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## **New Scholars**

# **EVANGELIZED EVANGELIZERS: THE ASIAN FAMILY THROUGH THE EYES OF THE FABC IN ITS DOCUMENTS FROM 1970-2013**

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### **Introduction**

John Paul II's iconic line, "The future of humanity passes by way of the family" (*Familiaris Consortio*, #86) encapsulates a belief held by both the Church and society that the family carries with it an essential and critical role in forming future generations. In addition, the universal Church has made the family its theme for the two-part gathering of bishops in the 2014 Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops and the 2015 Fourteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops.

This research assesses the treatment of the family by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC). Specifically, it addresses the problem of how the FABC documents (plenary assemblies, bishops'

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institutes, and supplementary documents) from 1970-2013 present the Asian family. This is significant because the Asian family has a crucial position in the Church, especially in Asia and especially in this millennium. Moreover, no previous systematic attempt has been made to study the FABC on the family. The family is an essential part of the Asian Church, which the FABC calls a Church of the Young and a Church of the Poor. It would benefit moral theologians, especially Asian moral theologians who study, reflect on, discern, and desire to propel the Church in scholarly discussions about the Asian family.

### **Overview of the Chapters**

The dissertation is divided into five chapters. The first chapter is entitled, "The Significance of the Family in the FABC." It introduces the study by presenting the statement of the problem, its scope and limitations, its significance, methodology, the definition of terms and related literature. It investigates all documents from the FABC plenary assemblies (1-10), relevant bishops' institutes, and supplementary documents, highlighting key documents from over one hundred *FABC Papers*.

A second chapter, "A Primer on the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC)" provides basic information on the FABC. It begins with a brief history of the origins of the FABC, rooted in Vatican II and in the 1970 historic visit of Paul VI in Manila for the Asian Bishops' Meeting. It discusses the nature of the FABC as a voluntary association, a transnational body of local Churches of Asia composed of nineteen bishops' conferences in Asia. While it shares similarities with other continental episcopal groupings such as CELAM and SECAM, the FABC remains distinct in its being uniquely Asian, with a faith rooted in the history and culture of Asia's peoples.

The chapter discusses some features of the FABC's theology: induction, more *ad extra* than *ad intra*, at the service of life, following the "see-judge-act" schema, and collaborating with other faiths through dialogue. The FABC operates on a spirit of dialogue, a service to the peoples of Asia, the advancement of the reign of God, and a spirit of communion and humility. While its Asian theology remains faithful to magisterial teachings, it uses a truly Asian means of theological reflection that draws from the concrete realities and experiences of Asian churches. Basic FABC themes examined are harmony, pluralism, the sacredness of human life, family and marriage, interfaith marriages, and globalization.

Since a proper context of the family is necessary for a study of the Asian family, the third chapter is on "A Socio-Anthropology of the Family." It reviews Western and Asian theories on the family. Under the Western theories, it investigates family forms such as the nuclear family, the extended family, and newer family forms (lone parent/single parent family, transnational family, etc.). It likewise discusses the postmodern family from conservative, liberal and feminist perspectives.

Shifting the discussion to Asian theories, chapter three highlights the Asian nuclear family's retention of traditional values, stressing on the care of the more vulnerable members in the family (the aged and the young), filial piety, and the role of religion. It evaluates similarities between Western and Asian theories (including newer family forms and the shift from being parent-centred to child-centred) and their differences. (For instance, Asian families tend to be financially independent but psychologically and emotionally interdependent, as well as possess deep religious and cultural ties.) The chapter ends with a discussion on the future of the Asian family as being dependent on various forces: the global culture, transnational corporations, demographic shifts, technology, religion/faith, and poverty.

Having considered the socio-anthropology on the family from Western and Asian theories, the study then proceeds with a discussion on the Catholic theology on the family and the FABC themes on the Asian family. This is the content of the fourth chapter, "The FABC Themes on the Asian Family."

The Catholic theology on the family looks into the Christian family in Biblical times, based on four key gospel passages (The Finding of Jesus in the Temple, Jesus' Mother and Brothers, Mary and John at the Foot of the Cross, and Jesus Calling the Children to Himself) as well as the New Testament Household Codes. It then presents the Christian family's nature and mission today, drawing from John Paul II's *Familiaris Consortio* and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. It discusses the four tasks of the family from FC #17, the family as domestic church, and current challenges of the family, drawn from the survey leading up to the 2014 extraordinary synod of bishops (which includes the growing conflict between marriage and family as proposed by the Church versus the actual reality, the decrease in children born in "regular families," and the need for more effective pastoral care in the formation of children and parents' faith formation). The chapter advances to the Asian family in the FABC's

plenary assemblies where five themes emerge: the family in Asia as a gift, threats to the family in Asia (among them, familism and new family forms), the teaching that family springs from the Sacrament of Marriage, pastoral needs of the Asian family, and the FABC resolutions and plans that take into account holistic programs to care for families with special needs (like transnational families) and families in difficult situations (divorced, single parents, remarried, etc.). There are four themes that stem from the bishops' institutes: forming the Asian family, sending out the Asian family as new evangelizers, interfaith marriages, and the significance of the newsletters of the Office of the Laity and Family, called "Laity."

The fifth and final chapter, "An Analysis of the FABC on the Family in Asia" is divided into three sections. The first section deliberates on the salient features on the family from the previous chapters on the social sciences, the Church, and the FABC. The second section reflects on the lights and shadows of the FABC on the family in Asia. It considers the FABC's fidelity to the nature and mission of the FABC (how family refers either to the nuclear family, God's family, or the human family; its identity as domestic church, its call to be evangelized evangelizers, and its challenge to a new way of being Church in Asia), fidelity to observations on the social sciences, Scripture and Church teaching on the family, and the invitation to respond effectively regarding certain practical matters (practices, structures, attitudes, and approaches that would hurt the family in Asia). The third and final section views the future of the family in Asia in terms of four critical areas: the mega-trend of globalization, the danger of lethargy of a "middle-aged" FABC, practical needs such as a sensitivity towards marginalized families, and the prophetic role of the laity and the family (as domestic church, object of evangelization, basic ecclesial community).

## **Conclusion**

The FABC remains a gift to the Church in Asia in its efforts to reflect on concerns common to the Asian bishops as well as implement plans to evangelize Asia together, one family at a time. Christian families in Asia are one of the FABC's greatest instruments to bringing about God's reign in Asia.