personality has an important bearing on justice and peace between individuals and in social systems and structures. It affects not only relationships between the sexes but also spills over in same-sex relationships, because it is determinative of images of self and of others. When the characteristics of this individual personality become those of a collective, one has the ingredients for a violent society.

In Asia, correlation between male violence and sexism is apparent in the escalation of militarization and violence to women. Aside from the vivid scenes portraying Nietzsche's cynical words, "Men should be trained for war and women for the recreation of the warrior," there is an increase in the cases of prostitution, wife-battering, rape and incest.

Much of this is hidden from public view and what transpires in the home is labeled as private matter. But *all* "private" relationships have public dimensions, and the pains and stresses suffered by one individual have repercussions for others. The personal is also political. Childrearing, as well as physical-sexual relationships, has a direct bearing on society, even if this activity is not in public view.

Gender relationship is a matter for analysis and reflection on the level of structural violence and social injustice. For so long, women in Asia have been denied economic and legal rights. Seen as inferior being, they have been excluded from important decision making and from the directional mechanisms of society. Their values and perspectives, their orientation towards life are missing or discounted, causing an imbalance between social forces and exaggerations in many areas of social and political life. The pouring of the region's resources into the war machinery, perhaps, could have been minimized, if more women, with their sensitivity to life and their capacity for a more holistic, comprehensive process of decision making were involved in top-level political affairs.

In societies where one group dominates another, where participation in power and decision making are cornered by one group, one class, or one sex, peace is far off. A society can only be peaceful in the measure that there is social equilibrium, when all its elements are untrammelled and all citizens are allowed the means towards fullness of growth and abundance of life.

### 3.4 Gynecophobia in Christianity

The Catholic Church itself has a history of ambivalence (to put it mildly) towards women. This ambivalence has shown itself in two streams, or two theologies, on male-female relationship: a theology of subordination and a theology of equivalence, with the theology of subordination overwhelmingly predominant, practically negating that of equivalence (a term which suggests equality but which gives room for differences.)

The *theology of subordination*, constructed by some of the Fathers of the Church during the developmental stages of Christianity, was grounded in their Mediterranean, Greco-Roman culture which placed the male as dominant, normative, superior to women. It was through this cultural lens that they read Scriptures, interpreting the Genesis creation stories as a theological rationale for women's subordination in society and religion. They found reinforcement in the misogynistic passages of Paul and deuterio-Pauline letters which exclude and put women down. This theology of subordination imputed to women's nature what was actually a social construction of gender characteristics of weakness, feeble-mindedness and sensuality, thus imprisoning women in a vicious cycle of cultural, intellectual and spiritual deprivation and disadvantage. This theology, developing in consonance with the growing mystique of virginity, legitimated oppression and marginalization of women as *not* being the image of God, and worse, as the gateway of evil into the world.

The other theology, that of *equivalence or equality*, found its inspiration in the praxis of Jesus of Nazareth and its classic formulation in Galatians. 3:28: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." This theology, though exhibiting the best intuition of Christianity, has been usually submerged and overridden by the theology of subordination, which is actually a religious mirroring of structures in a society discriminatory of women.

### 3.5 Women's Movement — a "Sign of the Time"

The women's movement has now become a ground swell, and the Church must face it squarely. It is not a Western phenomenon, although the initial stirrings came from the West. Wherever women or men have recognized its truth in their hearts, new linkages in the movement have been forged. The women's movement will not go away; it is not a passing fad. It is a permanent challenge to the injustice of societies and cultures dominated by men. The famous French historian Georges Duby has recognized it as the biggest shift in human history since the beginning of the human race. It is a litmus test for the Christian Churches, whether they will allow themselves to be submerged in a pre-Christian attitude or to be awakened to a higher form of consciousness. Acts 2:17 puts into the mouth of Peter on the day of Pentecost the words of the prophet Joel: "In the last days, it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy."

In the past, the Church has resisted many historical and cultural movements that eventually entered into the mainstream of social and political life, like democracy, separation of Church and state, religious toleration, etc. — movements that manifested strivings towards a higher form of human consciousness. It has not always recognized that these experiences and movements are sometimes the harbingers of the action of the Spirit. Possibly, the women's movement may be one of these, and the suppression of women's potentials and their charism could be sin against the Spirit.

