

New Evangelisation:

Challenges to the Family in our Time

■ **María Eugenia F. de Góngora**

The family has always been a target. Why? Because the family is life, it is covenant, it is the cornerstone of community. Family brings stability to humanity and unity to countries... in a phrase: it represents the love of God, and God Himself. It parallels the alliance between God and His Church. The greatness of the family is its beginning in God. He conceived it for the good and happiness of mankind. It is pure genius! Each person is embraced, affirmed and loved by a family community at every age (cf. *Familiaris Consortio*, 28)

The life of a new family starts through the sacred bond of the sacrament of marriage between a man and a woman. Jesus uses the sacrament of marriage as an analogy of His alliance of love with His Holy Church. This is marriage: two people making a holy covenant to live in love and beget life (cf. Eph 5:29; Matt 19:5-6).

It is easy to understand why there is someone interested in destroying the sacred marriage bond, and therefore the family. Throughout the Old Testament, we find hundreds of challenges that the family had to overcome. Today the challenges remain, although we must recognize that post-modernism has opened doors to serious new sins and attacks. In our time, opposition to the family is more sophisticated, more disguised, as the Church has warned us: “the tragedy of this era is that humanity is losing the sense of sin” (*Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, 18). In other words, this generation calls good evil and evil good. This accelerates the degeneration of this sacred institution.

A great work of architecture is built not only with large parts. They must be attached with small

parts, forming a single structure. They all support and help each other. All the pieces have special roles, that give strength, size, and beauty. Similarly, the family is the cell of society. The family is the building block of society and the Church. Here we understand the Church to be a united family of families.

This unity is our appropriate response to the cry of our Lord: “that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.” (Jn 17:21).



But if the family unit were not built on a smaller scale, humble and simple, almost hidden — a privileged place where it must be nurtured— then there would be no witness of unity on a larger scale. The family will thrive only if it is based on love. Its primary mission is to watch over, reveal and communicate love (cf. FC, 17).

Nevertheless, if love is not lived in and transmitted from this primordial cell, then there will be consequences in society and the world. The generosity, teamwork, consideration, forgiveness, understanding, joy, and celebration that society needs will disappear if they do not originate in the family. It will be, instead, as the Word of God teaches us: whatsoever a man soweth, that he will also reap, “by their fruits ye shall know them” (Mt 7:20).

New lethal threats to the family appear every day. Selfish individualism, the loss of a sense of community, and the obsessive enforcement of personal rights are just a few of the most damaging trends. Human growth is stunted under these conditions.

This crisis is an urgent cry to cultivate eternal fruit: goods from heaven, the truly transcendental, which bring Man into God’s glory and fulfill him. Looking up to the things from heaven, rather than down to the ones from below, is the only way to find real meaning (cf. Col 3,1-2). To do otherwise is to invite death.

The family is not a sum of individuals, it is not a company —although in a company there are common goals, common dreams, common ideals. Currently in many families, even these bonds cannot be found. The only thing that keeps them together is the physical roof. They are families in appearance only, merely sharing space. They do not relate to each other. Even their bank accounts

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are separate. The link is broken. There is only hostility.

Embraces and warmth have been left out of the picture. The family is supposed to be a safe place, a respite from the bruising of outside life, a dose of encouragement founded in love and unconditional acceptance. For example, most families used to share at least one daily meal together. No longer. New work patterns and other commitments have pushed family members to eat alone. To many cultures and to our ancestors, the table was something sacred, where eating together meant celebration and joy. A blessing, food, drink, and conversation were shared. It was the space that used to facilitate family relationships. Everyone used to comment, laugh, and encourage around the table. Everyone used to learn each other's stories and grow from the simplest to the most profound news. The after-meal conversation could be most intimate, sharing hopes and worries, good wishes and advice. Let us ask ourselves, does this exist now in my family, or are just absorbed in the rush of each day?

For the family to recover its place as a wellspring of life and identity in Christ, we must go to three altars:

- The altar of the Holy Eucharist,
- The altar of the sacred food, and
- The altar of the marital bed.

