THE CHALLENGES TO THE FAMILY IN THE EMERGING GLOBAL REALITY

(Faith, Morality, Evangelization)

The Theme of your Assembly is: **THE CHALLENGES TO THE FAMILY IN THE EMERGING GLOBAL REALITY: Faith, Morality, Evangelization.** As you can see, the Theme can be broken up into three parts: **The Family, the Emerging Global Reality and the Challenges placed by this to the Family** particularly with regard to three areas: **Faith, Morality and Evangelization**. I will develop my reflections on your theme in that order: Family, Global Reality and Challenges.

I. Let us first briefly look at the **Family**. I begin with a sentence from Pope John Paul's Encyclical on the family, *Familiaris Consortio (F.C.)*. In no. 86 of the Encyclical, the Pope says: **The Future of humanity passes by way of the family**. You know how true that is…. (Example of pet dog).

Without the family, there can be no human being. That is why the family has always been regarded as the basic cell of Society and of the Church. Even the ancients recognized its importance. They regarded the family as the nursery ground of civilization, the workshop where character is formed, the garden where virtues are planted to bloom in later life.

Very aptly has the family been described *"a community of love and life, of a man and a woman, open to life*. Those words are significant:

- ❖ A family is a *community of love and life* - two persons share everything of themselves in love, keeping nothing back.
- ❖ A community comprising *a man and a woman:* That is something important: Sexuality is not something accidental to human beings. We have to keep this in mind today with the attempt to change the very meaning of the family so as to include the union of two men or two women.
- ❖ Finally, *open to life*: The family is the "crib" of life, as Pope John Paul II loved to say. It is in the family that life begins, develops itself and matures. That is why Pope John Paul II says that "the fundamental task of the family is to serve life" (*F. C.* 28). The one who attacks family also attacks life; the one who defends family also defends human life.

What are the tasks of the Christian family? *F. C.* 17 – 64 lists four main tasks of the family:

- o Forming a community of persons
- o Serving Life
- o Participation in the development of society
- o Sharing in the life and mission of the Church

II. You are familiar with these. Hence, we will not spend any more time on the Family. Rather, we move on to the 2nd phrase of the theme: **Global Reality**. Pope John Paul II, in his Message for the 31st World Day of Peace, 1989, observed: "We are on the threshold of a new era which is the bearer of great hopes and disturbing questions". We are on the threshold of a new era, the Pope said in 1989. Today, in 2010, we are right in the midst of that era! The Pope well says that the era is one of *great hopes* and *disturbing questions*.

Could we summarize in a word what is happening in the world in this era? One word perhaps encompasses what is taking place. It is the word '***Globalization***'. Thomas Friedman says of globalization: "It is not just some passing trend. Today it is an overarching international system shaping the domestic politics and foreign relations of virtually every country…. ".[1] As Friedman notes, globalization is surely not a passing trend. It is here to stay. It is affecting the world today and will affect the world of tomorrow progressively more and more.

What really is this buzz-word 'Globalization'? It is like the atmosphere, the air around us. We breathe in air, but we cannot capture it. So also with globalization: we are aware of it as an atmosphere around us, but we would find it difficult to capture in a few words

Basically, globalization would mean *interdependence*. I recall how the CBCI Commission for Labour in its 2004 May Day Message pointed out that interdependence is the central fact of the 21st century. It implies that we are tied

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[1] Thomas Friedman, <u>The Lexus and the Olive Tree</u>, 1999, quoted by Bp. Thomas Dabre, <u>Third Millennium</u>, VIII (2005), April/June, p. 10

together and that we cannot escape each other. It makes the whole world one family. People around the world are more connected to each other today than ever before. Goods and services produced in one part of the world are increasingly available in other parts of the world. Information flows around the world instantaneously. Globalization fosters mutual cooperation and understanding. It brings people together and enhances human solidarity.

