

SECULARISM AND NEW WAYS OF BEING A FAMILY

- A) **Baptism: Christian Commitment**
- B) **Domestic Church**
- C) **The Eucharist and the Family**
- D) **The Future of the Family depends upon Today's Family**

SECULARISM AND NEW WAYS OF BEING A FAMILY

Secularism is not an exclusive problem of the Catholic Church or Christianity. It is a reality which we are experiencing in the world in different forms and intensity. It varies according to the country or region which we focalize.

Traditionally we have looked upon *secularism* as a kind of negative energy which comes from "outside" and responds to created interests which aim at attacking and destroying the Church. This, which is completely false, only talks about external factors of the Church. But, is it only external to the Church, the participation in and the origin of the process of secularization which we all live?

--How much responsibility do we have in the church for what is happening?

--How much of this process of secularization is nothing else but the natural movement of society and culture, the changes and evolutions which we do not want or we do not read in reality, or those which we ignore because they remove us from our comfort zone?

--And when these changes become true realities which cannot be hidden and which question us, we frequently interpret them as attacks to the church status quo? Without realizing that "...they may be an occasion for spiritual life revival in new forms and for new ways of existence to the interior and outside of our relationship with God" (Charles Taylor).

In our presentation of the Panel on "Secularism and New Ways of Being a Family", we will be accompanied by the concern and pastoral reflections (2010) of an Egyptian-Lebanese Jesuit

priest, F. Henri Boulard SJ (with ample experience in the pastoral, academic and social welfare world—Caritas International in Egypt, Middle East and Northern Africa); reflections of Juan Martin Velasco (*Metamorphosis of the Holiness and Future of Christianity*, 1998), of the rigorous study of the Spanish Moralist Marciano Vidal (*Orientation of the postmodern family*, 2001); documents of the Latin American CFM; documents of the Latin American Bishops and of the Vatican (Medellin, Puebla, Familiaris Consortio, Letter to the Families).

In these documents and authors we find, not the pessimistic vision of those which limit themselves to the role of “victims” from external aggression, but of those who make a responsible, critical and encouraging interpretation of the new realities, of the changes upon which they build a new method of interpretation of the signs of our age, of being a community and of being a Church.

In a letter addressed to His Holiness Benedictus XVI (Mail of the CFM of Brasil, No. 229, February 2010), F. Boulard states, in which we could describe as “an ad intra look into the responsibility of secularism”, the following:

- Religious practice constantly decreases. Churches are frequented by older people, who will shortly be no longer with us.
- Seminaries and novitiates are more and more empty each day; number of vocations decrease in an alarming way.
- The number of priests has diminished; the group is gradually becoming smaller and older. Additionally each one has more parishes, works and people to take care of, without being able to produce more than what they are doing and reducing the quantity and the quality of the services rendered by them.
- The Church language is anachronistic , tiresome, repetitive, moralizing and rather inadequate for our age.
- It is urgent to renovate profoundly theology and the instruction of Christian doctrine (catechize). This must be rethought and reformulated; we find that our faith is too abstract, cerebral, dogmatic and with little address to the heart and body.

--A large number of Christians have gone to “knock on the doors” of oriental religions, “new age” sects, spiritualism and evangelical churches.....With amazement we see that they go elsewhere to look for the nourishment they do not find among us; they have the impression that “instead of bread we give them stones”.

--With reference to morale and ethics, the impositions of the Magisterium on the subjects of: marriage, birth control, abortion, euthanasia, sexual relations, homosexuality, marriage of priests, divorce, divorced and remarried couples, etc. are not interesting to most people; on the contrary, they generate indifference and weariness.

--The Catholic Church were the teachers of Europe but they forgot that Europe became adult and intellectually mature and rejected being treated as an under age child who has not reached maturity. The paternalistic ways of a church “mater et magistra” have become outdated and are rejected.

--The countries that in the earlier times were the most Catholic, made a 180° turn and fell into atheism, anticlericalism, agnosticism, indifference or changed their religion (Bizancio-Turkey, France, Spain, Italy).

--Dialogue with other churches and religions has come to a standstill. The advance made in the past century, is badly menaced.

What has been the reaction of the Church in the face of these realities?

- a) To lessen the importance of the seriousness of the situation, finding comfort in certain conquests and fervors in the field of religious traditionalism; or in the growth of Christianity in some underdeveloped countries.
- b) To invoke in a passive way their confidence in the Lord, who has helped the Church during 20 centuries in many other crises, and who will continue to help her in difficult times. (This must be true, but there should also be an auto evaluation which will permit us to see that which we are not doing well, in order to make the necessary and possible changes.

--The apparent vitality of the Church in the underdeveloped continents is deceitful. Earlier than later, those churches as they mature will go through the same crisis which the European continent is presently experiencing.

--Modernity and changes will never go into reverse, so that we, as part of the Church must go forward with the people; we cannot ignore the realities which they created and live in.