### 3.6 Beyond Sexism

Movement away from sexism requires a conversion, a shift of horizons. "Metanoia" is a radical call, a first step towards becoming God's children, a "putting on the mind of Christ." Conversion is costly, requiring investment in pain and vulnerability, and letting go. It is a movement from ignorance to a new perspective, from what is now seen as wrong to what is right, from what was inadequate to what is more whole.

John Paul II himself called sexism a sin. All forms of sexism are con-

nected with sin because they treat persons less than persons and they negate the equality of all human beings. They spring from the human phenomenon of prejudice which turns differences into inequalities often for the sake of self-enhancement.

What is sexism, in fact? The *New Catholic Encyclopedia* defines it as "the belief that persons are superior or inferior to one another on the basis of their sex. It includes attitudes, value systems and social patterns which express or support this belief."<sup>10</sup> Moral theologians today are grappling with the evils of sexism in its obvious and its more subtle forms in society and religion.

*First-level sexism* is the unabashed subordination of women, the "robust and candid imputation of inferiority and subjection as natural to womanhood."<sup>11</sup> *Second-level sexism* is a refusal to deal with the reality of women; it "consigns the feminine either to the pedestal or to the unobtrusive and benign backdrop of real life," wanting women to know their place and stay there.<sup>12</sup> *Third-level sexism* accepts the logic of the women's movement but "believes that feminine liberation is a cause to be struggled and suffered for — by women," because it is *their* problem and not an essentially human issue.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, the various negative reactions that have met the women's movement: *outright rejection* and condemnation, with the knowledge that the new order will demand the giving up of privilege; *subtle denial* in the form of invoking a romantic "feminine mystique," which actually refuses to look at the reality of flesh-and-blood women; *cooptation* that concedes a minor point in order to enhance traditional hold on power.<sup>14</sup>

### 3.7 Regaining Balance in the Church

No one denies that there will necessarily be a giving up of masculine hierarchical privilege. But it is important to see beyond this letting go to the paradox that emancipation of women carries with it the seed of men's own emancipation. The Church suffers from a deprivation it does not seem aware of. One woman put it:

What really causes pain is not so much women's position in the Church; it is rather to see the Church itself reduced to its masculine part, like a body which has decided to live with only half of itself, with half of its possibilities of loving, feeling, deciding, acting. A half that remains always identical, without the novelty and fruitfulness that the other half could bring.

The good accruing from the women's movement is now evident in the

lives and persons of many men, leading them to ask questions about the real meaning of masculinity, and to work through a more profound, more integrated understanding of themselves, allowing them to be more gentle and compassionate in their relationships, and feeling no longer constricted by cultural expectations regarding masculine behavior. In allowing themselves a more active receptivity towards women, men's humanity has been enhanced rather than diminished.

Incorporation of the feminine experience in society and religion can only be for the benefit of the whole. The moral theologian Daniel Maguire sees "feminine advantages" as necessary correctives to the "perils of macho-masculinity."<sup>15</sup> These perils he lists as: 1) a proneness to combative or aggressive modes of power; 2) a divisive, dominating hierarchical instinct; 3) abstractionalism that makes one lose contact with the present and the concrete; 4) consequentialism that is intoxicated with results; 5) and hatred of women marked by aversion, degradation, exclusion.

Without idealizing women and saying that advantageous femininity is only in women or in all women, Maguire posits that the notably feminine experience gives them advantages in four ways: 1) women's-at-homeness with bodily existence anchors them in a concrete valuation of life; 2) women's integration of affect makes their moral judgment more reliable; 3) women's association with children who are repositories of trust, celebration, love makes their lives richer; 4) women's status of alienation gives them acute perceptivity. Women reveal a world that is relational where interdependence and mutuality, rather than separation and independence, are valued. All this is not to say that women are superior to men. It simply points to a need for humanity and all human institutions to reclaim their excluded "other selves." In this light, a full and wholehearted acceptance of women, with all the gifts they bring, can only be a transforming grace for society and religion.