The family is nourished at these altars both spiritually and physically. Are these altars respected today? If we do a quick reality check, the answer has to be no. We are staining them by inappropriate acts. We must use these privileges with reverence as sources of strength for the challenges that may arise.

As baptised Christians, we must all heed the alarm. The warning signs are unmistakable. When a big storm is coming, a tsunami, everyone knows that when the bells are ringing they have to run, to escape immediately to be safe, or they will die. We must not naively think that everything is all right; perhaps we ourselves have lost the truth. That is why we must check deep within ourselves and take appropriate actions starting with our own families. Where we find weak areas, call for help! Take strength in the Lord in your spiritual life. Seek counselling with other couples who have been on the journey longer. See a family counsellor. Act urgently to make it to safety. This action is also a fraternal commitment to keep others out of harm. We must remember that "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Therefore, after

becoming aware of a problem, we must not stand idly by. God calls us to action. Jesus Christ in His great commission, in the missionary mandate, tells us: Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit (Mt 28:19).

ICCRS, the organisation that is at the service of the Charismatic Renewal worldwide, with humility, but with great faith, has constituted the Ad hoc Committee for the Family to overcome attacks on the family today. The Committee seeks to accompany, assist, encourage and embrace families, from our original charism.

In this way, each family will be encouraged with the Word of Jesus Christ our Lord as its foundation. At the same time, we hope to create a great network of families that mission in the Holy Spirit, as intercessors, united in purpose. They are families who have experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and live the life in the Spirit. They evangelise other families so they can welcome the Divine Paraclete in their hearts. They know the only one who can heal, deliver and give a new life, the true Life. For this, it is necessary to promote the pastoral care of the family, to set up the ministries that can serve families in a specific way.

We trust fully and joyfully that we are not alone in this fight. Elsewhere in the world, there are families pressing on in the very same direction, calling for a New Pentecost every day. We know that only with power from on high can we move forward to reach the goal. Being certain that Jesus is with us in the midst of violent storms —although it seems that He is asleep in the boat— He acts as soon as we ask. Holding on tight to the sweet hands of Holy Mary our Mother and intercessor, let us raise our heads, pray hard, keep watch, and raise our voices, committed to protecting the great institution of the family.

In our concern for saving the institution of the family, we will have soon the opportunity to demonstrate our total loyalty to H.H. Benedict XVI, who has called us paternally to join him from all over the world at the upcoming World Meeting of Families in Milan, Italy, from May 30th and June 3rd.

He has also invited us to unite in prayer with all the families of the world so that this seventh edition of the Meeting will be blessed with abundant fruit.

It will be a great occasion to proclaim the balance in the life of the "Family: Work and Celebration". 🏠

A God-Given Vision with a Mission

■ Cyril John

God Given Vision —A Testimony

On July 8th, 1996, during my personal prayer I had a vision in which I saw a huge building. I was filled with awe and asked the Lord what the vision meant. I received a strong conviction in prayer that it was a centre that the Lord wanted to be established in New Delhi. During a charism growth retreat that I had attended in Jeevajyoti Retreat Centre, Moovattupuzha in Kerala from May 16th to 21st, 1993, the counsellor had shared with me a message that the Lord was calling me to rebuild New Delhi, the capital city of India spiritually. I was not even a member of the core team of my parish prayer group then, although I used to attend the weekly prayer meetings. After I returned from the retreat, I was inducted into the core team of the prayer group in the Cathedral parish and chosen as its leader after three months. I was discerned as Chairman of the Delhi Archdiocesan Service Team (DST) on December 14th, 1994. It was during my tenure as Chairman of the DST that I received the message about the retreat centre.