(Keeping in mind the difference between talking about a corporation or talking about the Church) Any entity, upon finding losses or malfunctioning, immediately initiates actions, asks questions, calls experts, tries to recover, uses all its energy to change in a radical way. (We are talking about assuming the responsibility and the direction of an "ENTITY" which right now is in our hands, "God helps those who help themselves").

These disturbing pastoral reflections made by F. Boulad, may be grouped in five large aspects, which have been pointed out since the last part of the past century:

- 1. Secularization of Society, the culture and the life of the people.** That is, loss of cultural validity of the religious factor, which in some places can become exclusion and persecution. Social narrowness of the religious sphere, to go from occupying the total social field to the restricted sphere of religious groups or personal practice.
- 2. Crisis or decline of religious practices.** Crisis and loss of practices and beliefs, loss of an institutional sense of religious experience; religious practices "to satisfy consumers".
- 3. Religious indifference.** Which is a mass phenomenon, frequently described as a consequence of pedagogical processes of Christianity of the past; religion is also visualized as a historical phenomenon already left behind.
- 4. New religious movements.** In the Modernity and Postmodernity, the religious phenomenon does not disappear, but it acquires different manifestations. These religious and syncretistic phenomena come from Christianity and other religions and frequently acquire sect characteristics; greater presence of fundamentalist attitudes.
- 5. Frequent reactions from the religions and churches to this new human situation and to the crisis they generate internally.** They go from the fundamentalist "cognitive intrenchment"

and “ghetto” type positions before a reality which they believe to be dangerous, to the intense search of their own identity—marking the differences with others--, the organization of strongly proselytizing campaigns, the return to the anachronistic past through very traditional programs. Also present are actions of sacrifice before an imposing reality, with the intention of not disappearing or to be considered progressive. (J.M.Velasco, *Metamorphosis of Christianity....*(1998)

This diagnostic overview of the reality in our Church and the growth of secularism, should not be looked upon only as an attack originating from dark intentions, but also as a consequence of the inevitable change of the human, social, cultural realities which cause an impact on the persons making up all the institutions, including those belonging to the Church. They should also be regarded as situations of crisis and contrast between what we have been up to now, with experienced realities, and that which we can become as a result of the new realities which are being constructed. This is a call to come out of well-known, safe and comfortable spaces which demand a renovation of our vision, set ups, and to learn how to be and do new things. This demand for movement generates insecurity, a sensation of entering the unknown, where we do not know if everything which “has served” up to now, will continue to do so.

Nevertheless, our Church must reflect seriously over what the future will be like, which undoubtedly will be different to what it has been up to now, because realities are different. Advantage should be taken of these moments of crisis, to adequate our forms, contents, ways of doing things, tools and pedagogical and moral criteria used, in order to take care of new needs which require new answers, all of them pervaded with charitable love, an attitude of acceptance and forgiveness, respect for each other’s human and Christian dignity, brotherly love and communitarian practice in which we all grow and learn together.

It is completely legitimate and necessary for the Church to make questions about its future, especially when this future must be looked at from the perspective of rapid change and incertitude. Without becoming frantic or panicky, we must recognize and present the

seriousness of the situation and the radicalism of the crisis. This does not mean that we have a catastrophic or apocalyptic vision of the future of Christianity; this ecclesiastic crisis must be regarded as a strong stimulus, a unique opportunity to avoid absolute attitudes and ecclesiastic egocentrism. (J.M.Velasco op.cit.)

Along the same lines, the scarcity of vocations may be a call to overcome situations of excessive historic clericalism and recover protagonistic lay roles within the Church which is made up of all of us together and which were at some moment relegated to a second level.

The religious indifference must be regarded not only as a unilateral attitude assumed by persons and society, but it should also be considered as a consequence of pastoral and pedagogical methods, which have abused of fear, guilt and imposition. It is an opportunity to update forms, contents and protagonism of the ecclesiastic discourse and in the transmission of the salvation message and the images we have used to transmit and present God to the world.

Some reading cues of the present tendencies which allow us to foresee the future.

These should be regarded as needs which must generate changes in the way they are understood and taken care of, in the attitudes to be assumed and the ecclesiastic pedagogy to be created and assumed.

1. Observe the average age of persons participating in our liturgical celebrations, events of Christian initiation, and the reasons for doing it .
2. The major difficulties found to give religion and catechetical classes, restrictions in educational centers and the small group of students attending these classes.
3. The evolution which has taken place in the beliefs and moral criteria.
4. The lack of close links among important social institutions (the family, the school, the culture) and the Church, which used to facilitate propagation of the faith.
5. The increasing withdrawal from Christian practice on the part of women, for reasons of work and becoming aware of certain discrimination with respect to their ecclesiastic participation.

6. Increasing scarcity of pastoral agents, due to break-up of generation relief on the part of laymen, priests and clergy.
7. Displacement of the “strongholds of Christianity” of the classic occidental world (Europe) to the countries of the 3rd world, where we also find a decrease of the birth rate.
8. In the western countries Christianity is changing from the majority religion to a minority religion.

