

THE CHURCH AS FAMILY OF GOD: ITS DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CHURCH IN VIETNAM

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Statement of Sources

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to study the development of the concept/model “the church as the family of God” and to explore its implications in terms of participation of church members and the social mission for the church in Vietnam. The discussion of the development of the ecclesiological concept helps to construct an ecclesiology of the church as the family of God in response to the call of Pope John Paul II in the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* (1995).¹ It also assists the Vietnamese church in its evaluation and implication of the model of the church as family. This ecclesiological model has been promoted since the seventeenth century and emphasised since the Second Vatican Council in the church in Vietnam.

The scope of this thesis studies the biblical, theological and ecclesiological development of the concept/model of the church as God’s family. It also investigates the understanding of the family and the church as family in Vietnam, the mutual relationships of church members, and the characteristics of the mission of the church in the world. Then it explores the implications of the ecclesiology of the church as the family of God for the local church. A proper understanding of these issues is necessary because it helps the Vietnamese church to apply authentically the model of the church as the family of God.

Chapter One discusses the biblical understanding of the family of God as the metaphor for the relationships between God and his people and among members in the church. The metaphor “the family/the household of God” was applied to the house church in early Christianity and provides some relevant implications for the church today. Chapter Two examines the theological foundations of the concept in patristic writings, in the liturgy and in church documents. Chapter Three explores the components of an ecclesiology of the church as the family of God which include trinitarian, Basic Ecclesial Communities, ancestral veneration and liberation ecclesiologies. Chapter Four investigates the traditional as well as the modern Vietnamese family and its challenges in order to identify the foundation of the understanding of the concept of family in the local church. Chapter Five describes the development of the concept/model of the church as family in the organisation of the Vietnamese church that appeared in the seventeenth century and in some documents of the local church. Chapter Six analyses church hierarchy and the

¹ Cf. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa (EIA)*, 63: “It is earnestly to be hoped that theologians in Africa will work out the theology of the church as family with all the riches contained in this concept”. It is noted that the church in Vietnam has adopted this ecclesiological model since the start of evangelisation in Vietnam.

participation of the people of God. It provides some implications of the ecclesiology of the church as God's family for the promotion of the participatory church in Vietnam. Chapter Seven examines the characteristics of and the practical tools in the church's social mission and explores the challenges to the implications of the social mission of the church as the family of God in Vietnam.

The conclusions of this thesis are that the concept/model and the applications of the church as the family of God have basic foundations in scripture, in patristic writings and in church documents. The concept of family in these materials implies two main meanings: the familial relationships between God and the people of God (or the church) and the mutual relationships among people in the church as well as in society. These relationships are based on human interactions in the family which are problematic in some situations. Therefore the model of the church as family must be patterned on trinitarian communion of the divine family so that it can overcome the limitations of the human family. In that context, the Vietnamese family pointed out advantages as well as disadvantages in the development of the model of the church as family. The concept of family is very close to the Vietnamese; it provides some possibilities to develop the participation in the church and its mission in society. However, to some extent, the concept and the structure of the Vietnamese family which was influenced by Confucianism have challenged the local church in these areas. Therefore the proper understanding of hierarchy and the church's social mission were discussed. Based on that understanding some applications were also proposed in order to help the Vietnamese church to overcome these challenges and become an authentic model of the family of God.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AA	<i>Apostolicam Actuositatem</i>
AAS	Acta Apostolicae Sedis
AFER	African Ecclesial Review
AG	<i>Ad Gentes</i>
BISA	Bishops' Institute for Social Action
BIRA	Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs
BTB	Biblical Theology Bulletin
CA	<i>Centesimus Annus</i>
CBQ	Catholic Biblical Quarterly
CCC	Catechism of the Catholic Church
CELAM	Episcopal Conference of Latin America
CIC	Codex Iuris Canonici
CL	<i>Christifideles Laici</i>
CTSC	Catholic Theological Society of America
DCE	<i>Deus Caritas Est</i>
DeV	<i>Dominum et Vivificantem</i>
DV	<i>Dei Verbum</i>
EA	<i>Ecclesia in Asia</i>
EAPR	East Asian Pastoral Review
EDA	Églises d'Asie
EE	<i>Ecclesia de Eucharistia</i>
EIA	<i>Ecclesia in Africa</i>
EN	<i>Evangelii Nuntiandi</i>
FABC	Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences
FAPA	For All the Peoples of Asia
FC	<i>Familiaris Consortio</i>
GS	<i>Gaudium et Spes</i>
JSAS	Journal of Southeast Asian Studies
MND	<i>Mane Nobiscum Domine</i>
NRT	Nouvelle Revue Théologique
LG	<i>Lumen Gentium</i>
MR	<i>Mutuae Relationes</i>

OR	L'Ossevatore Romano
<i>PDV</i>	<i>Pastores Dabo Vobis</i>
PL	Patrologia Latina
PG	Patrologia Graeca
<i>PG</i>	<i>Pastores Gregis</i>
<i>PO</i>	<i>Presbyterorum Ordinis</i>
<i>PP</i>	<i>Populorum Progressio</i>
<i>PT</i>	<i>Pacem in Terris</i>
QA	<i>Quadragesimo Anno</i>
RICAO	Revue de l'Institut Catholique de l'Afrique de l'Ouest
<i>RM</i>	<i>Redemptoris Missio</i>
<i>RN</i>	<i>Rerum Novarum</i>
<i>SC</i>	<i>Sacrosanctum Concilium</i>
<i>SRS</i>	<i>Sollicitudo Rei Socialis</i>
TS	Theological Studies
<i>UR</i>	<i>Unitatis Redintegratio</i>
VBC	Vietnamese Bishops' Conference
<i>VC</i>	<i>Vita Consecrata</i>

INTRODUCTION

The family has been central to both society and religion including religious institutions. It is a social and economic unit in which basically parents and children live together and care for one another. It is also the basic institution for religious education, particularly in Judaism and Christianity. The Christian family is the domestic church or the church of the home.¹ The family deserves its genuine ecclesiality from the presence of Christ; it constitutes a specific revelation and realisation of ecclesial communion.² In particular, the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* (1995) called the church the family of God.³

In the documents of the church in Vietnam, the concept “the church as the family of God” was first identified in the intervention of Bishop Simon Hòa Nguyễn Văn Hiền at the Second Vatican Council when he argued that “since the church has an obligation to all people of whatever age or condition, the teaching concerning the church, family of God, is directly available to all”.⁴ The concept of the church as family has been developed by the Vietnamese Bishops’ Conference (VBC) in the Pastoral Letters of the Episcopal Conference and individual bishops since 1980. In particular, in the Responses to the *Lineamenta* for the Synod for Asia (1997), the Vietnamese bishops proposed to develop the family model of the church. “It is equally necessary to build the church as a family of God’s children more than a hierarchy endowed with structures and perfectly formulated laws”.⁵ The model of the church as family which promotes the relationship of “filial piety

¹ LG 11; John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* (FC) 21; 49; 51.

² FC 21; Karl Rahner, *Studies in Modern Theology* (London: Herder, 1965), 293-294. Rahner argues that “we are not saying that the family is ‘like’ the church, or that is ‘part’ of the church. The family ‘is’ the church in that it is a genuinely ecclesial expression of God’s presence among specific communities of people. The family is, in fact, a local church, and local churches, are not merely members of the total church. They are actual realisations of what the church is as a whole”.

³ EIA 63; FABC VIII, *The Asian Family Towards a Culture of Integral Life*, 50 (Hong Kong: FABC, 2004). The Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC) document states that “the church is born as a new creation (2 Cor 5:17), God’s ‘household’, his own family (Eph 2:19; 1 Tim 3:15) born of the Spirit of Jesus, the Spirit of Life ... The church begins in the home, not in the parish”. Cf. Hilary O. Okeke, “From ‘Domestic Church’ to ‘Family of God’: The African Christian Family in the African Synod,” *Nouvelle Revue de science missionnaire* 52 (1996), 193-194. Okeke called the church as family of God an ecclesiological Copernican revolution because the family is considered “the paradigm of the church” which differs from the domestic church in which the church provides the image for the family.

⁴ *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II* (hereafter *Acta Synodalia*), vol. II, pars II (Rome: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1972), 44. The intervention written in Latin was translated into English by Margaret Press.

⁵ VBC, *Bản trả lời các câu hỏi - Phụ trương của Lineamenta*, II (hereafter *Bản trả lời*), [Responses to Questionnaire - Appendix to the *Lineamenta*] and *Bản góp ý của Hội đồng Giám mục Việt Nam* (hereafter *Bản góp ý*) [Contribution to the Elaboration of the *Instrumentum laboris*] in *Góp ý chuẩn bị Thượng hội đồng Giám mục Á châu* [Contributions to the Synod for Asia] (Reichstett, France: Định Hướng Tùng thư, 1998), 14; cf. Vietnam - Union of Catholic Asian News (UCAN) Document, “Bishops Propose New Way of

towards the Father, in the love and harmony of brothers and sisters”, will integrate better in the Asian society.⁶ Thus the two emphases of the model of the church as the family of God are the relationships within the church and with society.

One of the reasons the Vietnamese bishops promote the model of the church as God’s family is that the family with its functions is very close to the Vietnamese. However, the concept of the Vietnamese family has a positive as well as a negative impact on society and this local church. The family is a basic institution of paramount importance in Vietnamese society. It is a key concept for understanding people as well as society and also for describing human relationships in societal organisations. The Vietnamese relate strongly to their family which is also their home. Home is the place where one is born and nurtured physically and spiritually during life. In other words, the church begins at home. It is in that cultural context that the family has been the model in organising the structure of the Vietnamese church and its pastoral activities. In the initial periods of evangelisation in Vietnam in the seventeenth century, missionaries organised parishes, religious organisations and dioceses according to the model and the spirit of the Vietnamese family. Some models of these organisations still remain in the local church and show their valuable contributions as well as posing some challenges to the life of the church.