### **3.8 A New Relationship in the Church**

A new pattern of relationships will then come about, a "new order" based upon:

a view of women as autonomous human persons, as claimants of the rights which belong to all persons, as capable of filling roles of leadership in both the public and private spheres, as called to equality and full mutuality in relation to both men and women.<sup>16</sup>

This new relationship requires that the fullness of Christian agape be applied to relationships with women, as completely as with men. It means doing away with the ambiguities of agape practised differently with wom-

en because they are held inferior to men.

If agape means equal regard for all persons, then it requires that women be affirmed no less than men. If agape means a love that is self-sacrificing, then men as well as women are to yield one to the other, to know the meaning of sacrifice and surrender at the heart of their love for God and for human persons. If agape includes mutuality... then, some form of equality is assumed in every Christian love.<sup>17</sup>

This love will then be a just love by which we "affirm for persons, both women and men, what they reasonably need in order to live out their lives as full human persons and, within the Christian community, what they need in order to grow in their life of faith."<sup>18</sup> It will be a just love that rejects gender differentiations imposed by cultures and institutions, and affirms all persons, regardless of their sex.

Culturally-defined identities and roles have been so ingrained in both men and women that they need to double their efforts to counteract these ingrained attitudes and habits of mind in themselves. Asian women through the centuries have learned that, in order to survive and have a niche in society, they have to be people-pleasers, and in trying to please others, they are de-selfed. But when women do so, nature seeks revenge, in many subtle and covert ways, and men are also victimized by the balance in gender relationships.

In order to divest ourselves of our deeply-held conviction of men's dominance and superiority and of women's subordination and inferiority, we need to go to both the cultural and theological sources of these convictions, and to engage in a critique of the mechanisms, institutions, symbols and rituals that keep women down. Beginning with our reading of Scripture, we must engage in an ideological suspicion, unmasking the texts in such a way that they will yield for us good news for *all*. This will enable us to create new symbols and rituals and lifestyles that open up different horizons, providing us with an eschatological vision of freedom and salvation expressed in Galatians, 3:28.

Christianity, like any religion reflective of its surrounding culture, has a fundamentally masculine image of God, which it has reified as corresponding to reality, even as it says that God has no sex. It has, thus, imprisoned "God" for us, reducing for us our possibilities of getting in touch with a far bigger and wholer transcendent reality. It had taken away from us the very rich, numinous sense of the Great Mother of pre-Christian cultures, whose deep psychological basis has been discovered by depth psychologists as being intrinsic to the human psyche.

Present Church structures and rituals do not support the new insights of the theological sciences. From the level of the parish all the way to the global Church, women are marginal beings, with perhaps some marks of *tokenism*. For so long, women in the Church have borne the wounds of distrust. We need to heal relationships and to humanize the structures, rendering them truly "catholic."

We should move towards the elimination of sexism in the Church through *affirmative action* in favor of women. What this means is that women must be treated favorably and promoted in order to produce equality in a group of unequals. But in doing so, we must not link pastoral gifts to the sex of a person, for example, by limiting women do those tasks that have traditionally been associated with women.

(Women) are the secretaries, receptionists, hostesses, nurses and homemakers, who perform the services that make life more comfortable and create the atmosphere in which the competitors can succeed... All these services involve a "ying," or integrative activities, and since they rank lower in our value system than "yang" or self-assertive activities, those who perform them get paid less. Indeed, many of them... are not paid at all.<sup>19</sup>

This situation is paralleled in the Churches where there is a corresponding economic discrimination. Often women, religious and lay, are sources of cheap labor for bishops and clergy and so often, too, they are denied proper theological education because education would lead to awakening and awakening to change. But this is a myopic attitude which runs counter to the very message of the Christ they preach.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Enhancing the lives of women and their ability to shape their own lives is enhancing the lives of families, social groups, nations. The outcome of better resources for women leading to their bodily integrity and health, education, self-determination and religious worship can only be positive and beneficial for all.

"*Gloria Dei vivens homo*: the glory of God is *homo*, the human being, the whole human race, every individual person, fully alive... We can say, *Gloria Dei vivens mulier*: the glory of God is woman, all women, every woman everywhere, fully alive."<sup>20</sup>

#### 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

"Christian love of neighbor and justice cannot be separated. For love

implies an absolute demand for justice, namely, a recognition of the dignity and rights of one's neighbor. Justice attains its inner fullness only in love" (*Justice in the World*, 34). This is the guiding principle for any action on behalf of women. The possibilities for action are legion, for the problems concerning women are deeply rooted and all-pervasive.