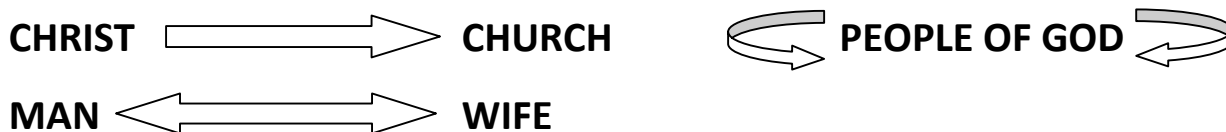
It is time to think that Christianity is not disappearing; what is coming to an end are some forms and figures, to give room to other forms and figures; Christianity does not disappear, but the forms of being a Christian change.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY: SACRAMENT OF GOD IN THE WORLD

Symbols have a value for us. All things, no matter how simple they look, may become signs. A ring, a meal, a gesture, an action, a child.....may be symbols of something beyond what they appear to be. They may represent events, feelings, ties, which have a value and a special meaning. Signs not only evoke and remind.....They create, renew and deepen the realities they reveal. **A sacrament is a symbol**, and makes real something transcendental, something which goes beyond what it appears to be at first sight. If marriage is a sacrament, what does this mean?.....what does it symbolize?.....Let us see what St. Paul states in his Letter to Ephesians, Chapter 5, 22-33:

“Wives should be subordinate to their husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, just as Christ is head of the Church, he Himself the Savior of the Body.Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the Church, and handed Himself over for her.....in order that He might present to Himself the Church with splendor without spot or wrinkle and any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. So husbands also should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife, loves himself.....”For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother, and be joined to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak in reference to Christ and the Church. In any case, each one of you should love his wife just as himself; and the wife should respect her husband”

In this text, there is an important parallelism:



From a theological point of view, **marriage is sacrament of Christ’s love for the Church, His Bride**. And how does Christ become the Lord of His Church---Bride? Through an attitude of service, mercy, delivery up to the point of death. In no moment do we see Him with an attitude of power. We have before us a proposal: to love as Christ loves His Bride (the Church—People of God). This is the same for husbands as well as for wives, because these are interchangeable roles in a dynamic relationship of love. There are beautiful images which ratify this in The Song of Songs and other biblical texts, as for instance, prophet Hosea, whose wife does not behave well; however, he looks her up, helps her to rise and forgives her. ¹

For this reason, John Paul II stated:

“The communion of love between God and people, a fundamental part of the Revelation and faith experience of Israel, finds a meaningful expression in the marriage covenant which is established between a man and a woman. For this reason, the central word of Revelation, “God loves His people”, is likewise proclaimed through the living and concrete word whereby a man and a woman express their conjugal love. Their bond of love becomes the image and the symbol of the covenant which unites God and His people” ²

That love of God, of Christ is:

- *True*
- *Merciful*
- *Free*
- *Unconditional*
- *Fecund*

¹ For ex. Hos, 2, 21; Jer, 3, 6-13; Is, 54; Ez, 16, 25; Hos, 3

² John Paul II (1983). *Familiaris Consortio*. N°12.

➤ *Responsible*

From the foregoing, we find three important consequences:

1. MARRIAGE = SACRAMENT OF THE CONJUGAL LOVE OF CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

- It is a life project of two persons united by marriage. *“For this cause, a man shall leave his father and mother, and cling to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh” (Gen.2, 24)*³
- It is constructed during their lifetime: *“Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, love is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth.” (1 Cor 13,4-7, s.s.)*
- It is not a magic act of one day. It does not end with the ceremony. The couple, ministers of the sacrament during their lifetime. *“This is a great mystery and I refer it to Christ and the Church” (Ephesians. 5,32)*

2. FAMILY = DOMESTIC CHURCH

The family is a level of the Church. That which is symbolic and sacramental in the Church as a community and institution becomes real life in the family. *“Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am.” (Mt 18, 20)*

- ❖ **In the living experience of the sacraments:** The union between faith and life takes place in the family.
- **Baptism:** The incorporation of a new member to the community (Demands preparation). Baptism makes us part of the People of God, active members of the Church. By the action of the Holy Spirit, we participate in all the richness of the grace, which God bestows upon us. This same Spirit gives us the possibility of recognizing Jesus as the Lord, and leads us to build the unity of the Church with different charismas, which He entrusts to us for “common benefit” (1Cor 12, 3-11). And in the family, Domestic Church, we begin to be a part of the

³ Ephesians 5, 31.