Models are popularly used in the empirical sciences as tools for scientific investigation.⁷ Given that there is some correlation between models in science and in religion, scholars, since the Second Vatican Council, have preferred models to definitions in the study of the church because of the nature of the church and of models.⁸ The church is a mystery which implies that its richness and diversity are not fully intelligible to the finite mind of humans. It is a divine and human reality that needs to be explored and defined by various images so that the mystery of the church can be presented to and appreciated by

Evangelisation for Asia” (16 February 1998); accessed 1 May 2003; available from <http://www.ucanews.com>; Internet; “The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Vietnam,” in Peter C. Phan (comp. and ed.), *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 50.

⁶ VBC, *Bản trả lời*, II, 14.

⁷ Cf. Ian G. Barbour, *Myths, Models and Paradigms: The Nature of Scientific and Religious Language* (London: SCM Press, 1974), 29-30. Barbour identified four kinds of models used for diverse purposes: experimental, logical, mathematical, and theoretical models. The fourth ones are “imaginative mental constructs invented to account for observed phenomena”. They usually take the form of imagined mechanisms or processes, which are postulated in a new domain by analogy with familiar mechanisms or processes. See also Ian G. Barbour, *Religion in an Age of Science* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1990), 43.

⁸ Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, exp. ed. (New York: Image Books, 2001). Some books using the model approach are: Howard A. Snyder, *Models of the Kingdom* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993); L. J. Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures: New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology* (New York: Orbis Books, 1988); John Fuellenbach, *Church: Community for the Kingdom*, rev. and exp. ed. (Manila: Logos Publications, 2001).

people of different backgrounds. Models as intellectual and hermeneutical tools are used to explore and analyse reality. They are relatively simple and artificially constructed cases which prove “to be useful and illuminating for dealing with realities that are more complex and differentiated”⁹ and also throw light on a subject from a particular angle.¹⁰ Indeed, a model can be defined as “a conceptual or symbolic representation/system/framework by which a reality or part of reality is both grasped and expressed”.¹¹ Besides, as a humanly constructed image or metaphor, a model in ecclesiology is characterised by its critical realism. Models must not be understood literally. That means, they are “neither literal descriptions of reality nor useful fictions, but human constructs that help us interpret experience by imagining what cannot be observed”.¹² In other words, models do not totally resemble reality, but are a disclosure of reality, and people need to be critical in order to realise this characteristic of models.¹³

According to O’Meara,¹⁴ there are four systems of models of the church: biblical, theological, philosophical and organisational models. The first model system includes images which the New Testament itself used to describe the church, such as the church as the Body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit. The second set of models is taken from the theological tradition of the church, which means from the ecclesial reflections upon its own nature. The church as sacrament as well as communion are some metaphors included in this second model system. The third type is influenced by a specific philosophical worldview. These models are not images or symbols but structures or frameworks revealing and arranging reality, such as Neoplatonic, Aristotelian, nominalist, idealist and phenomenological-historical models. The fourth set of models comes from social-political and behavioural sciences (managerial and organisational theories), such as the church as institution.

The above different models or model systems point out that each model describes a particular aspect of the church or uses a special framework or category for viewing the church. This particularity of models reveals that each model has its uses that need to be acknowledged without denying its limitations. The significant strength of the models is their great potential for expanding human knowledge as Luzbetak writes that the utility of

⁹ Avery Dulles, *Model of Revelation* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1983), 30.

¹⁰ Gideon Goosen, *Australian Theologies: Themes and Methodologies into the Third Millennium* (Strathfield NSW: St Pauls Publications, 2000), 76.

¹¹ James H. Kroeger, “Revisiting Models in Theology – An Exploration into Theological Methods,” *Asia Journal of Theology* 15 (2001), 367; Fuellenbach, *Church: Community for the Kingdom*, 158.

¹² Barbour, *Religion in an Age of Science*, 43.

¹³ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), 30.

¹⁴ Thomas F. O’Meara, “Philosophical Models in Ecclesiology,” *TS* 39 (1978), 3-4.

models “lies in the fact that they proceed pedagogically from the known to the unknown, not only summing up but, so to speak, dramatizing the implications of the particular analogy”.¹⁵ People may be able to explore deeper understanding, insights and implications about the church through the usage of a familiar model or image, such as a human body and a family. Indeed, models, on their explanatory level, serve to synthesize what one knows or at least is inclined to believe, and on their exploratory level, they can lead to new theological insights.¹⁶ A model can be either a model *of* the church or a model *for* the church.¹⁷ A *model of the church* symbolises what the church is while a *model for the church* is like the blueprint for a new church. However, a model can also provide both these characteristics at the same time. Thus the ecclesiological model of the family of God is not just an ecclesial model of participatory and mutual relationship with all as brothers and sisters but also a model for the church to have a richer understanding of divine relationships in the Trinity as God’s family.

Models in religion, however, have some limitations such as inadequacy, relativity and time-limits.¹⁸ Each model of the church comprehends only a particular facet of the church or focuses on one aspect of this mysterious institution. It does not exhaust the church because the church is always greater and richer than any model that tries to grasp it. No single model can exclusively grasp and express the whole of reality completely. But its relativity does not mean the relativisation of models, that is, that all models are the same or one model is as good as any other model. Such relativity requires the need of many models to be taken into account in studying or describing the church. Besides, models often appeared as responses to the needs of people living in a certain time. The historicity of models implies that some theological models of the church can be inappropriate to people in some cultures and that they have their time-limits. However, theological models are not vanquished as thoroughly as happened in the empirical sciences.¹⁹

In addition to the above limitations of models, Luzbetak mentioned two other risks in using models to describe the church. These are reification and reductionism.²⁰ Such dangers can happen because of the analogical characteristics of a model and reality. In

¹⁵ Luzbetak: *The Church and Cultures*, 136.

¹⁶ Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 17-18.

¹⁷ Fuellenbach, *Church: Community for the Kingdom*, 158.

¹⁸ Luzbetak: *The Church and Cultures*, 136-137.

¹⁹ Fuellenbach, *Church: Community for the Kingdom*, 159-160; cf. Antonio B. Lambino, “A New Theological Model: Theological of Liberation” in *Towards Doing Theology in the Philippine Context* (Manila: Loyola Papers 9, 1977), 6; Barbour, *Religion in an Age of Science*, 43.

²⁰ Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures*, 136.

the case of ecclesiological models one can materialize and reduce the divine and mysterious nature of the church. Reductionism is also understood as an option for an absolutist model that means such a model is insisted upon in every circumstance and is kept away from dialoguing with other competing and conflicting models. Brueggemann emphasises that “models must not be dictated by cultural reality, but they must be voiced and practised in ways that take careful account of the particular time and circumstance into which God’s people are called”.²¹

In order to counteract the limitations of individual models Dulles emphasises the inclusiveness of models. It is essential to know that a model must be used in conjunction with other models. There is a need of a variety of models in order to supplement one another when describing a complex reality. This is an important requirement in using models in science as well as in theology. Indeed, “a variety of models will prove the best route to theological understanding... [since] a good theological system will generally recognise the limitations of its own root metaphor and will therefore be open to criticism and correction from other points of view”.²²

The above strengths and weaknesses of models in theology raise some concern in choosing a good model. In order to have an adequate evaluation about a church model one should consider the seven criteria as suggested by Dulles. A good model is required to meet at least one of the seven following criteria: (1) biblical and (2) Christian tradition backgrounds, (3) developing a sense of corporate identity and mission in Christians, (4) stimulating Christian virtues and values, (5) being correspondent with the religious experience of contemporary people, (6) theological fruitfulness, (7) promoting relationships with other people and institutions/organisations.²³ Good models need to be grounded in biblical and theological traditions. The more they are connected or related to and tested by these traditions the more they become convincing models. Christians benefit from models in so far as they support them in strengthening their faith and mission and in promoting their hope and love for God and of humans. Models are also required being closely related to people who appreciate them and being theological fruitful in terms of developing new insights/implications and of relationships with non-Christian people and institutions. In other words, good models are useful in the sense

²¹ Walter Brueggemann, “Rethinking Church Models Through Scripture,” *Theology Today* 48 (1991), 129.

²² Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 34-35; cf. Bevens, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 31.

²³ Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 183-184.

that they are simple, clear, aesthetic and balanced, and not only provide information, but also practical solutions for outdated models.²⁴

The biblical and theological background of church models is essential as is often mentioned. This background makes the church models authentic in the Christian tradition. However, some of these church models draw less attention from a number of African, Asian and Latin American peoples because of the unfamiliarity of some biblical models. They need a church model which is relevant to their culture and their needs.²⁵ That is why these local churches promote a model which is more familiar to them and is also easier to understand for the majority of people. It is in this socio-cultural context that the church as the family of God has been promoted in these local churches.

The Vietnamese family has been examined by a number of theological and pastoral studies. However, to my knowledge, these studies of the family in relation to the church in Vietnam have been mainly canonical, liturgical and missionary in nature.²⁶ Some theses present a better understanding on the concepts of the Vietnamese family and marriage laws of the Catholic Church and family life and find new ways of pastoral care for Christian marriage in modern Vietnam. Others either discuss the foundation of the compatibility between Vietnamese ancestor veneration in the family and the Catholic tradition or examine the challenges for the promotion of the missionary vocation of the Vietnamese Catholic family.