I dared not to share this message with the members of the Service Team, because we did not have even a bank account at that time. By sharing such a message, I felt, I would become the laughing stock in front of others. The only thing I did was to start praying for it and asked our intercessory core group to lift up the intention in prayer. In the year 1999, during a meeting the Delhi Service Team had with Most Rev. Alan de Lastic, then Archbishop of Delhi, he suggested to us that we should initiate steps for acquiring a plot of land for a centre of our own, since we used to organise a large number of Renewal events in the Archdiocese. This came as a confirmation of the vision from the Church hierarchy. After considerable search, we found a piece of agricultural land measuring about 7 hectares in the outskirts of the city. In prayer the Lord gave us confirmation to buy that plot. With personal contributions and loans and a heavy bank loan, the Service Team managed to acquire the land in 2001. By then my second term as Chairman of the DST was over.

There was a serious impediment coming in the way of using the land for construction of a centre. As the land was meant for agricultural purposes, the land law would not permit its conversion and use for any other purpose. Initially a small centre with an adoration chapel was constructed. 24 hours adoration and intercession commenced in the chapel. Having prompted us to buy the land, the Lord intervened powerfully. In 2009 the local government brought out a new Master Plan for the city according to which the whole area surrounding our centre was converted into freehold land meant for construction of commercial buildings and residential houses. Again to our surprise, in 2011 the government drew up a plan for a highway that would pass by the side of the centre. The Service Team then started construction of the centre. The centre has been christened as Jeevan Jyoti Ashram (a Centre of the Light of Life). Today it has the facility to house about 100 people for retreats and training courses. Two priests and a few volunteers are available full time in the centre for ministry.

It is a clear example of a God given vision that energized my leadership and mission. The vision was translated into reality even in the face of the most unfavourable and adverse circumstances. There were several impediments coming in the way of accomplishing the vision, but those were overcome because the project was God's plan.


What is a vision?

A vision is a call from the Lord for a particular way of life, mission or project. It is a way to live the Gospel. It is a direction for a person or a group to move forward. "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev 21:1). It is imaginative foresight or seeing with the inner eye. A vision statement by a prayer group, service team or community is the statement of what, it believes, God wants of it. It helps them to see the possible future more clearly than otherwise. Only those with vision would be able to strive for something deeper and new.

Vision and Mission

A vision has two aspects. Firstly, it gives clarity about own identity. For example, it is observed that some of the charismatic prayer groups and communities are not very clear about their identity —whether they are a simple pious gathering, Bible study group, fellowship group or charismatic prayer group. Vision gives clarity about one's identity. Secondly, vision gives clarity of mission. God has a plan for every individual, group and community for their welfare (Jer 29:11). Through vision God imparts clarity about mission. The key to Jesus' success in calling disciples into service was that He came with a divine vision for His mission. He was the possessor and proclaimer of a clear spiritual vision. The mission bears special anointing when it is inspired by divine vision.

Vision and Commitment

The vision invariably motivates and energizes us. Vision, like a Pole Star, helps navigate routes, even in rough weather, to destination successfully. It helps us to perceive things we would not have otherwise seen and dream what is unimaginable. It helps us to strive forward: "forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead" (Phil 3:13). The vision carries with it a contagious enthusiasm. It leads to commitment and commitment ignites action. God given vision helps us to pursue our mission consistently. Nelson Mandela did not become a leader of freedom struggle merely because he was handsome or charismatic. He forged his influence across the world by marking time in jail cells and walking down lonely roads. For more than twenty years he sat in prison, refusing to compromise his commitment to freedom. It involved commitment. "No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God" (Lk 9:62). It is said about Moses that at 120 years of age, "his sight was unimpaired and his vigour had not abated" (Deut 34:7). It was because Moses had seen the Lord face to face and imbibed the divine vision. The divine vision helps us to be "firm and steadfast" (Josh 1:6)! 



QUESTIONS TO THE ICCRS DOCTRINAL COMMISSION

The ICCRS Doctrinal Commission, currently headed by Dr. Mary Healy, is in consultation with theologians and experts from around the world.

If you have a question about the CCR, please send it to newsletter@iccrs.org

What is an occult bond?