People of God, participating in the common priesthood as followers of Jesus, living signs of Christ's love for His Bride, the Church---People of God, as John Paul II reminds us:

“Indeed, by means of baptism, man and woman are definitively placed within the new and eternal covenant, in the spousal covenant of Christ with the Church. And it is because of this indestructible insertion that the intimate community of conjugal life and love, founded by the Creator is elevated and assumed into the spousal charity of Christ, sustained and enriched by His redeeming power. By virtue of the sacramentality of their marriage, spouses are bound to one another in the most profoundly indissoluble manner. Their belonging to each other is the real representation, by means of the sacramental sign, of the very relationship of Christ with the Church. Spouses are therefore the permanent reminder to the Church of what happened on the Cross; they are for one another and for the children witnesses to the salvation in which the sacrament makes them sharers.”⁴

- **Confirmation:** Responsible decision to be a Christian (education for the decision).
- **Reconciliation:** Forgiveness for the daily falls and faults with mutual support.
- **Eucharist:** To share bread, joys, sorrows in the family meal around the table. (We will bring this up later)
- **Priesthood:** Sent from the **Domestic Church** to be **servers** (as Jesus in the Last Supper). We share a **common priesthood** when we receive the baptism in the Spirit. We can live our work and our profession as a vocation.
- **Marriage:** Daily living of the sacrament and during a lifetime which means being a **Domestic Church** (synthesis of all the sacraments).
- **Unction of the Sick:** Living illness and death from a point of view of faith, hope and love. Demonstration of love for those who suffer the most.

❖ **In the living experience of the liturgical seasons:**

- **Advent:** Pregnancy and preparation for the arrival of a new member of the family, Domestic Church.

⁴ (1983) *Familiaris Consortio*. No. 13

- **Christmas:** Birth. Welcome. Every time a child is born, it reminds us of Christ's birth.

"When Christ was born, he assumed the condition of a child: he was born poor and subordinate to His parents. Every child—image of Jesus at birth—must be received with love and kindness. Upon transmitting life to a child, conjugal love produces a new, singular, unique person, which cannot be repeated. At that time the ministry of evangelization begins for parents" (Document of Puebla No. 584)
- **Lent:** Scarcity, difficulties, pain, suffering, conflicts, crisis, lived in the family—Domestic Church.
- **Easter—Death and Resurrection:** Problems, pain and death (physical, economic, emotional, etc.) within the family. Overcome by faith, hope and love in the family—Domestic Church. Joys and celebrations for Life.
- **Pentecost:** The members of the family—Domestic Church are sent in couples to take the Good News of Love, Faith and Hope. "Look how they love each other". As a family, we have the mission to build a more human and just world. (Medellin: Family-Domestic Church: Formers of Persons, Educators in the Faith and Promoters of Common Welfare)

❖ **In prayer** – "The Lords Prayer" – Offering the day. Thanksgiving. Night Prayer.

❖ **Sharing the Word of God:** The family is the first evangelizer community. Children and youth ask, question and confront with the Truth. They ask for coherence in order to learn from models. They learn from authentic testimony.

❖ **In becoming what it is:** As John Paul II stated in *Familiaris Consortio*:

"The family finds in the plan of God the Creator and Redeemer not only its "identity", what it "is", but also its "mission", what it can and should "do". The role that God calls the family to perform in history derives from what the family is; its role represents the dynamic and existential development of what it is. Each family finds within itself a summons that cannot be ignored, and that specifies both its dignity and its responsibility. Family, "become" what you "are"! (3rd part No.17)

3. FAMILY = IMAGE OF GOD IN THE WORLD

God makes himself present in the world through the family. It is the best photograph of His love. The Puebla Document reminds us that God is a family:

“The family is the image of God who “in His most intimate mystery is not solitude, but a family”⁵ It is an alliance of persons who are summoned through the loving vocation of the Father who invites the spouses to an “intimate community of life and love” (GS 48)...The law of conjugal love is communion and participation, not dominance.” (Document of Puebla No. 582)

The Trinity = Community of love / Family

In God we find the fundament of every family and of all paternity and maternity. Reading the Ephesians text quoted before, together with the well-known passage of Gen 1, 26-28 in which God, when He creates the human being in His image and likeness, it is man and woman, Pope John Paul II affirms:

*“In the light of the New Testament, it is possible to discern how the **primordial model of the family is to be sought in God himself**, in the Trinitarian mystery of His life. The divine “We” is the eternal pattern of the human “we” especially of that “we” formed by the man and the woman, created in the divine image and likeness” (1994)⁶*

The family is the image of God Trinity. And like God, the family is a mystery. The history of salvation present in the Bible, shows how God reveals himself as:

- ❖ **Father-Mother** (O.T.: Prophets, Psalms; N.T.; Parables: Prodigal Son, etc. Pentecost: the Coming of the Holy Spirit: Fecundity-fruits).
- ❖ **Son** (God rejoices in his Loved Son: Baptism and Transfiguration)
- ❖ **Brother** (The Lord’s Prayer, Good Samaritan, Law of Love)
- ❖ **Husband/wife** (Hosea, Ezekiel, Isaiah, Song of Songs, Parables, Ephesians 5)

⁵ The Document of Puebla quotes John Paul II in his Homily in Puebla, AAS LXXI, p.184

⁶ *Letter to the Families*, No.6

In the Family we find the relationship of Conjugality, Paternity-Maternity, Filiation, Fraternity which God has chosen to manifest Himself to the world.