The originality of this thesis lies in its study of the development of the model of the church as the family of God and of the implications of this ecclesiological model for the Roman Catholic Church in Vietnam as regards the relationships within the church and with society. These applications also aim to develop interreligious dialogue since they promote working with other religions in Vietnam. Accordingly, this thesis will help the local church strengthen the model of the church as the family of God and develop some pastoral implications which are essential for this ecclesiological model.

²⁴ Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures*, 136.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 161-162. Luzbetak argues that the church's message about God and his loving revelation should be presented to people with cultural relevancy and felt-needs, that means, they should be tailored to the local set of needs.

²⁶ There have been a number of theses on the Vietnamese family and inculturation, such as: Nguyễn Soạn, *Les institutions familiales au Viet Nam en confrontation avec les normes du Droit Canon et du Vat. II* (Diss. Pontificia Universitas Urbaniana: Rome, 1974); Nguyễn Đức Bình, *A Comparative Study on the Nature and the Essential Properties of Marriage in the 1983 Code of Canon Law and the Civil Law of Vietnam* (Thesis, Faculty of Canon Law of the University of Santo Tomas: Manila, 2004); Peter De Ta Vo, *A Cultural and Theological Foundation for Ancestor Veneration among Catholics in Vietnam* (PhD. Diss., The Catholic University of America: Washington, DC, 1999); Nguyễn Văn Chiến, *Vocazione e missione della famiglia cristiana nel magistero di Giovanni Paolo II. Applicazione alla situazione in Vietnam* (Diss. Pontificia Universitas Urbaniana: Rome, 2004).

Taking into account the above description of church models, this thesis will discuss the biblical, theological and ecclesiological understanding of the family of God before focusing on the study of the development and the implications of the church as the family of God in Vietnam from the viewpoint of the participatory relationship in the church and its social mission. These are the main concerns when the Vietnamese church promotes this ecclesiological model. The relationship between God and Christians is significant in the church as God's family. The God-Christians relationships as in the family of God must be also lived out in Christian life as in the areas of liturgy, spirituality and ethics. This would require a special study which goes beyond the limitations of this thesis.

Chapter One identifies the family of God in the Old and New Testaments. The metaphor of family in scripture and the model of the house church or the household of God can be challenged by contemporary people. Therefore this chapter will look at the proper meanings of these metaphors and ecclesial models in order to justify the use of the metaphor of the family of God and to help the church today to learn some lessons from the early church as the house church or the household of God.

Chapter Two examines the anthropological-theological foundation of the ecclesiological concept of the church as the family of God in selected patristic writings, in the liturgy and in church documents. In addition to the discussion of this concept in the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, it explores particularly its development in the documents of the Synod for Africa and for Asia as well as the Episcopal Conferences of Latin America and of Asia in order to identify the significance of the ecclesiological concept in these local churches.

Chapter Three explores the components of an ecclesiology based on the concept of the church as the family of God. The concept of the family of God is that of communion. It can develop coherently four ecclesiologies of divine and human communion: trinitarian, Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs), ancestral veneration and liberation ecclesiologies. The description of the ecclesiology of the church as the family of God provides the foundation for the development of a more contextualised ecclesiology.

Chapter Four studies the Vietnamese family in three areas: the traditional and contemporary family and its challenges in Vietnam. This cultural and sociological description will help to understand why the church in Vietnam promotes the model of the church as the family of God. It also points out some challenges which the local church needs to address when the church promotes the family model.

Chapter Five investigates the development of the concept of the church as the family of God in Vietnam. It examines the practical implementation of the concept in three organisations founded in the seventeenth century and the theoretical development of the family of God in the relevant documents of the Vietnamese church.

Chapter Six develops the participatory church as the family of God in Vietnam. The chapter analyses the hierarchy and ministry in the context of the church as the family of God. It also studies the relationships of the members in the Vietnamese church. Finally it explores the implications of the ecclesiology of the church as the family of God for the promotion of the participatory church in Vietnam.

Chapter Seven analyses the concept “the church as the family of God” and its social mission which are mutually related because the church as the family of God implies communion within the church and with society. It describes the relationship between the church as family and its social mission and the practical tools of the social mission. The chapter also investigates some principles and mechanism in order to help the Vietnamese church to carry out effectively its mission in society.

In terms of documents, besides official documents of the church, African theological studies and the documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) are mainly used in this thesis to supplement the Vietnamese sources which are limited due to the difficulties in religious publications.

The methodology used in this thesis is twofold. An exegetical methodology is the main methodology used. By this I mean the close examination of biblical texts, church documents and the writings of theologians in order to extract meanings, often through a dialectic process. This is particularly the case in the first three chapters when the biblical and theological foundations of the church as the family of God are laid, but is also the case in Chapters Six and Seven when the idea of a participatory church and the social mission of the church are developed. A historical-theological approach is also used when appropriate, as is the case when different ecclesiologies are tracked through history. To some extent a limited interdisciplinary approach is also evidenced in this thesis when, for example, the Vietnamese family is examined and the disciplines of history, sociology and anthropology are most useful. It should be added that history also plays an appropriate part in sketching the origins of the Catholic Church in Vietnam and the development of certain institutions in that church.

CHAPTER ONE

THE BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE FAMILY OF GOD

The ecclesiological concept of the church as the family of God is emphasised in the Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* (1995), but the concept is not clearly defined and is not given with biblical references.¹ However, the working document of the African Synod (1994) and the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (1997) did identify some biblical references to the concept of the church as the family of God.²

Israel and the church as the family/household of God are the two biblical metaphors for the relationship between God and his people and the relationship among the people of God.³ However, it is noted that in the scriptures there was no word corresponding to the concept of family in modern society.⁴ The understanding of the concept of household or family in biblical and modern times differs. To some extent the family structure, values and metaphor as described in the Old and New Testaments can raise some challenges for modern people. These challenges and the task of developing an ecclesiology of the church as the family of God are the main reasons for the study of the biblical image of the family of God.

This chapter will identify the biblical understanding of the family of God as an ecclesiological image. It will discuss the metaphor in terms of Israel as the family of God in the Old Testament, the family as a Christian community of disciples and the household of God in the New Testament. The discussion of the biblical concept of the family of God hopes to develop a proper understanding of the metaphor of the family or the household of God and to justify its use for the church as the family of God.

¹ Cf. *EIA* 63.

² The *Instrumentum laboris* 25 of the African Synod stated some references in the New Testament: the church as the House of God (1 Tim 3:15), the Household of God in the Spirit (Eph 2:19-22). The Message of the 11th Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) mentioned other biblical references in the Old and New Testaments: Ex 4:22-23; Jer 31:19; Amos 3:1-3; Gal 3:25-29; 6: 10; 1 Tim 3:15; Acts 13:26; 17; 28; Jn 3:3-8. Cf. "Message of the Eleventh Plenary Assembly of SECAM," *AFER* 39 (1997), 278-285; FABC VIII, *The Asian Family Towards a Culture of Integral Life*, 50.

³ Cf. Paul S. Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 165-172.

⁴ The word "family" or "household" used in this thesis as the English translations of the Jewish and Greek terminologies does not have the same meanings with the original words in the scriptures. Cf. C.J.H. Wright, "Family," in David N. Freedman (ed.), *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 2 (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992) 761-769; Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1980), 245-292.

1.1 Israel as the Family of God in the Old Testament

The metaphor “Israel as the family of God” did not appear explicitly in the Old Testament. However, there are metaphors of familial relationships between God and Israel and vice versa. God is the father or mother of Israel and the Israelites are the children of God since “all the families of Israel” will be God’s people (Ex 4:23; Jer 3:4-20; 31:1; Isa 42:14). Israel is adopted to become God’s family through the covenant between God and the Israelites (Amos 3:1-3). Such metaphors related to Israel as God’s family need to be understood in the context of the Israelite family in the Old Testament. The family of the Israelites was highly structured in the centuries before the Common Era (BCE) and their concept of family was much broader than that of modern people. For the Israelites, the family implies the meaning of a community and ancestral relationships and traditions. Thus many scholars have agreed that there were no exact words in Hebrew, Greek and Latin corresponding to the modern concept of family. The word “family” or “household” used interchangeably below needs to be understood in the Israelite context.

1.1.1 Family in the Old Testament

The Israelite family is described through the family structure, functions and values in order to have a complete image of the family as described in the Old Testament. The stories about the family in the Old Testament need to be viewed with a critical approach to understand the meaning of the metaphor of the family of God adopted from the Israelite family.

The Israelite society was a comprehensive entity which was subdivided into three structures: *shevet*, tribe, as primary, *mispahah*, clan or association of families, as secondary, and *bayit*, extended family, as tertiary structure. These three social institutions, which are based on the family or household relationships, formed Israel as the people (*am*) or nation (*goy*) in the social and political sense or as the assembly (*qahal*) or congregation (*edah*) in the religious sense.⁵ It was the social structure in which the Israelite family as well as the covenant of God’s people developed. The Israelite family with this structure was almost unchanged during the history of Israel.⁶

⁵ Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh*, 245-285; Chris Wright, “Family, Covenant and Kingdom of God: Biblical Reflections,” *Transformation* 19 (2002), 13. The tribe was the largest kinship grouping, named after Jacob’s sons while the clan was a group of related households, named after one of the grandsons of Jacob. The Israelite structure of family/clan was similar to that of the Vietnamese. The Vietnamese family might correspond to *bayit* and the Vietnamese clan/lineage to *mispahah*. Cf. Peter C. Phan, “Jesus as the Eldest Son and Ancestor,” in Peter C. Phan, *Christianity with an Asian Face: Asian American Theology in Making* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), 137.