Globalization has made us more aware of what is happening in different parts of the world and has thus enabled people from one corner of the earth to reach out in help to people suffering or in need, for example, people suffering from the ravages of an earthquake or a tsunami. Concerns of people in any corner of the world become the common concern of the whole human society. Globalization can help very much the empowerment process of the marginalized by networking towards a greater resistance and solidarity. The world has become, to use a hackneyed expression, "a global village".

Pope John Paul II summed up so beautifully the benefits of globalization in his Message for the 2000 World Day of Peace: "Globalization, for all its risks, also offers exceptional and promising opportunities, precisely with a view to enabling humanity to become a single family, built on the values of justice, equity and solidarity".

Globalization may thus seem to be a very good thing: who would not want the earth to be one family? It has surely done some good. But that is only one side of the picture. We can ask: *Is globalization truly working for the growth or for the stunting of humanity as a whole?* By and large, most will agree that globalization, in its present form, has had over-all **negative results**. Rather than becoming a "global village", we have been subjected to what the Asia-Pacific Assembly of the International Movement of Catholic Students (IMCS) termed as a "global pillage". The Asia-Pacific Assembly points out to the massive dislocation of people; labour exploitation for maximum profit; farmers and indigenous peoples' displacement in their own lands etc. etc. [2]

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[2] . (Reported in *Asia Focus*, Nov. 19, 2004

While accelerating the growth of wealth, globalization has been described as "history's greatest poverty-creating machine". While the total world income has increased by an average of 2.5 per cent annually, the number of people living in poverty – what is called below poverty line, BPL – has gone up by almost 100 million.[3]   If anything, the disparity between the rich and the poor has grown. And if the estimates for the future are correct, the disparity is likely to grow even more as the rich become richer and the poor become poorer.

At our Assembly, we are more interested in the ***impact of globalization on family life***. The family does not live in a vacuum, but is interrelated with other institutions in society. Economic Globalization has surely had an adverse effect on family life. It has aggravated especially the poverty of *rural* families as many farm products of agricultural families are less in demand because of economic liberalization and deregulation. It has aggravated the poverty of *urban* families: the rapid exodus of rural families to the city has resulted in the proliferation of slums with awful family living conditions. It has increased the separation of spouses as millions leave their families behind to look for better paid jobs in other countries. In Asia, for example, with increasing poverty, the number of migrant workers grows, and this creates problems of disunity, unfaithfulness on the part of couples and inadequate supervision of the children left behind in the home country.

Look at the effect of globalization from just one aspect: the Call Centres or BPO's which have mushroomed in so many countries especially of the third world. Call Centres in the developing countries have fuelled a heated debate on out-sourcing of jobs from the West. But for several developing countries it is boom time for the economy and employment opportunities.

On the one hand, Call Centres have generated employment; the comparative high salary for a fresher has meant more disposable income for the middle class. Some youngsters have managed to save and fund their own higher education and support their families at an early age. But, on the other hand,   it's an upside down world! When it is time for most of us to go to bed and switch of the lights, thousands of

[3] Nobel Prize Winner, Joseph Stiglitz, quoted by Bp. Dabre, <u>Third Millennium</u>, VIII(2005), March/April, p. 20

youngsters are just leaving for work at Call Centres. Night becomes day and day is time to catch up on lost sleep. Due to time schedules the individual finds it difficult to maintain social ties with friends. Visualize the toll on Family life as members hardly see each other because of the awkward hours of work. When do couples get to live their marriage when they hardly meet? The children will not be able to know their parents or enjoy spending time with them. The family rituals of yore that kept our families together – family meals, family prayer – are difficult to fit into a call centre life.