“Prodigal Son” (Rembrandt)



Details of hands

When we get married “in the church”, we assume the project of being “**Domestic Church**”; we commit ourselves to be image of God to the world, a God who loves us as we are, and is always willing to forgive us. To unite faith with the ordinary everyday life. It is a life project. It is not achieved from one day to the other. We build it together and with God’s unconditional help, which is present through every member of the family. Therefore, it is necessary that those who get married “in the church” understand the sacramental dimension of their union and the close interaction between faith and family and conjugal life. Consequently, it is important to get rid of the magical elements and understand the dynamics of the sacramentality of the conjugal unity and its multiple dimensions. All these elements must be present in the preparation for conjugal and family life (remote, close and immediate) ⁷ If the couple to be married in the Church, is not aware of them, and is not prepared to assume them or is not willing to commit themselves to live their whole life according to them , **they should not be married in the Church**. We, as facilitators of the preparation for marriage, must act with great responsibility in this respect.

⁷ John Paul II (1983), *Familiaris Consortio*. No. 51, 66, 67, 68

In the moment of the cross, each one of the “members” of the Trinitarian family acts and reveals itself. The Son lives the giving of his life as a personal donation, for which he is reconciled (Col 1, 21-22). The Father offers salvation through his Son, whom he handed over for us all for love (Rom 8, 32), for “God so loved the world that He gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life” (Jn 3, 16) The Holy Spirit reveals itself when Jesus dies, upon transforming humanity and giving the gift of reconciliation to all men of all times (Jn 19, 30)⁸ Like the Trinity, the family is a mystery of love and unity. It is the image and living experience of its communion, which happens every day in the sacrament of the Eucharist.

*“With this Sacrament, Jesus draws us to Him and makes us enter his dynamism towards God and towards our fellow men. There is a tight bond between the three dimensions of Christian vocation: believe, celebrate and live the mystery of Jesus Christ, in such a manner that Christian existence truly acquires Eucharistic form”.*⁹

THE EUCHARIST IS LIVED IN THE FAMILY

The sacrament of the Eucharist was instituted during a family celebration, the celebration of the Jewish Passover. Benedictus XVI explains it in the following manner in his Book “El Camino Pascual”(The Paschal Way)

*“The Jewish Passover was and continues to be a family celebration. It was not celebrated in the temple but in the home.....Jesus also celebrated Passover according to the spirit of this prescription: in a home, with his family, with the apostles, who had become his new family. Acting in this way, he also obeyed a precept which was then in force, according to which all Jews who came to Jerusalem could establish pilgrim associations, called chaburot, which for that night constituted the home and the family for the Passover. And this is how the Passover has also become a celebration for the Christians”*¹⁰

⁸ The meaning of the phrase “And bowing his head he delivered his spirit”, is given in this sense by Ignace De la Potterie(2007).*Jesus Passion according to St. John. Text and Spirit.*

⁹ Document of Aparecida, No. 251

¹⁰ Ratzinger, J.(1990). *The Paschal Way. Spiritual exercises given in the Vatican in presence of SS John Paul II.* Madrid:B.AC pp107-108.

¹¹ Idem pp. 109-110

And he adds a very interesting statement, which could mean the future of Christianity:

“Today this feast (=Easter feast) should again be a family celebration, which is the authentic barrier placed for the defense of the nation and humanity. May God allow us to understand again this warning, so that we may renovate the family celebration as a living home, where humanity grows and wins over chaos and nothingness...”¹¹

The family participates in an active way in the Eucharist, and makes it real every day in the sharing of “our daily bread”. In the **Domestic Church**, parents discover the marvelous gift of paternity/maternity which God has bestowed upon them when they become “*collaborators of God Creator in the conception and generation of a new human being*”, as indicated by John Paul II, who also affirms that “*God Himself is present in human fatherhood and motherhood.*”¹² And so parents as well as children have been loved with the unconditional and merciful love of the Son, who has shown us with his life, that we are also God’s children, and as stated by Saint Paul in his Letter to the Galatians, we can say with Him: Abba! (Father) ¹³ “*because God’s love has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us*”.¹⁴

In his Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum caritatis*, Pope Benedictus XVI, addressing laymen and families, states:

“Laymen should cultivate the desire for the Eucharist to have an increasingly more profound influence on their daily lives, transforming them into visible witnesses in their own work environment and in the whole society. I particularly urge the families to have this Sacrament as a source of strength and inspiration. The love between man and woman, the openness to life and the educative task reveal

¹² John Paul II (1994) *Letter to the Families* No. 9

¹³ Ga 4, 4-7

¹⁴ Rom 5,5

themselves as privileged fields where the Eucharist can show its capacity to transform the existence and fill it with meaning”¹⁵