International institutions, particularly the United Nations and Non-Governmental Agencies in many parts of Asia, have been in the forefront of action on behalf of women. To date, the United Nations has sponsored six international conferences with corresponding NGO forums attended by thousands of participants, thus spawning activities for the advancement of women in different aspects of life: gender equality, economic status, health, education, human rights and promotion of peace. The FABC and local Churches can support and foster their initiatives, for example, by using 1995, the International Year of Women, as a take-off point for participating in such initiatives, and by working for the implementation of the documents in the private and public arena. (See Appendix I.)

To heighten consciousness about the need to develop partnership of men and women in the life of the Church, the FABC-sponsored consultation on women in November, 1993, drew up recommendations for the FABC and its Offices. These, too, can be a good starting point for action for the Churches in Asia. (See Appendix II.)

## FOOTNOTES:

1. John Paul II, *Mulieris dignitatem: On the Dignity and Vocation of Women* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1988), 69.
2. Quoted in *With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology*, eds. Virginia Fabella and Mercy Amba Oduyoye (Maryknoll, N.Y., Orbis Books, 1988), p. 112.
3. John XXIII, *Peace on Earth* (Washington, D.C., USCC Office of Publishing and Promotion Services, 1963), 41.
4. "Justice in the World," *Proclaiming Justice and Peace: Papal Documents from Rerum Novarum through Centesimus Annus*, eds. Michael Walsh and Brian Davies (Mystic, Ct., Twenty-Third Publications, 1991), 277.
5. Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, Final Statement, Fourth Plenary Assembly, 1986, Tokyo.
6. Much of the data given here is taken from the replies to a questionnaire on the situation of women in Asia distributed by the FABC Office of the Laity, in preparation for the Sixth Plenary Assembly, reports presented at the Tenth Asian Meeting of Religious (AMOR, 1994), and studies made by United Nations Agencies synthesized in *The World's Women, 1970-1990: Trends and Statistics* (New York, United Nations, 1991): "the most complete depiction so far of women's conditions and contributions across the world."
7. Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (London, Penguin, 1968), p. 13.
8. Aloysius Pieris, "Woman and Religion in Asia: Towards a Buddhist and Christian Appropriation of the Feminist Critique," *Dialogue*, vols. 19-20 (1992-1993), 133.
9. Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel and Jurgen, *God: His and Hers* (London, SCM Press, 1991), pp. 4-5.
10. "Sexism," *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Supplement, vol. 17 (1979), p. 604.
11. Daniel Maguire, *The Moral Revolution: A Christian Humanist Vision* (San Francisco, Harper and Row, 1986), p. 105. The discussion on the three levels of sexism is taken from this author.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 106.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 106.
14. Elisabeth Schussler-Fiorenza, *Discipleship of Equals* (N.Y., Crossroad Publishing, 1993), pp. 58-61.
15. Maguire, *op. cit.*, pp. 109-116.
16. Margaret Farley, "New Patterns of Relationship: Beginnings of a Moral Revolution," *Theological Studies*, XXXVI, 4 (December 1975), 630.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 643.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 643.
19. Fritjof Capra, *The Turning Point: Science, Society and the Rising Culture* (N.Y., Simon and Schuster, 1982), p. 29.
20. Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is* (N.Y., Crossroad Publishing, 1992), pp. 14-15.

## APPENDIX I

### Recommendations of a FABC-Sponsored Consultation of Women (November, 1993)

#### A. That the FABC:

1. Sponsor an Asian-level conference on "Role of Women in the Church and in Society towards the 3rd Millennium," in 1995 to:
  - 1.1. Deal with gender issues;
  - 1.2. Invite women for consciousness raising;
  - 1.3. Discover women's spirituality and feminist theology;
  - 1.4. Reflect and discover the feminine perspective of the Bible;
  - 1.5. Network among women's groups, among religious women and between religious women and lay women.
2. Promote partner-relationship between women and men in the family, in the Church and in society.
3. For the 6th FABC Plenary Assembly, that women be invited and a sub-topic on women, as co-creators with God in bringing about and in nurturing life be included, with a message for women.
4. Bring awareness about:
  - gender sensitivity in our everyday language, songs, prayers and in the division of roles, tasks and responsibilities in the Church;
  - priestly formation in terms of gender ideology and;
  - seminary teaching staff — to be more open to women professors.