⁶ Leo G. Perdue, “The Israelite and Early Jewish Family: Summary and Conclusions,” in Leo G. Perdue *et al.*, *Families in Ancient Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 163-165. Perdue uses

The Israelite extended family (*bayit*) was primarily made up of immediate members who were related to one another by blood or marriage relations, such as husband, wife or wives, married sons and wives, sons, daughters and grandchildren (Gen 7:1; 36:6; 45:10). The dead members were also considered as still belonging to the family because their deaths were their return to the ancestors (Judg 2:10; Gen 25; 8; 17; 49: 29-33; 1 Kgs 14:13; 2 Kgs 22:20). The unborn members were considered as family members because they were counted among the descendants to inherit the Promised Land (Gen 12:2; 13:14-17; Ps 22:30-31). Besides, marginal members were people outside of the kinship system, but they were added to the family in order to provide the labour force or some special religious services.⁷ They included slaves, debtors, sojourners, hired labourers, orphans and Levites; they all belonged to the master's family (Ex 20:8-10; Deut 5:12-15; Judg 17-18).

Besides people, the Israelite family also included land and other properties, such as pastures, livestock, and tools for living and working. Land was a necessary commodity for the survival of the family in the agrarian society of the Israelites, but it had a value so special that it could not be sold to other people outside the family or the clan. It belonged to God who was the landlord of Israel (1Kgs 21:3).⁸ It functioned as a proof of the relationship between God and Israel because the land was given to the people of God. The land in particular was called "inheritance" which implies the sonship of Israel because only children or descendants legally inherited the land of their father (Deut 4:21; 4:38; 12:9; 15:4; 19:10; 26:1).⁹

The Israelite family had two significant functions: nurturing and educational.¹⁰ The family had the responsibility to look after its members, particularly the old and sick grandparents, parents, widows without children. In return, children had to obey, honour and care for their parents as required by the commandment (Ex 20:12; Deut 5:16; Prov 19:26; 30:11; Sir 3:1-16). Indeed, love whose motive came from God existed among family members (Ex 20:6; 21:5; Deut 6:5; 7:7; Gen 29:30; 37:4; Isa 49:15, 21). The nurturing function of the family also determined some responsibilities of the

the phrase "the Israelite and early Jewish family" for the historical periods from 1200 BCE to the beginning of the Common Era. "The Israelite family" is used as its shortened form in this thesis.

⁷ Perdue, "The Israelite and Early Jewish Family," 163-165.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Christopher J. H. Wright, *Living as the People of God* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1983), 51-53.

¹⁰ The other functions of the Israelite families were: economic (production and consumption), reproductive, military and judiciary. Cf. Perdue, "The Israelite and Early Jewish Family," 168-174; Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh*, 341.

redeemer (*go'el*)¹¹ towards family members and of the head of the family towards marginal residents. The rights of some marginal residents are mentioned here to show the extension of this function. Debt servants and slaves were released after six years of service or slavery (Ex 21:2-11). Sojourners were provided shelter, food and protection (Gen 18:1-8; 23:4; 24: 28-32; Ex 12: 45; Lev 22:10-11). Hired labourers were to share in the produce of the land during the Jubilee year (Lev 25:6).

The nurturing function also included the care and charitable works for the poor. Apart from the legal requirements to protect the poor (Ex 23:3; Deut 16:19), the family had to receive the poor who came to the fields and vineyards of the family to collect some fruits or grains for their survival (Deut 23:24-25; Lev 19:9-10; 23:22). The family also used the collections from the tithes at the end of every three years for foreigners, orphans and widows (Deut 14:28-29; 26: 12). Thus the nurturing function was not only a social but also a divine requirement as mainly encoded in the Book of the Covenant (Ex 20:22-23; 21:15-17; Deut 27:19; 28:1-6; Isa 14:30; 56:1; Jer 2:34-35).

Education in ancient Israel occurred mainly in the family and was carried out by parents. This highlights the authority of parents over children. Indeed, the family played an important role in religious and general education of children. The father had the responsibility to communicate to his children the Israelite traditions, such as the Law of Yahweh (Deut 6:7; 20-24), the Passover (Ex 12:26), and the consecration of the firstborn son (Ex 13:14). This teaching could be called the catechism at home because these explanations had the form of questions and answers. The Passover was celebrated in the family itself and in shrines or temples of households or clans (Ex 12:13; Judg 18). Through these celebrations God's commandments, covenant and religious traditions were taught and passed on to the next generations. Parents also transmitted to children skills in household tasks and social customs that are important for future generations (Prov 1:8; 6:20; Ex 10:2; 12:26; Deut 4:9).

The Israelite family, however, had a patriarchal and hierarchical structure. It was centred on the male head of the household and was often referred to as the father's house (*bet'ab*). Patriarchy was also seen in the kinship, the Levirate marriage, and even in the Jubilee laws of redemption of debtors and the family land (Deut 25:5-10; Lev 25:25-28). In other words, the man was the head of the family who stamped on it his character, and

¹¹ The *go'el* or the redeemer was the next of kin responsible for the justice and well-being of the Israelite family (cf. Ruth and Leviticus 25). The main obligations of a redeemer are the revenge for murder, the raising of a male heir for the dead relative, and the redemption of land and of family members from debt. Cf. Perdue, "The Israelite and Early Jewish Family," 192-193; Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh*, 263-267.

wives, children, slaves and property were entirely merged in this structure.¹² In addition, there were other family issues that raised some challenges, such as polygamy (Gen 12-22; Ex 21:10), concubinage (Gen 22:20-24, Judg 8:31) and sexism (Sir 22:3; 25:24). Relationships in families were not always harmonious since there were occasions of injustice, abuse and fratricidal hatred or fratricide within the family (Gen 4:8; 27-35; 37-50). The existence of these family problems was not unusual among the Israelites as in all societies, thus making some people conclude that scripture is “a source of oppression for those whose families do not conform to the values of powerful groups who claim the bible as their authority”.¹³ To some extent the family in the bible is dysfunctional. However, to assume that this is a normal characteristic of the Israelite family as well as to jettison the description of the biblical family is equally a mistake.¹⁴ One must acknowledge the contrasting images of the family or the ambiguities of family life as described in the Old Testament and know that these biblical stories, including those of family, are “ideological driven narratives, chosen and custom fitted to support particular historical, political and theological ideas”.¹⁵ In other words, the family stories in the scriptures include both functional and dysfunctional values that need to be evaluated by the criterion of covenant theology for their proper meanings to emerge.¹⁶

¹² David T. Tsumura, “Family in the Historical Books,” in R. S. Hess and M. D. Carrol R. (eds.), *Family in the Bible: Exploring Customs, Culture, and Context* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 60-66; James A. Sanders, “The Family in the Bible,” *BTB* 32 (2002), 117-118; Sally Purvis, “A Question of Families,” *Interpretation* 52 (1998), 146-147; Tikva Frymer-Kensky, “The Family in the Hebrew Bible,” in Anne Carr and Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen (eds.), *Religion, Feminism and the Family* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 56-57.

¹³ Purvis, “A Question of Families,” 152; Wes Howard-Brook, *The Church Before Christianity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 74-75. Howard-Brook identified some problems in the Israelite family, but he did acknowledge the value of relationship between Abraham and Lot (Gen 14) and among Jacob’s children (Gen 24).

¹⁴ Purvis, “A Question of Families,” 152.

¹⁵ Frymer-Kensky, “The Family in the Hebrew Bible,” 56; Wright, “Family, Covenant and Kingdom of God,” 11-17; John Rogerson, “The Family and Structures of Grace in the Old Testament,” in Stephen C. Barton (ed.), *The Family in Theological Perspective* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 41. Rogerson acknowledged the problems of the Israelite family as described in the Old Testament, but he concluded that “[w]hat is really important is that theologically-driven efforts were made to counteract the forces that undermined the family”. According to Wright, some contrast images of the Israelite family are: family as a central feature of the created order (Gen 1:27-31; 2:20-24; Ps 127-128) vs. a context of fallen rebellion (Gen 4:9-24; 9:20-27), and family as focal point of covenant faithfulness and social stability (Ex 12:43-49, 13:1-16; 21:15-17) vs. a context for covenant unfaithfulness and collapse (Num 12; 16; Josh 7).

¹⁶ Cf. Perdue, “The Household, Old Testament Theology, and Contemporary Hermeneutics,” 246 –247; David L. Petersen, “Genesis and Family Values,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 124 (2005), 15-23. According to Perdue, covenant theology provides the fundamental and thematic structure for the biblical teachings. He argues that “the very origins of covenant theology took shape within the social reality of Israelite households and that this theology was later extended to include the households of Israel”. Petersen identified three family values among other positive and negative ones in Genesis which focuses on the family. They are: the value of defining family in expansive terms, of familial continuity, and of non-violent resolution of conflict within the family. The first two values are also the backgrounds to understand and acknowledge some other family values.

The covenantal relationship between God and Israel is the centre of, and the rationalization for, all the structures and the practices of the Israelite family. In other words, texts and themes on family issues are explained and justified whether or not they are related to this centre. They are considered more or less important whether they are close or remote from this central covenant. Indeed, the covenant between Yahweh and his people is mainly involved in the family and aimed to bring the Israelites into an intimate relationship with God.¹⁷ Moreover, one needs to acknowledge the importance of evaluating family issues in their holistic biblical context. In this sense, Genesis which consists of many challenging family issues is a story of grace triumphing despite human sin and of grace triumphing even in families broken by sin. Indeed, with the holistic view that God created humankind in his image as a functional community one could see how modern people can appreciate the relevance of family life in terms of structure, function and values as described in the Old Testament, particularly in the Pentateuch.¹⁸

The structure of the Israelite family and its functions showed a strong sense of solidarity among its family and marginal members. In other words, the modern concept of individualism was not known in the Israelite family, although individual responsibility began to develop during the exilic period (Ez 18).¹⁹ This solidarity also extended to the marginal members and therefore the family had a moral responsibility towards them as the nurturing function required. This nurturing was practised particularly in the sabbatical years. However, beyond this social purpose, the nurturing function also had theological meanings and foundations. It was a commandment from God to be kind to others as God was generous to the Israelites when he saved them from the slavery in Egypt (Deut 15: 1-18). So Exodus became the theological foundation for the nurturing function of the Israelite family. The commandment of love as it was taught had to be extended beyond the immediate family members and directed to the marginalised in the family and in society. Thus one of the significant values of the Israelite family was solidarity which is also an expression of the covenant.