An occult bond is a hidden demonic influence that hinders or blocks the progress of a person's spiritual life. This kind of spiritual bondage can occur when a person seeks for supernatural knowledge, protection or power by occult means. For example, common ways of seeking occult power are witchcraft and magic; common ways of seeking occult knowledge are divination and spiritism. Spiritism refers to consulting spirits or the souls of the dead to know or get something. There are many forms of divination, including the use of astrology, tarot cards, palm reading, clairvoyance, and geomancy —all of which can give people false or ensnaring knowledge of people and events.

God strictly forbids such practices in Scripture (Deut 18:10-12), since they represent a refusal to trust him and an attempt to manipulate spiritual forces for one's own purposes. The Catechism also states clearly that all such practices are gravely sinful, even when they are done for the sake of restoring health (#2117).

The reason that occult involvement is so dangerous is that it can bind and submit the person to evil spirits. These spirits may use a person's occult involvement to bring about an apparent benefit, only to lead the person into deeper spiritual bondage. For example, a twelve-year-old girl was always sick. Someone gave her an amulet to wear around the neck. The disease disappeared immediately. But the child fell into depression, stopped laughing and attempted suicide. Satan may keep the body in apparent health to send the soul to hell.

Causes of occult bonds

Following are some of the root causes of occult bonds:

Actions that invite demons and encourage spiritual ties, for example, consecration to Satan and blood oaths; initiation in voodoo, esoteric orders of secret societies, the New Age, Freemasonry, or Rosicrucian orders.

- Eastern spiritual and energy practices such as yoga, Tai Chi, feng shui ley lines, mantras, transcendental meditation, Zen, reiki, or opening chakras.
- Consulting soothsayers and following their counsel; seers, witch doctors, astrologers, hypnotists, card readers, shamans, and occult healers.
- Wearing amulets, talismans, zodiac signs, horns, fetishes, charms, jujus, rabbits' feet, mad stones, zemis, rings or magical objects said to carry energy.
- Participation in séances with turntables, Ouija boards, fortune-telling balls, glass bead games, or role playing.
- Studious reading of books on the occult, on Satanism, and on zodiac horoscopes.
- Soul ties or sexual relations with masters of the occult.
- Stubborn attachment to venial and mortal sins.

The effects of occult bonds

An occult bond is spiritually devastating. It weakens faith; it kills the desire to praise God, to proclaim Jesus as Lord and sole mediator, and to pray to the Virgin Mary. It creates anxiety and agitation when a person is in holy places. Obscene thoughts may enter the person's mind in the presence of the Eucharist. Occult involvement may cause sexual perversions, alcoholism, drug abuse, violence against loved ones, and ultimately, depression and suicidal tendencies. Since these symptoms can have other possible causes, however, only those who are experienced and knowledgeable in deliverance ministry should attempt to discern whether a person has an occult bond.

How to break free?

Release is available through prayer made in the authority of the Name of Jesus Christ. But the person who has been involved in the occult must first make radical choices of conversion. These steps should be followed:

- Acknowledge your occult sins and confess them to the Lord, making use of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- Discard or burn any occult symbols or occult books you possess (see Acts 19:19 and Deut 7:25).
- Renew your baptismal vows to renounce Satan, his works, and all his seductions, specifically renouncing any ways that you have been involved in the occult.
- With the help of someone who is mature and Spirit-filled, say a prayer of deliverance to break the spiritual bondage, exercising your baptismal authority to reject evil spirits in the Name of Jesus.
- Finally, devote yourself to Jesus and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Jesus warned that it is not enough to expel evil spirits. "When the unclean spirit has gone out of a man, he passes through waterless places seeking rest, but he finds none. Then he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when he comes he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes and brings with him seven other spirits more evil than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first" (Matt 12:43-45). If we want to experience complete and lasting freedom, we must let our mind and heart be filled with the Truth that is Jesus Christ. This takes place through frequent reception of the sacraments, daily prayer and Scripture reading, sound formation, and being in relationship with other Catholics with whom we are transparent and accountable.

Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil and set the captives free (1 John 3:8; Luke 4:18). No one is condemned to remain in spiritual bondage if they turn to him in repentance and trust. 🙏