In the First Letter to Corinthians, we find this marvelous reference to the Eucharist, which we can live in our Domestic Church, as we participate in the mystery of the union in common (common-union) through love:

“The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.”¹⁶

This is possible through congruence between faith and life, present in the family as a true Domestic Church, as is evident in this beautiful text of the Puebla Document:

“In the Eucharist, the family finds its plenitude of communion and participation. With the desire and the search for the Kingdom, it gets prepared by purifying its soul from everything that separates it from God. In an attitude of worship, it exercises the common priesthood and participates in the Eucharist to extend it in its life through the dialogue in which the word, anxieties, plans are shared, deepening the familiar communion. To live the Eucharist is to recognize and share the gifts that we receive from the Holy Spirit through Christ. It is also to accept the welcome which others offer us, allowing them to come into ourselves. The Spirit of the Covenant emerges again: to allow God to come into our life and do with it His will. Then, the strong and soft image of Christ, dead and resurrected, appears as the center of our lives”¹⁷

The family knows that it is incomplete and sinner....However, upon experiencing God’s true, merciful and unconditional love, it is moved, as in the case of the Samaritan in the Gospel of St. John, to transmit to the world the Good News and share that love, that Life.¹⁸

¹⁵ Benedictus XVI (2007) *Sacramentum caritatis*. No. 79

¹⁶ I Cor 10, 16-17

¹⁷ Document of Puebla No. 588

¹⁸ Jn 4, 5-42

“The husband is going to offer his love-Spirit to Samaria, the prostitute, who accepts him. The new alliance announced in Cana is addressed to the whole humanity and is not going to fail. The thirst is the search for God or for men. The water of the well is the law and wisdom. The vivid water is the new life. The new law of the Spirit and Christ will be its own fountain. The Samaritan is the margined woman, the idolaters. And Jesus-fountain, the Messiah who is there and wishes to save. But he does not impose:

“If you knew”, if you wished....And everything happened in the sixth hour, the hour of the greatest surrender”¹⁹

That Encounter can tell us today many things. Let us get closer, to listen and reflect on the dialogue:

***“You speak well: I do not have a husband; because you have had five, and the one you now have is not your husband”.** The sixth husband is not an obstacle to Jesus’ offer of life and that she may receive that water. Jesus is going to give her the water of the revelation of the Messiah, even without her breaking up with that husband....He is going to evangelize her and will leave her with her responsibility and her conscience, as he did with the collector and Zaqueo. The Good News is vivifying and demanding in itself....Then, why does Jesus uncover her personal situation? To give the woman proof that He is not one of many, so that she will accept the gospel. The fact is that she will decide that he is a prophet, because **“he has told me everything I have done”**...Not a reproach, nor questions as to where and when and how many times.... Instead of pointing out the evil she has done, he talks about the richness he wants to give. He who has seen God, or knows how to see and say what is the taste of God, does not need to magnify sin, which is counter-productive and shows lack of sensibility and delicacy. Enough humiliation feels the sinner! This is the way Jesus acts with the adulteress, with Zaqueo, with Levi, the publican and with the prodigal son. The evil that we do when we sin hurts God, because we are hurting ourselves due to ignorance: “Forgive them, they do not*

¹⁹ Marti Ballester, *Jesus*. Consulted on 4-21-2010 ein:
<http://es.catholic.net/escritoresactuales/664/1956/article.php?id=21983>

*know what they do". He wants us to be happy and sees that we make ourselves unhappy when we move away from Him."*²⁰

We are all sinners, so we say with the centurion, before Jesus' presence in the Eucharist: *"Lord, I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof; only say the word and I will be healed."* **(Mt 8, 5-13)**

We believe that **the future of the Church and of the world is** in the family. We have in our hands the responsibility of responding to the signs of the times, and we echo the words of John Paul II:

*"If the first "way of the Church" is the family, it should also be said that the civilization of love is also "the way of the Church", which journeys through the world and summons families to this way; it summons also other social, national and international institutions, because of families and through families. **The family in fact depends** for several reasons **on the civilization of love**, and finds therein reasons for its existence as a family. And at the same time **the family is the centre and the heart of the civilization of love.**"*²¹

Today Jesus himself is saying to us *"You (families) are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lamp stand, where it gives light to all in the house. Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father."* **(Mt 5, 13-16)**

We can be leaven. From and with our Domestic Churches with creativity and openness, we can give the Church the impulse to grow and ferment: so that it may become **bread** of hope in the crises and adverse situations, support in the moments of anxiety, and love for the neediest. In this way our communities will be testimony of Christian life, of unity, of joy: *"The community of believers will be of one heart and mind. No one will claim that any of his possessions is his own, but they will have everything in common....There will not be among us any needy person...."* **(Acts 4,32-34)**. The union of believers *"in the breaking of the bread and in the prayers"* **(Acts 2, 42b)** and *"in the meal celebrated*

²⁰ Caritas, un camino mejor. Lent 1987.Pag 60. Consulte don 4/21/2010 in: <http://www.mercaba.org/DIESDOMINI/CUARESMA/03A/ev-dcomentario.htm>

²¹ John Paul II (1994) *Letter to the families.No.13*

alternatively in our homes in joyous expectation of the return of the Lord.” (Acts 2, 46) will create communion.