#### B. For the FABC Offices:

1. That the Office of Laity and Office of Human Development set up a women's commission and encourage the National Bishops' Conferences to do the same with the following objectives:
  - promote encounters and dialogue between women and men in the Church, especially in decision making;
  - evoke men — women collective awareness;
  - study and train on "gender and development";
  - affirm and facilitate the networking among women groups;
  - promote awareness through information sharing.
2. That the Office of Social Communications:
  - develop communication/dialogue/talking and listening at all levels about women's issues;

– evaluate/analyze the abuse of women in the mass media and contribute to awareness raising.

3. That the Office of Education and Student Chaplaincy:
  - promote a re-education of Christian families, to discover the new concept of Christian family;
  - analyze existing teaching materials and textbooks and encourage the development of new ones from the gender perspective;
4. That the Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs:
  - promote networking with ecumenical and interreligious groups on women issues;
  - initiate and encourage the study on how religions affect women in society.
5. That the Theological Advisory Commission:
  - Develop a Theology of Compassion for the Asian Churches;
  - Invite women feminist theologians into their commission.

## APPENDIX II

<b>1975 Mexico City World Plan of Action</b>	
<b>GENDER EQUALITY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase women's participation in policy-and decision-making in government and public organizations</li> <li>• Provide women equal opportunities to represent their countries in all international and regional meetings</li> <li>• Instill values of gender equality in children</li> <li>• Encourage women and girls to participate in political activities and community development programs</li> </ul>
<b>ECONOMIC STATUS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure equal pay for work of equal value for all women</li> <li>• Recognize women's unpaid domestic work in national economic statistics</li> <li>• Provide job training for all women</li> <li>• Guarantee and increase women's access to credit and capital</li> <li>• Ensure women workers maternity leave and benefits</li> <li>• Increase employment opportunities for women</li> <li>• Eliminate discrimination in the workplace.</li> <li>• Prohibit discrimination based on sex or marital status</li> <li>• Eliminate exploitation of female labor</li> </ul>
<b>HEALTH</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop rural technology to reduce women's heavy workload</li> <li>• Ensure women's right to equal access to health information and care</li> <li>• Provide maternal and infant health services to all women</li> <li>• Train and educate women to provide health care</li> <li>• Promote research on the special health problems of women</li> <li>• Educate comprehensively in family health, sanitation and nutrition</li> <li>• Ensure investments in public health services, especially in rural areas</li> <li>• Encourage breast feeding</li> <li>• Provide family planning education and services so all women can decide when and how many children to have</li> </ul>
<b>EDUCATION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure women equal access to education at all levels and ages</li> <li>• Ensure all women's access to adult vocational and literacy training</li> <li>• Eliminate gender stereotypes in textbooks and replace negative images of women with positive ones</li> <li>• Emphasize changing gender roles throughout the world</li> <li>• Promote cultural exchanges between women of different countries</li> <li>• Increase literacy and civic education, especially among rural women</li> </ul>
<b>WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guarantee women's full exercise of equal human rights through law</li> <li>• Ensure all women's equal rights in marriage, divorce and parenting</li> <li>• Guarantee women's rights to own, buy, sell and administer property</li> <li>• Ensure women equal voting and legal rights</li> </ul>
<b>PROMOTION OF PEACE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage women to participate actively in strengthening international peace and disarmament</li> </ul>