We have spoken so far of ***economic*** globalization.   But that is only one aspect of globalization. When we speak of the family, it is primarily **cultural** globalization that we are concerned with.   In October 2001, a very good seminar **The Church in Mission** was held at Ishvani Kendra, Pune, celebrating the Silver Jubilee of that institution. I quote from the Conclusion of that seminar: "While technological advance is welcome, the underlying values of the new economic order are eroding the basic human and religious values that have nurtured Asian cultures for millennia. Asian cultures are fragmenting in varying degrees as they come under the pressure of materialistic values. Secularism and consumerism are taking over as modern day gods". Globalization is creating a "consumer ethic", a society where 'to be is to consume'.[4].

This cultural aspect has been well analyzed by the Final Document of the FABC 8th Plenary Assembly, "*The Asian Family towards a Culture of Integrated Life*'. The FABC Document affirms: "A technological culture is rapidly emerging that is uprooting families from their traditional cultures and creating anonymous societies in urban areas... A growing techno-mindset is eroding marital and familial relations that are eminently bonds of intimacy and love". And the Document well reminds us that while the so-called 'elite' are the first receivers of this culture, "the emerging culture also reaches down to the grassroots since local TV, radio and cinema ape the media programs served by the West whose values and portrayal of family and life gradually become normative for viewers and listeners"

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[4] Church in Mission Conclusions of the Ishvani Kendra Silver Jubilee Colloquium, Pune 24-27 Oct. 2001, nos. 6-8)

This growing erosion of cultural values is a challenge for the Church. In the post-synodal exhortation *Ecclesia in A*sia, art 39, Pope John Paul II particularly stresses that cultural globalization made possible by the modern communications media, is quickly drawing Asian societies into a secularist and materialistic global culture. It has resulted in the eroding of traditional family and social values which had given them direction in life".

One striking example is the slavish attachment to the communication media which we see around us. The invention and use of television has had a dramatic effect on the family. Initially, there was a struggle to limit TV viewing. Today, many families have given up the fight. Television has won and families have changed their schedules and lifestyle to accommodate television viewing. Television has become the new altar and the most interesting dish at dinner time. Today children rush home from school, not to the loving embrace of their parents, who may still be at work anyway, but to some cartoon show. I'm worried at the thought that children will soon know TV characters better than their parents!

The philosophy of materialism puts greater emphasis on material possessions than spiritual values. This materialism is encouraged by high voltage **advertising**. The family is urged through television, radio, print media, billboards and internet to buy the latest-model cars, appliances, and other commodities, even if the present models are still functioning adequately. After the urge to buy is generated, an "easy-credit" system removes any remaining obstacle, as for example the realities of the family budget, to the purchase,. One of the great problems facing Christian families today is finding the balance between material and spiritual values.

The **Internet** is a relatively newer reality affecting family life. There is a wealth of knowledge on the Internet that is useful to a family, but there are also silent threats that lurk beneath the worldwide web. There are child molesters who choose their targets through the Internet. There is also the threat of pornography, "hate" websites that encourage the use of violence against groups of people, gambling websites and so on. Children and adults can get hooked to computer games. The personal computer can certainly take you away from your family.

The media has "sexed up" everything. Besides taking sex outside the spousal relationship, "sex" is used to sell anything from cars to condoms. We live in image-driven times and increasingly the images we focus on these days, reinforce the 'sexual' behaviour and preoccupations of an urban society. Gone are the days when saints' were role models; today media personalities have taken their place.   The media personalities tell-all tales, well publicized in tabloids and magazines, out-sell news stories and topics which impact our lives.

As a result of the life-style brought about by the Call Centres and the negative impact of the media there is a threat to the stability of the family. We witness today the breakdown of so many marriages, as couples walk out of each other's life. We see so many couples living almost as singles under the same roof, with little communication between them. The peal of the wedding bells has long since died. Marriage has become for them a mirage.

III. We have looked thus far at the Family and then at the Global Reality. Let me in the third part bring the two together: **Challenges to the Family from the Emerging Global Reality.** Rather than see what is happening in the world as threats, we can see them as **Challenges**. – Challenges to be faced by the Church and the Christian Family Movement. That is what I want to do in this last section of my Address – how the global reality is a challenge to us under the three headings which form part of your theme: **Faith, Morality and Evangelization**.   We will touch briefly on each of these three..