THE FUTURE OF THE FAMILY DEPENDS UPON THE FAMILY OF TODAY

The family has its lights and shadows, and so does the Church pastoral on the family.

The family is the fundamental cell of society. Who forms whom? The family as a *domestic church*, as a level of the Church, is a core subject running through all areas of pastoral work in the Church; all of them are related to family life.

All or some of the elements that are considered shadows or internal or external realities of families, probably address the issue of the new forms in which families today are initiated (structure), of how they exist (functioning) and how they end. These new forms lead us to think that present day families are “broken”. Could it be that the family is “breaking apart” or rather that now a family has “many other forms of being a family”?

All social studies that are performed today on the family or to the families, conclude that the new and varied forms of being a family have the common denominator that all consider themselves “families”: none of them, including those which are difficult for us to accept, consider themselves “no-families”, and do not want to exclude themselves nor to be excluded. Apparently, the reality of the family today means that the family continues to be valued as an institution, and that what has changed are the ways how a family is constituted and how it functions. The previous forms of being family are not denied, but they are not considered as the only way of being family, rather that there are other forms for constructing and living a family reality.

These new families exist and continue to multiply, with or without the approval of civil or ecclesiastic authorities. How are we as Church, as CFM, approaching these new family realities? Do we continue to cling to the existence of a unique and theoretical way of being and living as a family? Do we

continue to exclude these new family realities from participating in the life of the Church, or do we treat them as “object” of our apostolate, in order to convert them and lead them to the “right path”?

What would have happened to us if previous forms of being a family (matriarchal, patriarchal, extended) should have attacked, disqualified and excluded us from being considered families and from church participation, due to the fact that we had become modern “nuclear families”, within which we understood and carried out our family life in a different way and had reasons and arguments to live in a different manner?

Believe it or not, there were enough arguments and complaints for not accepting the reality of the nuclear family as we live it today, and from which we are offering resistance to recognize and accept new forms of being family. For example, here are some of these complaints and arguments:

- “Your marriage is not a decision based on family convenience; it is only a decision based on the love of two persons”.
- “It is no longer a business deal, but a disinterested action”.
- Accusations were made about being individualists and isolationists.
- There were accusations of de-institutionalization and rupture of the grand family and of society.
- What was the thinking about the reduction of offspring associated with the nuclear family?
- The belief that “each child brings its loaf of bread under his/her arm” was broken.
- Children became protagonists in family decisions, whereas before, it was the domain of the *pater familiae*.
- There was an internal and external restructuring of family functions.

Undoubtedly, historically there has never existed a “unique family model”, an “eternal family”. The family has evolved along with the person, society and culture. Yet today, many talk about “broken families”, when it would be more realistic to talk about “families integrated in different ways...” This is indicated by the present moment in which we live, which is earmarked by the uncertainty and the paradox: “We need to learn to walk in the darkness” (Paniker); but are we mature enough to move in

the midst of fate and noise” (E.Morin). We need to come into contact with, allow ourselves to be affected by and assimilate the spirit of our time, the contemporaneity.

Nowadays we must think, plan and work with the family of today, the postmodern family, with its characteristics, strengths and weaknesses. At present, the family continues to be valued, as it was mentioned before, and as Marciano Vidal (2001, Page 14) points out “The family is a value with growing esteem. Seldom in history has it been valued as it is nowadays, “to the point that it can be said that the family has almost no enemies”. What family are we referring to? Today there are several—and even different—kinds of families: the institutional and non-institutional, the monoparental and the biparental, the initial and the recomposed, the heterosexual and the homosexual.”

Given all the characteristics of the family and society today, it is necessary to adjust our thinking and discourse regarding the family:

- a) The discourse must be above any discussion over conceiving the family as a static and repetitive institution, or rather understanding it as an institution which is being discovered in each epoch and which follows the rhythm of changes in every moment. Today we have the family that we actually have, and to which we must respond.
- b) Break away from the dichotomy between what is rational and what is religious, since it is a worn out discourse. Presently, we are talking about the need to integrate what is human with what is divine. The individual, the family and society are part of these two realities and to separate them is not only senseless, but negates the reality of the families.
- c) We must establish and bring closer the dialogue between what is labeled “normative knowledge” (ethics, morality, law, theology) and other realms of human knowledge which have their own ways of approaching the family (sociology, anthropology, history). Bringing together these two streams of thought, will evolve into a more authentic and enriching knowledge for working with the families.