	<p><b>1980 Copenhagen</b>  <b>Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women</b></p>
<b>GENDER EQUALITY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase women's participation in policy-and decision-making in government and public organizations, including political office</li> <li>• Use affirmative action to enable women to achieve equality in all areas of life</li> <li>• Ensure women's rights to vote and stand for election</li> <li>• Provide women equal opportunities to represent their countries in all international and regional meetings</li> <li>• Establish women's equal rights in all legal codes</li> </ul>
<b>ECONOMIC STATUS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure equal pay for work of equal value for all women</li> <li>• Provide job training for all women</li> <li>• Guarantee and increase women's access to credit, capital and land</li> <li>• Ensure women workers maternity leave and benefits</li> <li>• Ensure equal employment opportunities, social security, pensions and benefits for all women, including those married, pregnant and with children</li> <li>• Promote structures for women and men to share parenting and domestic work</li> <li>• Provide women workers access to child care</li> </ul>
<b>HEALTH</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure women's right to equal access to health information and care</li> <li>• Ensure health and safety standards in all work places</li> <li>• Provide family planning education and services so all women can decide when and how many children to have</li> </ul>
<b>EDUCATION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure women equal access to education at all levels and ages</li> <li>• Ensure all women's access to adult vocational and literacy training</li> </ul>
<b>WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guarantee women's full exercise of equal human rights through law</li> <li>• Ensure all women's equal rights in marriage, divorce and parenting</li> <li>• Guarantee women's rights to own, buy, sell and administer property</li> <li>• Eliminate prostitution, trafficking in, and slavery of women</li> <li>• Guarantee women's right to change or retain their nationality and that of their children</li> <li>• Recognize women's right to decide when and how many children to have</li> </ul>
<b>PROMOTION OF PEACE</b>	

<b>1985 Nairobi</b> <i>Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies</i>	
<b>GENDER EQUALITY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase women's participation in policy-and decision-making in government and public organizations, including political office</li> <li>• Involve women's groups and issues in all policy-making — community, national and international</li> <li>• Recognize and affirm women's contributin and responsibility in all aspects of the human community — economic, political, social, cultural</li> <li>• End all discrimination against women</li> <li>• Establish women's equal rights in all legal codes</li> <li>• Form a governmental body to promote and monitor gender equality</li> </ul>
<b>ECONOMIC STATUS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure equal pay for work of equal value for all women</li> <li>• Include women's unpaid domestic work in national economic statistics</li> <li>• Provide job training for all women</li> <li>• Guarantee and increase women's access to credit, capital and land</li> <li>• Ensure equal job opportunities and social benefits for all women</li> <li>• Promote structures for women and men to share parenting and domestic work, such as flexible working hours</li> <li>• Provide services to reduce child care and doemstic work of women</li> <li>• Prevent secual and physical harrassment in the workplace</li> <li>• Pursue affirmative action programs in the hiring of women</li> <li>• Reduce mass poverty among women</li> </ul>
<b>HEALTH</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure women's right to equal access to health information and care</li> <li>• Discoutage childbearing at a young age</li> <li>• Provide family planning education and services so all women can decide when and how many children to have</li> </ul>
<b>EDUCATION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure women equal access to education at all levels and ages</li> <li>• Ensure all women's access to adult vocational and literacy training</li> <li>• Eliminate gender stereotypes in textbooks and replace negative images of women with positive ones</li> <li>• Encourage girls to study all subjects</li> <li>• Initiate efforts to ensure girls do not drop out of school</li> </ul>
<b>WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guarantee women's full exercise of equal human rights through law</li> <li>• Eliminate violence against women, including rape and domestic violence</li> <li>• Ensure all women's equal rights in marriage, divorce and parenting</li> <li>• Guarantee women's rights to own, buy and sell property regardless of marital status</li> <li>• Protect frfugee and immigrant women's human rights</li> <li>• Ratify Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)</li> </ul>
<b>PROMOTION OF PEACE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote women's peace-making and aims reduction work</li> <li>• Protect refugee women and children</li> </ul>