A. We begin with **FAITH**: If I were to ask you: What is faith? What would your answer be? We use the word loosely at times to mean trust confidence, a set of beliefs etc. *Faith really is a commitment, a total self-surrender to God.* For us, as Christians, it is a commitment to God **in Christ**, who we believe is God's ultimate Word to us, the highpoint of his revelation to human beings. The letter to the Hebrews begins so beautifully: "In many and various ways, God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son" (Heb. 1:1). Jesus is for us the last word of the Father to us and we respond to that word by a total 'yes', a whole-hearted commitment.

For a Catholic, this faith-commitment to God in Christ has an ecclesial dimension. It is commitment **in the Church** which is the community of faith. After the candidate for Baptism makes his/her profession of faith, the celebrant says: "This is our faith. This is the faith of the Church". In Baptism, we share in the faith of the Church, the faith which is identical with the faith of the Apostolic Church summed up in the words of Peter: "Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (Jn. 6:68) and of the Apostle Thomas: "My Lord and My God" (Jn. 20:28).

There are several stages in Faith: We begin with the *implantation* of Faith. Before a tree can grow, the seed must be planted. In the case of most Catholics, this is done at what we call Infant Baptism. The little child does not realize what is happening. When the celebrant asks: "Do you believe in God the Father almighty, Do you believe in Jesus Christ, Do you believe in the Holy Spirit", the poor child is unable to give an answer. It is the parents who answer for the baby. *The child is baptized into the faith of the Church through the family*.

Once the seed is planted, it must grow. The second stage is *growth in the faith*. Faith has to be nurtured in order to grow. Otherwise, it remains stunted. In this, the family plays a key role. The questions asked of the parents at the time of baptism are significant. Right at the start of the ceremony, the parents are asked: "What do you ask of God's Church for John/Mary? (whatever be the name of the child) The parents answer: Baptism. The priest then says: "*You have asked to have your child baptized. In doing so, you are accepting the responsibility of training him/her in the practice of the faith… Do you clearly understand what you are undertaking*"? Only after the parents have said 'Yes', does the Baptism continue.

The parish surely does have a role to play. The parish, for example, builds up the faith through the Sunday homily, through the Catechism classes organized through the parish school and through the Sunday Catechism class and myriad other ways. But all these only supplement what the family does - faith grows primarily in the ambience of the family.

This has been the constant teaching of the Popes. In his encyclical letter on Catechetics, *Catechesi Tradendae*, Pope John Paul II repeated the words of Pope Paul VI: "The parents not only communicate the Gospel to their children, but from the children they can themselves receive the same faith as deeply lived by them" (Art. 45). Note the words of the Pope. It is a two-way traffic: parents to children and children to parents. To quote from the Conclusions arrived at the Theological Pastoral Congress of the 5th World Meeting of Families meeting in Valencia, Spain: "Starting from family life, children begin a path of learning and deepening of the faith that continues in the parishes and other ecclesial institutions" (No. 27).

How is this Christian faith received from the parents and developed by the parish to survive and grow in today's globalized world? It is a challenge to the Church to deepen family catechesis so that each one can be truly evangelized and make a personal commitment to Jesus as Lord and Saviour. Only in that way can we help the child as he/she enters the adult world to cope with the challenges from a globalized world without walls where people of different faiths intermingle. *Family catechesis is the answer to this challenge.*

That is where I see the role of the CFM. YOU UNABASHEDLY CALL YOURSELF CHRISTIAN. I see you constantly striving to build truly Christian families. After meeting committed people like you, permit me to spell out how I visualize a *Christian* family:

❖ I see a Christian family as one which is open to life where every life is welcomed and children are valued more than possessions and things.

