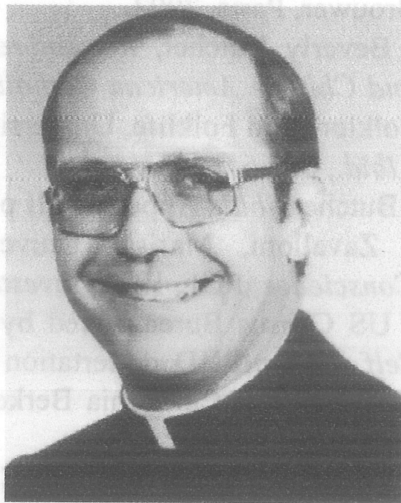


Asia's Bishops Highlight the Family

James H. Kroeger, M.M.

For the eighth time in three decades, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) gathered in plenary assembly on August 17-23, 2004. The 181 participants from 22 Asian countries who came to Daejeon, Korea were made up of 6 cardinals, 80 bishops, and 95 priests, religious men and women, and laypersons. A similar mix of clergy, religious, and laity has characterized preceding assemblies; however, in line with the conference theme, extra steps were taken to assure the presence of laity, who numbered about 60.



The weeklong FABC gathering, focusing on "The Asian Family: Towards a Culture of Life," sought to address the vast changes in Asia with their concomitant new pressures on Asian families. The assembly process had begun a full year earlier, when a draft document, principally authored by Archbishop Orlando Quevedo of Cotabato, Philippines, had been circulated to all the Asian bishops' conferences. In response to their reactions, compiled as a 114-page book, and to the feedback from theologians and resource persons, a working paper was ready for all the arriving participants. The task at hand was to discuss and digest the paper, bring additional experiences and insights, and suggest specific ministry programs of family enrichment. This formula proved to be the right-mix for a week of animated interaction.

In contrast to many previous FABC plenary assemblies, this 2004 meeting had no major addresses by theologians or resource persons; their contributions had already been integrated into the draft text. However, several short presentations or

messages were given, often at the initial session of each day. Archbishop Oswald Gomis of Colombo, Sri Lanka, FABC Secretary General, gave a brief opening address, reminding delegates of FABC's rich, 34-year history [see Appendix A: An FABC Overview]; Gomis challenged the delegates to explore how the FABC could be a visionary force at the service of Asian families. The delegate of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples in Rome, African Archbishop Robert Sarah, highlighted the pivotal nature of the conference, asserting that "the Catholic Church and the Asian and African societies must stand firm in presenting marriage and family life as something precious."

Assembled participants heard many other well-chosen voices. There were words and gestures of welcome to Korea from Archbishop Andreas Choi Chang-mou, president of the Korean Bishops' Conference, and from Cardinal Stephen Kim, retired archbishop of Seoul and one of the few living original organizers of the FABC in the 1970s. Japanese Cardinal Stephen Hamao, currently serving in Rome as President of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, gave a description of the vast migration and refugee phenomenon in Asia, highlighting its impact on the Asian family. He graciously provided everyone with the new Vatican document *The Love of Christ toward Migrants (Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi)*. Fraternal delegates, representing various bishops' conferences, gave brief messages (Archbishop Adrian Doyle [Australia], Bishop Denis Browne [Oceania], and Bishop John Cummins [USA]). Finally, a delegation headed by Bishop Wilton Gregory, president of the USA bishops' conference, visited briefly; one Asian bishop, surprised to see an African-American stand when Gregory was introduced, exclaimed: "He looks like one of us!"