<b>1992 Rio de Janeiro Agenda 21</b>	
<b>GENDER EQUALITY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase women's participation in policy-and decision-making in government and public organizations</li> <li>• Involve women's groups and issues in all policy-making — community, national and international</li> <li>• Develop a strategy to eliminate constitutional, legal, administrative, cultural, behavioral, social and economic obstacles to women's full participation in public life</li> <li>• Use affirmative action to help women gain equality in all areas of life</li> <li>• Reflect equally the views of women and men in all programs</li> <li>• Support the activities and agendas of community women's groups</li> </ul>
<b>ECONOMIC STATUS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include women's unpaid domestic work in national economic statistics</li> <li>• Improve the status and income of women</li> <li>• Generate employment for the urban poor, especially women, through the improvement and maintenance of cities</li> <li>• Strengthen and develop the collection of data related to women</li> </ul>
<b>HEALTH</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide women-centered and managed maternal and infant health services to all women</li> <li>• Train and educate women to provide health care</li> <li>• Develop a national health action plan to educate women to reduce the risk of HIV and other infectious diseases in women and their infants</li> <li>• Conduct research on health effects of toxic waste on women and children</li> <li>• Provide family planning education and services so all women can decide when and how many children to have</li> </ul>
<b>EDUCATION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure women equal access to education at all levels and ages</li> <li>• Ensure all women's access to adult vocational and literacy training</li> <li>• Eliminate gender stereotypes in textbooks and replace negative images of women with positive ones</li> <li>• Promote education for women in management, development and environmental concerns</li> <li>• Increase the number of women scientists and researchers</li> <li>• Create awareness of women's contributions to the transmission of social values and knowledge</li> </ul>
<b>WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eliminate violence against women, including rape and domestic violence</li> <li>• Combat abuses of women's human rights</li> </ul>
<b>PROMOTION OF PEACE</b>	

<p><b>GENDER EQUALITY</b></p>	<p><b>1993 Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase women's participation in policy-and decision-making in government and public organizations</li> <li>• Encourage full and equal participation of women in political, civil, economic, social and cultural life</li> <li>• Encourage inclusion of the status of women in all deliberations by treaty monitoring groups</li> <li>• Eliminate gender bias in the administration of justice</li> <li>• Make information on legal procedure available to all women</li> <li>• Pursue universal ratification, implementation of CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women)</li> </ul>
<p><b>ECONOMIC STATUS</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognize the importance and participation of women in the development process</li> </ul>
<p><b>HEALTH</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure women's right to equal access to health information and care</li> <li>• Provide family planning education and services so all women can decide when and how many children to have</li> </ul>
<p><b>EDUCATION</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure women equal access to education at all levels and ages</li> </ul>
<p><b>WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eliminate rape, domestic violence, and other violence against women</li> <li>• Eliminate prostitution, trafficking in and slavery of women</li> <li>• Integrate women's rights into the mainstream of the UN system</li> <li>• Urge governments to counter intolerance and violence against women based on religion, including traditional practices harmful to women</li> <li>• Encourage effective measures against female infanticide, harmful child labor, sale of children and organs, and aid sexual abuse of children, including prostitution and pornography</li> <li>• Protect and promote the human rights of the girl child.</li> </ul>
<p><b>PROMOTION OF PEACE</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Condemn such activities as systematic rape in war</li> </ul>

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<p style="text-align: center;">1993 Vision Declaration and Programme of Action</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote women's participation in public and professional life in government and other organizations</li> <li>• Encourage full and equal participation in society in political, social, economic, and cultural life</li> <li>• Promote initiation of the women's movement in education for equal status and work</li> <li>• Promote leadership of the women's movement in society</li> <li>• Promote commitment to equal pay/equal status in all sectors</li> <li>• Promote universal ratification of CEDAW, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women</li> </ul>	<b>GENDER EQUALITY</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote the improvement and participation of women in the development process</li> </ul>	<b>ECONOMIC STATUS</b>

**FABC PAPERS** is a project of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), designed to bring the thinking of Asian experts to a wider audience and to develop critical analysis of the problems facing the Church in Asia from people on the scene. The opinions expressed are those of the author(s) alone and do not necessarily represent the official policies of the FABC or its member Episcopal Conferences. Manuscripts are always welcome and may be sent to: FABC, G.P.O. Box 2984, Hong Kong.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote the formation of women's groups and their active participation in society</li> <li>• Promote leadership of women in all sectors of society</li> <li>• Promote women's rights for the enjoyment of the full range of human rights</li> <li>• Promote the formation of women's groups and their active participation in society</li> <li>• Promote the formation of women's groups and their active participation in society</li> <li>• Promote the formation of women's groups and their active participation in society</li> </ul>	<b>WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote the formation of women's groups and their active participation in society</li> </ul>	<b>PROMOTION OF PEACE</b>