Among the great anthro-po-cultural changes that we must assimilate due to their impact on the families and on the Family Pastoral work—as pointed out by Vidal, are the following:

- The revolution of the individual, which influences and motivates his de-institutionalization, and from which are generated the diverse forms of present day families, which must be considered and understood.
- The revolution of sentiments, which reflect a rearrangement of the roles and intra-family relations.
- The revolution of the child and the youngster, which establishes “child-centered” forms in a given stage of family life, and of an “eternal” family (unlimited rooting of children in the home) in another stage.
- The feminist revolution, which refers to women’s emancipation, strengthening of their dignity, recovery of their rights, their “exit” from the household and the need for restructuring internal and external familiar relations.
- The demographic revolution, which entails a family reduced in members, but extended in the ages of its members.
- The bio-technical revolution, which has generated important and disturbing changes, and conceptual and operational ruptures in reproductive behavior.
- The axiological revolution, which places the family in a new way of looking at norms, habits, morality. The border line in ethics has shifted.
- The sex revolution, which impact on children’s education and on the exercise of sexual roles has overflowed beyond imagination and has evolved into precocity.
- The juridical revolution which entails significant changes in social roles of the family.
- The religious revolution, which most visible effect is the secular process that affects the dimensions of the family as Domestic Church and all the ecclesiastic activity.

The new profile of the family which is generated as a consequence of these revolutions, is the family with which we will work in forthcoming years, for which we will have to change our old pastoral schemes, for which we will renovate ourselves as families and as an apostolic movement, as a consequence of thinking in terms of the other, as a result of adaptation. It is this family, the postmodern family with which we must walk (the other forms are no longer the only ones and are becoming a minority). This postmodern family is the one most in need of help, focus, warmth, loving

understanding, of discovering and living with them the love of God, our Father, which we try to transmit on to them in our pastoral work.

Some theoretical models that allow the study of the contemporaneous family refer to: the insecure family, the self-structuring family, the relational family, the reconciling family, the individualized family. These family models are of great importance because they address functions that characterize the family, and in this sense, they point out the road to reach them, the adequate ways to approach them and their priorities.

We have affirmed that the “eternal” family does not exist, meaning that we cannot identify a family with pre-modern, modern or postmodern models. What we can do is to study, to know and to adjust our pastoral work to the characteristics that the family acquires in each stage of its development. It is necessary to orient the present transformation of the family institution, so that it may continue to carry out its main functions: humanization, identity socialization, living experience of the faith, construction of love, its accomplishment as a Domestic Church.

The family is a value and a highly appreciated institution because there is the generalized perception in the present culture and society, that it is within a family that its deepest needs are satisfied. It is possible to indicate that the change from the nuclear to the postmodern family should not only be considered as one more change undergone by the family throughout its historical development, but it should be regarded as a necessary change for the family to maintain its humanizing capacity, in a culture which changed and to which we should respond and evangelize along with the family.

The family continues to be an institution, a human and humanizing place, and in the present context, it exhibits the following characteristics:

- It tends to a minimum of institutionalization and a maximum of personal experience, and reference to its own originality.
- It makes interpersonal encounters possible and forms human beings-for-the-encounter.

- It is a place for rest, for recovery, for separation of that which is public from that which is private.
- Within it, the symbols through which “the human family” understands, structures and adapts itself for survivorship, are created, assimilated and transformed.
- It is the prime human environment; the second uterus where the personality of the individual is finally shaped.

In this sense, this present day vision of the family coincides with and shares the definitions of the family which have emerged from Church teachings, and which today continue to maintain their validity and value vis-à-vis the reality of new family forms:

1. **The family is the foundation of society.** (GS 52,2)
2. **The family is the school for the highest Humanism.** (GS 52.1)
3. **The salvation of the individual person and of both human and Christian society, is closely bound up with the prosperity of the community of marriage and the family.**(GS 47.1)
4. **Marriage and family are one of the most precious gifts of humanity.** (FC 1)
5. **The family is the fundamental community upon which the whole spectrum of social relations rests** (Letter to the Families-John Paul II)
6. **In Familiaris Consortio, on the subject of family:**
 - **Formation of a community of persons**
 - **Service to Life**
 - **Participation in the development of society**
 - **Participation in the life and mission of the Church.**
7. **Documents of Medellin:**
 - **Former of Persons**
 - **Educator in the Faith**
 - **Promoter of Development**

Questions for Group Discussions

1. Contemporary families reflect various profiles and characteristics. Among the challenges that confront the Christian Family Movements, we find:
 - 1.1 Is it necessary **to open up to all of these new types of families?**
 - 1.2 Can and should **they be agents of family apostolate** or should they only be **“objects of evangelization”**?
 - 1.3 From the perspective of **God’s merciful love** for us and from the **need** that these new families have to **live their faith and to feel part of the Church** together with their brethren in the faith, how can **we approach them, be receptive to the family realities** that they have built, or should we rather consider them the “new lepers” of the gospel, thus pressing them to live their faith in other churches, where they find what we deny them