FABC Plenary Assembly VIII, following a week of dedicated work, produced a "magisterial" final document, containing 124 sections and extending to 43 typewritten pages. *The Asian Family toward a Culture of Integral Life* has three sections: (I) Pastoral Challenges to the Family in Asia; (II) Theological-Pastoral Reflection; (III) Pastoral Recommendations for Family Ministry. Assessing the entire document, one participant noted: "This work has emerged from the experience of

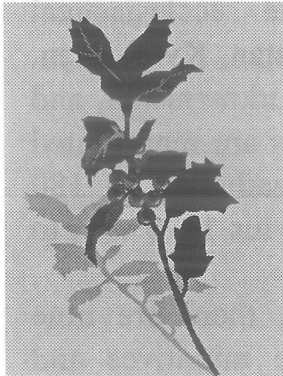
pastors and families in Asia. It is very contemporary and comprehensive. I know the amount and depth of effort that went into this product. And, my hope is that it will find extensive pastoral use in Asia. Adapted to local needs, it could well serve as the guiding framework for dioceses, parishes, and family life centers to design a truly effective—and critical—ministry for families.”

The well-planned and carefully executed FABC assembly was further enriched by several factors. The daily Eucharist, homilies, prayers, and meditations moved the participants to open themselves to the evident action of the Holy Spirit. Three evening cultural events were warmly appreciated: the Trinitas Choir provided a panorama of sacred music; the Boys’ and Girls’ Choir of Seoul enthralled and delighted everyone; the presentation of the National Center for Korean Traditional Performing Arts captivated the audience. There were optional screenings of several award-winning Asian films. Delegates were invited to express in writing their appreciation to retiring Assistant Secretary General, Father Edward Malone, for his lengthy service [see Appendix B: An FABC Servant]. Yes, FABC VIII provided a rich, cultural smorgasbord—to everyone’s delight! And, of course, who can judge the importance and fruitfulness of the personal conversations and interaction among old and new friends?

On August 21, the penultimate working day of the conference, all delegates were hosted by the Tanbang-dong Parish in Daejeon for an inculturated celebration of Sunday Mass. Over one hundred families renewed their marriage vows during a moving Eucharist. And, one more delicious Korean meal was served in the parish hall. The day was enhanced with a pilgrimage to the near-by Hwangsee Bawee Shrine, site of the inspiring martyrdom in the 1800s of scores of Korean Catholics.

As FABC VIII concluded, a short message “To the People of God in Asia and People of Good Will” was released [see Appendix C: FABC VIII Message]. Principally authored by Bishop ‘Chito’ Tagle of Imus, Philippines, the message, framed in an ecumenical and interreligious tone, expresses the commitment of Catholics in Asia to work with governments, educational and media centers, and people of good will from all faiths “in

strengthening the family as the focal point for the promotion of a civilization of love and a culture of life." The message, summing up the work of FABC VIII, concluded: "We entrust Asian families to God, the Fountain of Love and Life.... Families of Asia, become what you are—God's gift of love and life for Asia!"



The staff of the Holy Spirit Study Centre

wishes all our readers a

Merry Christmas

And a

Happy New Year

APPENDIX A:

AN OVERVIEW OF THE FABC

The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) is a transnational episcopal structure that brings together fourteen bishops' conferences from the following countries as full members: Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Laos-Cambodia, Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei, Myanmar (Burma), Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam. FABC has eleven associate members drawn from the ecclesiastical jurisdictions of East Timor, Hong Kong, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Macau, Mongolia, Nepal, Siberia, Tadjikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Thus, in total, twenty-eight countries are represented in the FABC, which grew out of the historic gathering of 180 Asian Catholic Bishops with Pope Paul VI during his 1970 visit to the Philippines.

Aside from a modest central structure, there are nine FABC offices, which carry out many concrete initiatives and projects. The offices, purposely scattered among various Asian nations, are focused on evangelization, social communication, laity, human development, education and student chaplaincy, ecumenical and interreligious affairs, theological concerns, clergy, and the consecrated life. Each of these offices sponsors a wide variety of activities that promote the growth of the Asian local Churches. In particular, the offices of human development, interreligious dialogue, and theological concerns have been extraordinarily productive.