¹⁷ For instance, circumcision as the sign of the covenant between Yahweh and Israel was a family ritual (Deut 10:16; Ex 12:43-49; 13:1-16), and the Decalogue as the covenant law highlighted the protection of the family in terms of the preservation of parental authority (Ex 21:15, 17), of sexual integrity (Lev 18:6-18), and of economic viability (Lev 25:23-55). Cf. Wright, "Family, Covenant and Kingdom of God," 13-15.

¹⁸ Gordon J. Wenham, "Family in the Pentateuch," in Hess and Carrol R. (eds.), *Family in the Bible: Exploring Customs, Culture, and Context*, 28-31. Wenham identified some messages or values of the Pentateuch to families, such as grace, forgiveness and care for others; cf. Petersen, "Genesis and Family Values," 5-23.

¹⁹ Leo G. Perdue, "The Household, Old Testament Theology, and Contemporary Hermeneutics," in Perdue *et al.*, *Families in Ancient Israel*, 225-243; Dearman, "The Family in the Old Testament," 137; Pilch, "The Family: Status and Roles," *The Bible Today* 40 (2002), 390.

The foregoing description of the Israelite family shows the centrality of the family in the social and religious life of the people of God. In the Israelite family, love among family members and care for others are so emphasised that they rise above hierarchical order and respect. Indeed, Perdue concluded that much of what the Old Testament said about the character, and especially the activity of God and about human morality, was shaped by discourse concerning the family or behaviour within the context of the household.²⁰ It is in this context that the concept “Israel as God’s family” is understood.

1.1.2 God as Father/Mother and Israel as Son/Daughter/Household²¹

The above description of the centrality of the Israelite family provides an understanding of the metaphor “Israel as the family of God”. God was father/mother who took care of Israel as children, reflective of the roles of the parent in the family. In return, the Israelites had the responsibility to respect and obey God. These are the two complementary meanings of the metaphor of God as parent and Israel as sons/daughters.

In the Old Testament, many images of family or marriage relationships were used to describe the relationships between God and the Israelites and also the relationships among people. However, these images were not as plentiful as that of the people of God although the idea of the fatherhood of God was common in the daily life of the Israelites.²² The images of the family appeared either in pairs, such as father/mother - children or son/daughter, husband/wife, or in forms of family terminology, such as family, household and slave. As God is invisible, the metaphors for God were used to describe his relationship with people as well as his love for people, but the use of metaphors for God might be misunderstood or wrongly explained. One needs to know that the image of God as father/mother does not describe God’s gender; it must be understood as a symbolic image since God is beyond sexual distinctions.²³ Therefore it is important to go beyond these images to arrive at the meanings which are analogical and consequently not applied literally to God.²⁴

²⁰ Perdue, “The Household, Old Testament Theology, and Contemporary Hermeneutics,” 225.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 225-243; Dearman, “The Family in the Old Testament,” 124-127; J-M Dabiré, “Eglise-Famille de Dieu,” *RICAO* 14-15(1996), 90-93.

²² Cf. Christopher J. H. Wright, “אב (*’ab*)” in Willem A. VanGemeren (ed.), *The New International Dictionary of the Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 222. Wright mentioned that the danger of association with fertility cults (cf. Jer 2:27) is probably the reason explaining the limited use of the metaphor “God as father, Israel as son” in comparison with covenant metaphors.

²³ Cf. M. Jordan (ed.), *The Church’s Confession of Faith* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 63.

²⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica of St Thomas Aquinas*, q.1, a. 9 (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1981), 6.

Yahweh revealed himself as Father (Job 31:18; Jer 3:4-20) and the Israelites called him Father (Ps 89:26). God as Father is mentioned in different places and situations. The scriptures used the family metaphors for the representation of God and the description of the relationship of Israel to God. God as “Father who created you” was honoured among the Israelites (Deut 32:6; Isa 63:16; Mal 2:10). God was always presented as the Father to his people. That relationship demands submission, confidence and praise from them because God loves them as orphans or as his first-born son. God disciplined Israel, but was ready to forgive their sins (Deut 32:19-20; 1 Chron 17:13; Ps 68:5; Jer 31:9). The prophets highlighted God’s fatherly love and tried to remind people to act properly, but in reality the Israelites misbehaved (Jer 3:4; Mal 1:6). In the deuterocanonical books the fatherhood of God became more personal (Tob 13:3-5; Sir 23:1, 4; 51:10; Wis 2:16; 14:3). God also declared himself as “God of all the families of Israel” (Jer 31:1.9) or “the families of earth” that he has intimately known (Amos 3:1-3).

Living in the ancient Near East, the Israelites might have been influenced by the concept of divine fatherhood from the surrounding peoples who considered the gods as ancestors or progenitors. However, there was a fundamental difference between the Israelites and their neighbours. The God of the Israelites was Father, not of “any kind of sexual activity and physical generation”,²⁵ but of relationships between Creator and creatures, particularly of a divine election manifested in the historical events of the liberation of Israel from Egypt (Ex 4:22-23),²⁶ and of the protection of Israel during the Babylonian exile (Isa 64:15-16).²⁷ Indeed, God as father is largely a post-Sinai idea. These events show the relationship between God, the Saviour, and his chosen people. This God-Father relationship also transcended the history of Israel and of humankind. This fatherhood belongs to God alone; it cannot be judged according to human criteria.²⁸

God in the image or symbol of motherhood could be also found occasionally, but God was never addressed as mother in the Old Testament.²⁹ Usually the metaphor “mother” or “motherhood” appears in some passages to describe God’s faithfulness and sacrificial love for people (Deut 32:18; Isa 42:14; 49:15; 66:13; Ps 25:6; 116:5). Another use of the

²⁵ Gerald O’Collins, *The Tripersonal God: Understanding and Interpreting the Trinity* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1999), 14; Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1984), 140.

²⁶ Joachim Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1967), 12-13. See also Kasper, *The God of Jesus*, 138-139; Roch Kereszty, “God the Father,” *Communio* 26 (1999), 261.

²⁷ Kereszty, “God the Father,” 261-162.

²⁸ Kasper, *The God of Jesus*, 140.

²⁹ George T. Montague, “The Fatherhood of God: Traditional Belief and Contemporary Question,” *The Living Light* 35 (1998), 10.

female image for God was also found in the Wisdom books (Prov 1:20-33; 9:1-5; Si 14:20-27; Wis 7:12; 8:2; Eccl 15:1-2). The motherly love of God shows a tender side to family relationship which rises above hierarchical order and respect.

Israel as the son of Yahweh was the counterpart of the pair “father/mother”. Beside the title “sons of Israel” as the name of the nation in the Pentateuch (Gen 42:5; 21; Ex 1:1, 7), Hosea and Jeremiah also considered Israel and Jerusalem as the son and daughter of Yahweh whom God loved (Hos 11:1; Jer 3:4; 19-22; Isa 1:8; Mic 1:13; 4:8; Jer 4:11; 6:26; 8:11, 19). The metaphor of Israel as the children of God (Deut 14:1) indicates the responsibility of all members of the Israelites towards God.

Since there is a connection between the family and the house/household, one can find the metaphor “house” (*bayit*) describing the people of God, such as the household of God (Num 12:7),³⁰ the house of Israel (Lev 10:6; Neh 20:29; 1 Sam 7:3; Isa 5:7) and the house of David (1Kgs 12:19). The word “house” denotes a union of people who share shelter and essential facilities or services. It was followed by a proper name of a patriarch showing its identity and origin. The house of Israel, with its fully extended meaning, described the Israelites with whom God made covenant (Jer 31:31) to transform them into brothers and sisters (Lev 10:4; Deut 15:3). In other words, the metaphor “house” implies the meaning of a common ancestorship, that is, a common ancestor for all people belonging to God’s family.

The metaphor “the family of God” is closely related to the people of God. The latter was made up of many Israelite families. Like the chosen people of God, the family of God was called and loved by God and in return the members of God’s family had to respond properly. Yahweh, as father, showed God’s concern for Israel as the whole nation saved the Israelites through the family.³¹ It was the covenant that made Israel into a community. Yahweh entered into a special relationship of covenant with the Israelites and expected them to respect and to obey God, but God often received their disobedience instead.

³⁰ Cf. J. Goetzmann, “House, Build, Manage, Steward,” in Colin Brown (ed.) *The New International Dictionary of the New Testament Theology*, vol. 2 (Exeter, Devon: The Paternoster Press, Ltd., 1976), 247-248. Goetzmann mentioned that the Greek words “*oikos*” and “*oikia*” appear frequently in the Septuagint mainly to translate the Hebrew word “*bayit*”. However, *oikos theou* (house of God) or *oikos kyriou* (house of the Lord) remained firmly to the earthly sanctuary of God, except one case in which it refers to Israel (Num 12:7), as Goetzmann states that “the only verse which expressly lies behind the New Testament understanding of the congregation as the house of God (Num 12:7 = Heb 3:2, 5) does not refer directly to the temple but to the land in which Yahweh (through his people) has settled and therefore reigns. It is more conceivable that an extended use of ‘house of David’ for the people of God prepared the way for the idea that the community was God’s house and God’s building”. He also mentions that “an extended use of ‘house of David’ for the people of God prepared the way for the idea that the community was God’s house and God’s building (cf. Amos 9:11; Acts 15:16).