❖ I see a Christian family as one where God comes first. This does not mean long prayers, but it does mean that the child who sees father and mother command him, bow down themselves in lowly submission to God the great Father of us all.

❖ I see a Christian family as one which has a Christian atmosphere about it. A Christian home need not be an antechamber of heaven containing the pictures of all the saints in heaven; but neither is it a replica of a cinema theatre. The home can have a `Christian atmosphere' in its pictures and decor. For a child, visuals are more important than words.

❖ I see a Christian family as one where children see father and mother asking forgiveness of each other after a quarrel. – and I might add, asking forgiveness from the children too when we wrong them.

❖ I see a Christian family as one marked by contentment. The advertising world constantly creates new needs in our children's young hearts, fuelling consumerism. A Christian family opens the children's eyes and hearts to the less fortunate, to the have-nots who surround our homes

I am confident that of the CFM families are of this kind – truly Christian families. Such a family may not boast of expensive gadgets, but it has the good example of the parents stamped on the children's minds and hearts. It may not boast of the latest car, but its members walk the path of life with steady step and smile

Let us turn to the **second** area: The challenges of the global reality to **MORALITY**. In an article in the journal <u>Third Millennium</u>, the author, Dr. Jacob Marangattu says that, as a result of cultural globalization, a "Pandora's box of moral questions" has been opened up. That is so true. Just to take a couple of examples with regard to human life from my own country, India. In India, the government has gone all out to promote artificial contraception in the guise of `Family Planning'. A contraceptive mentality is gaining ground. Abortion has been promoted. Figures indicate that India's 20 Lakh (200,000) gynaecologists perform about 1.20 crores (…. million) abortions a year – that is a staggering number.   With the spread of what the Pope describes as "the culture of death", human life has been imperilled from the very start: the womb of the mother which should have been the safest possible place has become at times a tomb.

Every week almost there's a sex crime reported. We express horror, dismay and shock – but beg for more! Mainstream newspapers carry provocative pictures on the front page. This has created a 'I feel therefore I do' casual attitude to relationships and fidelity in marriage. This casual attitude contributes to 'sex for fun' and promiscuous behaviour.   The rising trend of pre-marital sex and extra-marital affairs has contributed to instability in family life

A schematic comparison between the family 40 years ago and today may help us realize better the challenge before us in a globalized world - A schematic COMPARISON BETWEEN THE FAMILY 40 YEARS AGO AND TODAY:

40 Years ago	Today
1. Children's chance of growing up with both parents 80%. Parents at work 50% Jt family support for working parents	1. Children's chance of growing up with both parents less than 60%. Increased to 75% Parents at work Recourse to day-care - or home alone
2. **Religion** • Definite influence on family life and culture of the home.	2. **Religion**: • Indifference to Religion; seen in lack of participation by many
3. **School**: • Teachers valued • Prayer/discipline respected.	3. **School**: • Parent-teacher] Bonding less • Student-teacher] • Coaching class culture • Stress bec. of parental expectation.
4. **Family Rituals**: • Family Dinner • Family gathering • Little or no TV. Children had time to play	4. **Family Rituals:** • Family dinner less often • Family gathering fewer • Adults/children: TV 2/3 hrs a day • Children: computer. Little playtime
5. **Extended family**: • Lived closer together • More frequent contact	5. **Extended Family**: • Live further apart • Less involvement and contact
6. **Neighbours:** Knew neighbours well, trusted them, and they formed a support structure for each other.	6. **Neighbours:** • Know only 3 of 6 neighbours • Not willing to build relationship • Isolated existence
7. **Juvenile Crime Rate: Lower rate of:** • Disciplinary Problems • School drop-outs • drugs, alcohol • teenage pregnancy • robbery/assault • suicide	7. **Juvenile Crime Rate: Higher rate of:** • Disciplinary Problems**:** • School drop outs • Drugs/alcohol • "get rich quick" culture • robbery/assault • suicide/rape
8. **Technology**: • Predominantly Radio • Little / No TV	8. **Technology:** • TV/In channels. Internet • Consumerism
9. **Family Spirituality**: • Nurtured and central to family life	9. **Family Prayer** • Lack of vibrant faith-filled response • Poor Response to Family tradition