The supreme body of the FABC is the Plenary Assembly, which convenes every four years. Official delegates from member conferences and the FABC offices attend; there are many invited consultant participants. It is noteworthy that the "non-bishops" in attendance often reach well over fifty percent of the total participants. The themes, places, and dates of the eight plenary assemblies are as follows: "Evangelization in Modern Day Asia" (Taipei, Taiwan: 1974); "Prayer—the Life of the Church in Asia"

(Calcutta, India: 1978); “The Church—Community of Faith in Asia” (Bangkok, Thailand: 1982); “The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World of Asia” (Tokyo, Japan: 1986); “Journeying Together toward the Third Millennium” (Bandung, Indonesia: 1990); “Christian Discipleship in Asia Today: Service to Life” (Manila, Philippines: 1995); “A Renewed Church in Asia: A Mission of Love and Service” (Samphran, Thailand: 2000); and, “The Asian Family toward a Culture of Life” (Daejeon, Korea: 2004).

The FABC has been the most influential body in the Asian Church since the Second Vatican Council. It has strengthened the bonds of communication among the bishops in the region and has contributed to the development of a shared vision about the Church and her evangelizing mission in Asia. The initial impetus for the FABC theological orientation was given by the first plenary assembly in 1974; for the Church in Asia to truly discover its own identity it must continually engage in a three-fold dialogue with the peoples (especially the poor), the cultures, and the religions of Asia. This programmatic vision has guided the FABC for over three decades. One can validly assert that the FABC is truly “Asia’s Continuing Vatican Council II.”

APPENDIX B:

AN FABC SERVANT

Maryknoll Father Edward F. Malone, who recently retired after more than three decades of missionary service in Asia, has been an integral part of the FABC growth from its early years. Assigned to Hong Kong in 1971 (after years of Maryknoll formation ministry in the United States), Malone began work with the FABC in January 1972. This enthusiastic missionary did “the needful” as South Asians are fond of saying, to nurture and develop the FABC in the position that was eventually defined as “assistant secretary general” (read: jack-of-all-trades, work-horse, planner, fund-raiser, coordinator, publisher). Malone employed his considerable skills as theologian, pastoral planner, and visionary to promote a vibrant sense of fraternity among the Asian bishops and their local Churches. Ed worked hard, but made it appear easy; his loving dedication generated great energy and enthusiasm.



Over three decades as the nine distinct FABC offices were created, Father Malone was present and offered his judicial advice. He was the only person to have attended all eight FABC plenary assemblies (though he had to leave the 2004 assembly early due to illness). In 1976 Malone conceived and began publishing the *FABC Papers*, which have now reached Number 110; if one counted all the sub-papers, the total would be 175 booklets [consult the UCAN website for listing and index]. In addition, over a decade ago, Malone initiated the much-lauded Pastoral Management Training Workshops for bishops.

The Asian participation in the various international synods held in Rome was enhanced by Malone, who would operate out of the Philippine Embassy to the Holy See located near Saint Peter’s

Basilica. Malone himself was a delegate to the 1998 "Asian Synod" where he spoke on the missionary task and potential of the Asian local Churches; he urged the establishment of a missionary society in each Asian Church (see *Ecclesia in Asia* 44d). On September 30, 2000 during the Philippine National Mission Congress, Father Malone was honored by the University of San Carlos in Cebu City with a doctorate degree *honoris causa*; specifically the award was given "for his unique contribution to the FABC and the Church's mission of evangelization in Asia."

During the August 2004 FABC Plenary Assembly in Korea, after Malone had taken sick and returned to Hong Kong, the participants compiled a "Hearts for Father Malone" booklet which contained scores of messages hand-written by cardinals, bishops, priests, religious and laity. Archbishop Paul Grawng of Mandalay, Myanmar noted that Father Malone "loved the Church in Asia and brought up the FABC with loving care." Auxiliary Bishop John Tong of Hong Kong wrote that Father Malone is "a man who truly loves the Church. He dedicated all his time and energy working for the Church he loves, and we truly treasure his friendship." Ursuline Sister Mary Walter Santer wrote from Thailand saying that Father Malone has a "deep love for the Church, especially the Church in Asia. He used all his wonderful talents in serving Christ and His Church selflessly all his life. The FABC might not be what it is today had it not been for him."