³¹ God saved humanity through the family of Noah (Gen 6:18; 8:15-9:17), Abraham (12:1-3; 12:3) and through each Israelite family in the Passover (Ex 12:43-49).

Contrary to one's expectation, Yahweh would not abandon the Israelites even when disobedient since he would always be faithful to the covenant made with them. The two dimensions of the relationship between God and the members of God's family are similar to the dual relationship and obligation in the covenant of the people of God. Indeed, at least in Deuteronomy, "father-son relationships and covenant relationship were synonymous".³² Thus an ecclesiological meaning was implied in the metaphor "the family of God" as it does in that of the people of God.

In summary, the metaphor of Israel as the family/household of God describes particularly God's concerns for the Israelites because they belonged to God's house.³³ The divine love for people should become the model for members in the church as the family of God. God's concern was understood in the covenant context when the Israelites became God's chosen people. Thus on the one hand, the term "Israel as God's family" was used exclusively for Israel and was also understood in the Israelite family context but, on the other hand, it went beyond "customary law and cultural expectations" to include all peoples.³⁴ God's attitudes to the guilty and unfaithful people and their cities were never an expression of hatred or rejection, but always that of the forgiveness and the desire to establish again the covenant signed between God and the Israelite family.³⁵ Therefore when the metaphor "Israel as family of God" was used, it is not the sociological form and meaning of the Israelite family, but the theological one which is important. This family structure is not the normative structure for society and the church today, but its human experience is an illustration of the nature of God and God's loving relationship with people.³⁶ It is also relevant to the description of the characteristics of the church in the New Testament as a community which includes love and care for all peoples.

³² Wright, "אב ('āb)," 222; cf. Dennis J. McCarthy, "Notes on the Love of God in Deuteronomy and the Father-Son Relationship between Yahweh and Israel," *CBQ* 27 (1965), 144-147. Wright identified that the singular form "son" used in the texts (Ex 4:22; Deut 1:31; 8:5; Ps 103:13; Prov 3:12) indicating Israel as the whole nation while the plural form "sons" (Deut 14:1) indicating all members of Israel in their relationship with Yahweh. McCarthy argues that "the father-son relationship of Israel to Yahweh was conceived in terms which correspond to the definition of covenantal love as found in Deuteronomy... It is love which is seen in reverential fear, in loyalty, and in obedience – a love which, therefore, can be commanded".

³³ Goetzmann, "House, Build, Manage, Steward," 248.

³⁴ The term "the family of God" in Genesis is inclusive because it included the entire known world at that time (Gen 10:1-23). The selection of Abraham as the father of a chosen people is also a choice for the benefit of all of humanity since all "clans on earth" will be blessed by him (Gen 12:3). However, the term "Israel as the family of God" is exclusive for Israel as the chosen people.

³⁵ Dearman, "The Family in the Old Testament," 126.

³⁶ Purvis, "A Question of Families," 154.

1.2 The New Family as a Christian Community of Disciples

The Israelite family in the Old Testament provides a background to understanding the family in the New Testament because the latter still kept the values of the former. However, it was not the natural but the spiritual family or the family of Jesus' disciples that was the main concern of the gospel writers who often described the family in the context of Christian discipleship.³⁷

The relationship between families in the Old and New Testaments could be recognised through the words used for this institution. The Hebrew word *bayit* was translated into the Greek word *oikos*.³⁸ In the New Testament writings, literally, *oikos*³⁹ denoted a group of persons or a family or household as well the residence in which they lived,⁴⁰ and *oikia*⁴¹ meant the place where the ministry of Jesus⁴² and the mission of Christians in the early church were carried out.⁴³ However, the differences in meaning were not rigid.⁴⁴ Actually, the meaning of *oikos* and the concept of the house of God in the New Testament can be understood in the sense of a spiritual building (Eph 2:19-22). The term took on the meaning of the family of God as a Christian community through the establishment and the management of the house church which used the homes of some members as the meeting places for Christians of the early church.⁴⁵

1.2.1 The New Family of Christian Believers

The gospels provided some incidents describing the tension and the contrast between a new Christian family and a natural family. It was not the aim of the gospels to look down on the values and the structure of the natural family but to redefine the family in religious

³⁷ Cf. Santiago Guijarro, "The Family in the Jesus Movement," *BTB* 34 (2004), 115; Lawrence R. Hennessey, "Sexuality, Family, and the Life of Discipleship: Some Early Christian Perspective," *Chicago Studies* 32 (1993), 19-31.

³⁸ Cf. Goetzmann, "House, Build, Manage, Steward," 248-251.

³⁹ *Oikos* and *oikia* appeared some 114 and 94 times, respectively in the New Testament. Cf. John H. Elliott, *1 Peter – A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 414; and Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 182; Hermann Hendrickx, *The Household of God* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1992), 2.

⁴⁰ Lk 10:5; 11:17; 12: 52-53; 16:27; 19:9; Acts 10:2; 1:14; 16:15, 31; 18:8; Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 1:16; 16:19, 1 Tim 3:4-5, 12; 5:4; 2 Tim 1:16; 4:19; Titus 1:11; Heb 11:7.

⁴¹ Cf. Elliott, *1 Peter*, 414.

⁴² Mk 1:29; 2:15; 7:24; 14:3; Lk 7:37; 10:38.

⁴³ Acts 9:11, 17; 10:6, 17, 31; 11:11; 12:12; 16:32; 17:5; 18:7. See also Elliott, *1 Peter*, 414. Originally, the Greek terms, *oikos/oikia*, were chosen by translators of the Septuagint as the equivalent terms of the Hebrew words, *bayit/betab*. This showed the semantic and biblical relationships between the Greek and Hebrew terms.

⁴⁴ Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless*, 252, footnote 12.

⁴⁵ Goetzmann, "House, Build, Manage, Steward," 249-250.

and moral terms.⁴⁶ In particular, the gospel of Mark clearly showed that family relations were relativised for the purpose of following Jesus.⁴⁷ In fact, there are two kinds of accounts of Jesus' attitude towards the family. Besides a short description of Jesus' own human family (Mt 1:18-2:23; Lk 1:26-38; 2:1-40), there were some accounts about the tensions between Jesus and his family and among family members (Lk 2:41-51; 8:19-21; Mk 3:20-21; 31:35; Mt 12:46-50). Jesus taught that whoever loves father, mother, sons and daughter more than he is not worthy of him (Mt 10:37). This teaching was more radical when Jesus asked those who wanted to become his disciples to hate their own family members (Lk 14:26).⁴⁸ Actually, Jesus called for a transformation of family relationships which involved a re-ordering of all conventional priorities. He declared the biological family to be of secondary significance in the reign of God.⁴⁹

There were, however, also other accounts highlighting family values. Honouring parents was one of the commandments which Jesus quoted on different occasions (Mt 15:4; 19:19; Mk 10: 19; Lk 7:10; 18: 10). Some other family values were also emphasised, such as love (Lk 7: 11-15) or the faithfulness in marriage (Mk 10:2-12; Mt 5:27-32; 19:3-9; Lk 16:18). Thus the teaching of the gospels did not deny the natural family, but it protected and tried to transform this institution into a new family regardless of social status and cultural barriers. The new family relativises the importance of family members and property in Jewish society; it needs to be developed for the coming of the reign of God. Indeed, Jesus formed a new family with renewed or Christian family characteristics which are more universal and lasting.

The new family is a community of disciples and discipleship is a call to all people. The gospel teaching on the family or on the seeming renunciations of the family must be justified and understood in the context of discipleship because discipleship was mentioned explicitly in these accounts. "Any one who does not carry his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple" (Lk 14: 27; Mt 10: 38). The harsh statements of family rejection constitute a warning that "the kingdom of God might require a radical willingness to reject all previous loyalties and even lead to the loss of all that is most

⁴⁶ Cf. Carolyn Osiek, "The Family in Early Christianity- Family Values' Revisited," *CBQ* 58 (1996), 2-8; Guijarro, "The Family in the Jesus Movement," 114-115; John H. Elliott, "Jesus Was Not an Egalitarian. A Critique of an Anachronistic and Idealist Theory," *BTB* 32 (2002), 78-83; "The Jesus Movement Was Not Egalitarian but Family-Oriented," *Biblical Interpretation* 11(2005) 173-206.

⁴⁷ Stephen B. Ahearne-Kroll, "Who Are my Mother and my Brothers? Family Relations and Family Language in the Gospel of Mark," *Journal of Religion* 81 (2001), 9-17.

⁴⁸ The Semitic idiom "hate" was not an anti-family one. Cf. Benedict T. Viviano, "The Gospel according to Matthew," in Raymond E. Brown *et al.* (eds.), *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1995), 652.

⁴⁹ Elliott, "Jesus Was Not an Egalitarian," 78-79.

dear: friends, family, and even life itself”.⁵⁰ In Jesus’ view, the new family was formed on the foundation of faith by listening and practising God’s word (Lk 8:21); it could be made up of many families, clans and tribes (Lk 14:26; Mt 10:37). The new family members are brothers/sisters and children of God (Mt 23:8-12; 6:9). Because of that new relationship with God and with all people, they had to set apart the limitations of their human familial relationship to proclaim a new family, a new heavenly kingdom of God in the making (Mk 3:31-35; 10:28-31; Lk 9:60). Without this goal, Jesus’ call for relativising values of the human family is irrelevant.