This schematic presentation may be perhaps over-drawn and may not be true in all its details everywhere. But it does give us a glimpse of the situation. In such a situation, how does one cope with the moral challenges? Against the rising tide of the 'culture of death' how does one actively promote a culture of life? How does one safeguard the healthy traditional values which have sustained and supported families down the centuries? This is a question which we must face.

Here again, I can see a special place for a movement like the Christian Family Movement. YOU ARE THE ONES WHO HAVE DEVELOPED A METHODOLOGY – THE SEE, JUDGE and ACT METHOD – TO HELP FAMILIES BECOME DISCERNING SO THAT THEY ARE AWARE OF THE MORAL PROBLEMS AND DANGERS AND EQUIPPED TO COPE WITH THEM.

C. The third and final area you have put in your theme is **EVANGELIZATION**. That is surely difficult today because we live in a world whose values go clean contrary to the values of the Gospel. Just a moment's reflection will make us realize this:

- ➤ In a world of rampant corruption where everyone from the CEO to the peon believes in easy money, the Christian family is called upon to uphold the value of honesty and integrity.

- ➤ In a world where human life is cheapened to the point that posters in our trains in Mumbai advertise abortion for Rs. 1500, the Christian family is called upon to uphold the sacredness of all human life, whether it be of an embryo in the mother's womb or an old person nearing the end of life.

- ➤ In a world which debases love and glorifies lust in the name of freedom, the Christian family is called upon to demonstrate the value of life-long conjugal fidelity "until death do us part".

- ➤ In a world where life is treated like a commodity produced in a test-tube and couples would like to have tailor-made babies, the Christian family is called upon to proclaim the unbreakable link between love and life and to receive each new life as a gift of God.

- ➤ In a world of consumerism, where the craze is for the latest gadget available, the Christian family is called upon to portray the value of simplicity and contentedness.

We realize how true are the words of Pope John Paul II in Familiaris Consortio, where he continually insists that the *family must first be evangelized*. And that is something each family does or is called to do. The family environment must be the place of a continuous and mutual evangelization. The children must *see* the faith as lived by the parents. It would be a serious fallacy for parents, says Pope John Paul II, to request baptism for their children, without ensuring continuity and a gradual development in their Christian formation.   The propagation of "family catechesis" is certainly a privileged way to make Christian parents aware of their vocation and mission as educators and to involve them directly in the programme of initiation to the Christian life of their children.

But the family's mission does not stop there. The family, as *Familiaris Consortio* points out is not just a place of evangelization; it is not just evangelized itself. It is called upon to be an *evangelizer*.   The family which is evangelized must become an evangelizing family. A Christian family evangelizes the children, helping them grow in their faith. But, it does not stop there. It has to go out to become an evangelizer to other families.   This is does chiefly by the witness of its life as members live their Christian calling to the hilt.

There again is what I see the CFM doing a marvelous job in its own humble and quiet way. In 2006, it celebrated 50 years of its existence in India and the celebration was held in Goa, though not in this venue. I still remember how it took as the theme for the celebration: The Christian Family Movement witnessing to the Culture of Life, 1956 – 2006. That is for me something very indicative of the CFM's role. It may not boast of millions, or perhaps not even thousands of members, but the CFM has a role to play. It is like a mustard seed in the dough of families world-wide as it carries on its witnessing task of what it means to be a Christian family.   In the name of the Church, I want to say 'THANK YOU TO THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY MOVEMENT'. God bless you and may you continue to grow in numbers and even more in quality so that you become a truly powerful movement. We could describe it then as the Christian Family on the move towards establishing the Kingdom of God on earth.