APPENDIX C:**MESSAGE OF THE 8TH PLENARY ASSEMBLY OF THE FABC,
17-23 AUGUST 2004****TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD IN ASIA AND PEOPLE OF GOOD
WILL**

Gathered in Daejeon, Korea for the 8th Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, we bishops, together with priests, religious and laypeople from various countries in Asia, reflected on the theme *The Asian Family toward a Culture of Life*, in the spirit of listening to God and to the voices of Asian families. As this assembly comes to a close we are confirmed in the conviction that the family is truly God's gift and blessing to Asia!

We celebrated the signs of hope that abound in the Asian families. Inspired by religious and cultural values and traditions, many families strive to remain committed to the ideals of family life. They draw strength from Asian values like a profound reverence for life, closeness to and respect for nature, strong family ties, personal relationships, hospitality, the spirit of welcome, respect for elders, filial piety, and caring for the young. The enduring spirituality and religiosity in the family and the sense of the sacredness of marriage, family and children are a cause for joy and have made many families the cradles of vocations. Faced with great odds, they manifest resilience and endurance. The Asian family is strengthened by and also transmits these values. We marvel at how the values of indigenous peoples and other religions enrich Asian families. Intercultural and interreligious marriages also provide opportunities for spiritual enrichment, and become symbols of unconditional love in the midst of complex cultural and religious issues these marriages face. We thank you, families, for safeguarding genuine values and we encourage you to persevere.

We also share the anxieties of the Asian families. New realities impinge on the well-being of many families. An emerging global neo-liberal culture propelled by individualism, selfishness

and greed, with lifestyles and mindsets inspired by materialism and secularism, poses a threat to the family. Elite globalization has caused untold poverty and migration. Wars and conflicts also displace people from homes. Families face the impact of the means of social communication and coercive population programs on family values. The spread of HIV/AIDS, illegal drugs, and pornography has harmed families, especially the youth who are most vulnerable. The rise of marital divorce and break-up signals the dwindling cohesion of the family. Abortion and other attempts to manipulate human life present a severe problem. A contraceptive mentality is undermining genuine conjugal love. The continuing oppression of women and children is lamentable. Values that have served as foundations of the family are vanishing at an alarming rate, one result being the diminishing number of vocations in some countries. We cannot also ignore the complex situation of families with single, separated, or remarried parents and the effects on the children. We unite ourselves with you, Asian families, as you courageously struggle with these difficult issues.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we envision all families living by Love that comes from God, for only Divine Love strengthens and nurtures Life. God is love (I Jn 4:8) and out of love God sent the Son to bring us life (I Jn 4:9). In God's plan of salvation, the Son became incarnate through the Holy Spirit and became part of the family of Mary and Joseph. We desire that the values of the Reign of God taught by Jesus (Mt 5-7) may take root in Asian families and bloom into a culture of life. A culture of life respects and protects God's gift of human life in all its dimensions from conception to death. A culture of life vigorously opposes the forces that destroy, exploit and oppress human life. A culture of life actively promotes responsible parenthood and the primacy of human life and dignity over efficiency, capital and profit. A culture of life promotes family values from indigenous people and other religions. We believe that families, steeped in prayer and spirituality, are sanctuaries where love is faithfully shared and life responsibly generated, enriched and defended. By their shared love, communion and mutual service, Asian families can help

foster communion and solidarity in faith communities and in society as we work towards forming one family of humankind.

As pastors of the Church convinced of God's unfailing love, we bishops will look for every opportunity to promote the good of families. We commit ourselves to strengthen Family Ministry so as to assist and accompany all families, especially those in dire need, on their journey towards fullness of life. In a particular way we would like to express our affection and concern to the Catholic families in China and North Korea. We are one with our Catholic brothers and sisters in China as they meet the challenge of transforming the Church into one family of God.

As builders of communities, we appeal to our governments, groups concerned for the welfare of families, educational institutions, mass media producers and promoters, our brothers and sisters of other religious beliefs, and all people of good will to join us in strengthening the family as the focal point for the promotion of a civilization of love and a culture of life.

We entrust Asian families to God, the Fountain of Love and Life. We pray that you may "put on love, the perfect bond" (Col 3:14). Families of Asia, become what you are—God's gift of love and life for Asia!