According to Hendrickx,⁵¹ the connection of the new Christian family with the discipleship is very apparent in the comparison of the Markan with the other synoptic texts about the reward for the disciples who left their families to follow Jesus (Mk 10:29-30, Mt 19:29; Lk 18:29-30). Indeed, this significant relationship can be seen in three aspects. Firstly, Mark was the only evangelist who added the promise of a new family to the reward when he confirmed that those who left their family would “receive a hundred times as much, houses, brothers, sisters, mothers”.⁵² Secondly, the Markan text showed another detail to highlight the new family. The second part of the statement which described the new family omitted the receiving of new fathers as the reward. The disciples left “mother, father”, but they would receive only “mothers”. This deliberate omission could be explained that God is the only father in the new family. It could be an indication of the anti-patriarchal stance which indicated the egalitarian nature of the ideal family or community as the description below shows:

Mark’s community is one where people are to be the last of all and servants of all (9:35; 10:42-45), where children, who often symbolize the powerless, are to be accepted (9:36; 10:13-16), where husbands and wives cannot treat each other as property to be discarded (10:1-12), and where wealth and its subsequent division it brings about make it almost impossible to enter the kingdom (10:17-27).⁵³

Thirdly, the Markan text combined the new family with persecutions. The addition of persecutions to the reward corresponded to the other Markan accounts about family relationship (Mk 3:20-35; 6:1-6; 13:12). These persecutions were an actual situation of

⁵⁰ Pamela A. Foukles, “Images of Family Life in the Scripture,” *The Way* 32 (1992), 89.

⁵¹ Hendrickx, *The Household of God*, 37-42; cf. S. C. Barton, “Family,” in Joel B. Green *et al.* (eds.), *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 226-227; Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Family: A Christian Social Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 30-32; Ahearne-Kroll, “Who Are my Mother and my Brothers?” 9-17.

⁵² Matthew and Luke merely mentioned that these people would receive “a hundred times” (Mt 19:29) or “many times as much” (Lk 18:30).

⁵³ Cahill, *Family: A Christian Social Perspective*, 40. Cf. Michael F. Trainor, *The Quest for Home: The Household in Mark’s Community* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 152-153.

the new family because its members considered obeying the will of God to be more important than doing the will of people. Members might live counter-culturally in regard to some obligations of their natural family, but their new way of life was not an anti-family attitude. Consequently, the nature of membership in the new family could lead to some persecutions. They are very closely connected with Jesus' persecution in many ways⁵⁴ and therefore they make Christian followers or disciples more like to Jesus.

The above explanation of Hendrickx is strengthened by Trainor's view about the household in Mark. Trainor commented that this Markan account (10:29-31) was "Mark's most explicit and unambiguous articulation of the essence of the Christian household".⁵⁵ According to Trainor, the significance of this renewed household was the divine value of the community which Jesus wanted to form. It was established on "an equality of kinship that includes women, men and children" which was unfavourable to contemporary society, but it provided an alternative structure characterised by God's presence in the community.⁵⁶ Trainor concluded that:

What is clearly absent in the redefinition of membership in Jesus' household is the *paterfamilias*. There will be no need for a father. This does not mean that male parents are absent from the community. On the contrary, through the restructure of power relationships with its focus on the least, servant and slave, the ultimate figure of power in the hierarchy of the Greco-Roman world, the *paterfamilias*, will have no part to play.⁵⁷

The new family that Jesus called for saw an end to the father as the source of life and provider for the family (Mk 10:29-30). Disciples establish a new relationship with God. God, the heavenly Father caring for all disciples, will replace the role of earthly fathers. Apart from that, Jesus still asked his disciples to renounce honorific titles, such as father, rabbi and master (Mt 23:8-12). Jesus criticised authoritarian attitudes as well as the temptation to seek ecclesiastical prestige. He asked his disciples to follow his own model of service. It is true that patriarchal domination is no longer permissible in the new family.

⁵⁴ The disciples will be handed over to councils (Mk 14:53), will be beaten (4:65), will stand before leaders and kings (15:1-5), and will be hated by everyone (15:13-14). However, the Spirit will be with them even during the darkest hour (1:10; 3:28-30).

⁵⁵ Trainor, *The Quest for Home*, 152.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 152-153. Cf. Elliott, "Jesus Was Not Egalitarian," 76-84. According to Elliott, socially and economically egalitarian as the understanding of modern people did not exist in the biblical texts. "What Jesus encouraged was not a 'radical egalitarianism' eradicating the family ... [but] he rather proclaimed a 'radical inclusivity' that relativised all conventional lines of discrimination and exclusion". So, one should understand 'equality' in the context of Elliott's argument.

⁵⁷ Trainor, *The Quest for Home*, 153.

Only motherliness, fraternity and childlikeness before God the Father must be practised in the Christian family.⁵⁸

Jesus' teaching about the new Christian family became the standard for the church. The early church welcomed widows, orphans (Acts 6:1, 1 Tim 5:3; Jas 1:27), and those who had to break with their biological families for the sake of discipleship (Mt 10:34-39; Mk 13:12-13; Lk 12:51-53). The church was considered as the disciple's true family because the church as family provided for those who wanted to live the way of renunciation and also supplied the protection and nurture for those who had no family. Indeed, the church "was their *familia*; [since] the patronage of the church put them under the *paterfamilias*, Jesus Christ".⁵⁹ In addition to the description of the Christian family in the context of discipleship, the New Testament also describes the community of Jesus' disciples or the church by using family terminology.

1.2.2 The Use of Family Terminology for the Church

The Christian family as a community of disciples, or the church, is also characterised by the use of family terminology, such as brother/sister, father and son. This terminology appears many times in the New Testament, particularly in Paul's letters.⁶⁰

The family terminology in the gospels and Paul's letters described the relationships in divine and human families. Jesus taught all people to call God "our Father" in prayer (Mt 6:9) and therefore they are God's children through salvation of Jesus Christ. Jesus also revealed that God is his Father as well as the Father of the disciples (Jn 20:17). As a matter of fact, Jesus is the Son, the beloved Son of the Father (Lk 10:21-22; Jn 17:1; Mt 3:17; Mk 1:11) and the disciples are brothers (Mt 23:8). Paul envisioned the church in Thessalonica as a divine family in which God is the father (1 Thess 1:1-3; 3:11-13; 2 Thess 1:1-2; 2:16). In this family, Jesus is the Son whom God has sent to help Christians become children of God (Rom 8:16-17; Gal 4:4-5) so that they are able to call God by the most intimate term "*Abba*, Father" (Gal 4:6). Paul, on some occasions, considered himself as a father (1 Thess 2:11; 1 Cor 4:14; Phlm 10), a mother (Gal 4:19) or a brother (1 Thess 3:22; 2 Cor 1:1) in relation to Christians to highlight his love for

⁵⁸ Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus and Community: The Social Dimension of Christian Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 45-48. Lohfink remarked that Matthew must be taken the sensitivity of honorific titles from Jesus who showed his unconditional service in his whole life (Lk 22:27; Mk 10:45; Jn 13:1-10).

⁵⁹ Hennessey, "Sexuality, Family, and the Life of Discipleship," 29.

⁶⁰ Vincent Branick, *The House Church in the Writings of Paul* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1989), 16; Robert Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community*, 3rd print. rev. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1998), 56. According to Branick, Paul referred to Christians as *adelphos* (114 times) and as *adelphos* (5 times). Paul also often used other terminologies, such as father, son, and child. See also Philip F. Esler, "Family Imagery and Christian Identity in Gal 5:13 to 6:10," in Halvor Moxnes (ed.), *Constructing Early Christian Families* (London: Routledge, 1997), 134-144.

them. He also called Christians brothers and sisters (Col 4:7; 1 Cor 8:11, 13; Eph 6:21).⁶¹ Thus the family terminology is used to reveal the close relationship and love of Christians with Jesus and God, and among church members.

Paul also used words and expressions which are most naturally located in a family context in order to emphasise the centrality of love between him and Christians and among Christians. He referred to Onesimus, Luke and some others as “beloved” (Rom 16:5, 9-9, 12; Col 4:7). He expressed a special affection with Christians and expected them to practise the same kind of loving relationships with one another (1 Cor 16:24; 1 Thess 3:12). Indeed, the centrality of Christian love or *agape* enabled Paul to summarise his understanding of Christian responsibility as “faith working through love” and to conclude that the only thing community members should owe to all people is “love for one another, for to love the other person is to fulfil the law” (Rom 13:8; Gal 5:6).⁶²

The New Testament mainly described Christians as members of God’s family in two complementary approaches. Paul described the new family in terms of adoption and of inheritance when Christians participated in God’s family.⁶³ The Pauline pastoral approach, along with that of Peter, highlighted the intimate family relationship of Christians with Jesus (Rom 8:4-17) who was their eldest brother (8:29) and so they had to live worthily of divine holiness (1 Pet 1:14-17). Thanks to this adoption, Christians or the children of God received the Spirit to call God “*Abba, Father*” (Rom 8:14-15). Indeed, they were legally adopted out of bondage (Gal 4:1-7) to become co-heirs with Christ and free people living in the Spirit (Gal 4:7; Rom 8:14-17). In other words, they were moulded again in the image of God (Rom 8:29). The Johannine approach was a more theological one. Christians are required to be reborn divinely by the Spirit (1 Jn 5:4; Jn 1:12-13; 3: 4-8) and to live as God’s children by breaking with sin, keeping the commandments as well as being on guard against antichrists and the world (1 Jn 3:1-4:6; 5:1-5).

Christians belong to God’s family/household not because of physical descent or blood relation, but by doing God’s will and sharing and practising Abraham’s faith (Mk 3:31-35; Jn 8:39-40). They are born in “water and the Holy Spirit” through baptism (Jn 3:3-8) and through faith in Jesus Christ to become God’s children regardless of race whether Jew or Greek, free or slave, male or female (Gal 3:25-29). Therefore sometimes members of

⁶¹ 1 Cor 15:58; Rom 15:14; Phil 3:1; 4:1.

⁶² Cf. Banks, *Paul’s Idea of Community*, 52-54.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 49-54.

God's household must give up their own house, brothers/sisters, father/mother for the sake of Jesus and the Gospel to form a new family of disciples of Jesus (Mk 10:29 -30).⁶⁴

The use of family or kinship terminology as a rhetorical device, particularly in Paul's letters, has elicited different comments from authors. Some argued that Paul used family terminology "to reinforce the community's highly stratified hierarchy of power and privilege".⁶⁵ In response to these comments, Hellerman acknowledged that religious symbols, including the family metaphor, were powerful and could be manipulated for the purpose of the users. However, he remarked that one should understand the intentions of Paul in the historical and cultural context where he lived and that one should not use a post-modern view to read the ancient texts.⁶⁶ With such a view, one will realise that the use of family terminology did not benefit community leaders but its members because the beneficiaries were the poor, the hungry, the enslaved, the imprisoned, the orphans and the widows. Therefore "brother-sister terminology in antiquity had nothing to do with hierarchy, power and privilege, but everything to do with equality, solidarity and generalised reciprocity".⁶⁷ In other words, family terminology as a rhetorical device needs to be carefully evaluated in order to avoid an uncritical understanding so that its meanings are appreciated. Family terminology was also used to describe the Christian way of life. Paul often used this terminology to challenge Christians in living the ideals of God's holy people by rejecting pagan life, such as injustice, defrauding and other evils (1 Cor 16:1-11) and by practising charity (2 Cor 8-9; Rom 12:10; Phlm 15-16).⁶⁸

The study of the new Christian family and the use of family terminology for the church showed that the relationship among church members and the characteristics of the church adopted the spirit and the structure of the Christian family. This new family also showed the universality of the church because it includes all peoples. Therefore the new family of Christians should overcome the negative aspects of the human family. Jesus' teaching about the new Christian family promotes mutual relationship and service in order to build the reign of God among the peoples. The presence of such familial characteristics in the early church will be detailed in the household of God.

⁶⁴ Neyrey, "Family," 311.

⁶⁵ Joseph H. Hellermann, *The Ancient Church as Family* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 221. He referred to Graham Shaw, *The Cost of Authority: Manipulation and Freedom in the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1983); Stephen Moore, *Poststructuralism and the New Testament: Derrida and Foucault at the Foot of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994); Elizabeth A. Castelli, *Imitating Paul: A Discourse of Power* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991).

⁶⁶ Hellermann, *The Ancient Church as Family*, 221.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 223; cf. Lohfink, *Jesus and Community*, 161-162.

1.3 The Household of God in the New Testament

The “household of God” is the church (1Tim 3:15; 1 Pet 4:17). In the New Testament, the term “the household of God” was used for three institutions: the house churches in Paul’s letters,⁶⁹ church organisations called the household of God in the Pastoral letters as well as in the *First Letter of Peter*,⁷⁰ and the theological and social setting of the early Christian communities in the gospels.⁷¹ The household of God is the church because God is its builder who entrusted to Jesus the authority over the household in which the Christians are members (Hb 3:3-6). The household of God as a spiritual temple (Eph 2:19-22; 1 Pet 2:3) was also applied to the Christian community. Indeed, the use of the household of God as the Christian community is “an integral part of the primitive Christian *kerygma*”.⁷² This section will describe the household as the background for the study of the house church in Paul’s letters and the household of God in the Pastoral letters. These two structures are studied separately because they differ in terms of time and leadership.

1.3.1 The Households in the Greco-Roman Societies

According to Trainor,⁷³ the description of Hellenistic households appeared in the writings of the key Greek philosophers, such as Pythagoras (born ca. 570BCE), Plato (428-328BCE) and Aristotle (384-322BCE). These philosophers discussed households on the premise that the human person was a political and social being. The identity of a person was fashioned by the organisation of the city-state as well as the household. In particular, Aristotle described partnership in organisations⁷⁴ and household management. He distinguished three kinds of household relationships: master and slave, husband and wife, father and children.⁷⁵

⁶⁹ 1 Cor 16:19; Rom 16:3, 5; Phlm 2; Col 4:15; cf. Michel, “*Oikos*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, MI: WM B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), 125; Goetzmann, “House, Build, Manage, Steward,” 250.

⁷⁰ Michel, “*Oikos*,” 130. The ecclesiological meaning of the household of God is very clear in 1 Tm 3:15 which states that “but in case I should be delayed, I want you to know how people ought to behave in God’s household – that is, in the church of the living God”; 1 Pet 4:17.

⁷¹ Mk 10:29-31; Mt 10:14; 17:24-25; Lk 1:27, 69; 13:35; Acts 2:1-4; 46-47; Jn 4:53; 12:2. For the detailed description of the household of God in Mark, Matthew, Luke and John see Hendrickx, *The Household of God*, 29-104; cf. Goetzmann, “House, Build, Manage, Steward,” 248-256. According to Goetzmann, “the most frequent use of both *oikos* and *oikia* is in the literal sense of house (Mt 2:11; 7:27; 9:7; Mk 7:30) and in the simple metaphorical sense of family, household (Mt 13:57; Mk 6:4; Jn 4:53; 1 Cor 1:16; 16:15; 2 Tim 1:16; 4:19).

⁷² Goetzmann, “House, Build, Manage, Steward,” 248; Michel “*Oikos*,” 126.

⁷³ Trainor, *The Quest for Home*, 37-52.

⁷⁴ *Politics*, I.1.1; cited in Trainor, *The Quest for Home*, 44; Carnes Lord (trans.), *Aristotle the Politics* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 35.

⁷⁵ *Politics*, I.3.1-2; cited in Trainor, *The Quest for Home*, 46; Lord (trans.), *Aristotle the Politics*, 38.

Cicero (106-43BCE) commented that the duties of a person begin with his/her country, parents, children, the whole household (*domus*) and finally his/her kinsmen.⁷⁶ He also typified the Roman household consisting of husband, wife and their dependents, which means, children born to the couple as well as those of previous marriages, current and former slaves with their children. In this context the head of a household is the father who loved his spouse and his children.⁷⁷

From the above sources one knows that the Greco-Roman household, comprising immediate household members, marginal resident members and clients, was a social and political unit in the first century CE.⁷⁸ Household members related to one another by a relationship of dependence and subordination, not of kinship as in the modern nuclear family. Furthermore, the Greco-Roman household was a patriarchal and hierarchical institution whose head was the father who had an absolute authority over his wife, children, slaves, hired workers and, in some cases, even clients. He was responsible for the protection of all household members and, in return, the latter were subordinated and expected to obey him. The relationships between the head and the members were prescribed in the household code or management. The household code mainly featured the relationships of master and slave, of husband and wife, and of father and children. In other words, the relationships within the household “are considered under the rubrics of ruling and being ruled”.⁷⁹

The Jews who lived in New Testament times were influenced, to some extent, by the social political organisation of that period. The Jewish household followed the structure of the Israelite family in the Old Testament and underwent very few changes during the first centuries CE.⁸⁰ Their household was similar to that of the Greeks in terms of membership and patriarchal structure; however, it was the primary place for the transmission of the faith. It was in that context that the Christian household developed to become a place of gathering and praying. According to Osiek and Balch, there were two

⁷⁶ Branick, *The House Church*, 37; *De Officiis*, 1, 17, 58; M. T. Griffin and E. M. Atkins (eds.), *Cicero: On Duties* (UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 9; 24.

⁷⁷ Trainor, *The Quest for Home*, 60-64; cf. Cicero, *De Finibus*, 5.65; J. Annas (ed.), *Cicero: On Moral Ends* (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 139-140. According to Trainor, Cicero's vision of the Roman household is a counterbalance to the hierarchical household that permeated the literature.

⁷⁸ Household is the translation of *oikos/oikia* in Greek and *domus* or *familia* in Latin. Cf. Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: the Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), 30; David C. Verner, *The Household of God* (Chico, CA: Scholar Press, 1983), 27-78; Trainor, *The Quest for Home*, 37-64.

⁷⁹ Verner, *The Household of God*, 84. Verner summarised the description of the household code from *Politics* 1253b 1-14 of Aristotle. Cf. James D.G. Dunn, “The Household Rules in the New Testament,” in Stephen C. Barton (ed.), *The Family in Theological Perspective* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 43-63.

⁸⁰ Verner, *The Household of God*, 44-47, Branick, *The House Church*, 45-46.

types of houses where the earliest Christians could live. These served as places of worship: *domus*⁸¹ and *insula*⁸². Some houses of wealthy Christians were turned into places for religious activities. That was the origin of the house church.

1.3.2 The House Churches

The house church is the term used for the place of worship and the ecclesial structure in the early church. Christians gathered in private houses of wealthy Christians for religious celebrations. This familial environment made them call it the house church. Indeed, the house of a family functioned for the church as a setting for the gathering of household members as well as those from other households. The house church as an ecclesial structure did not exist beyond the first century, but as a place of Christian worship it developed and lasted until the middle or the end of the second century.⁸³

According to Lee and Cowan,⁸⁴ the house churches had four essential characteristics that made them truly a church. They were: *koinonia* (community),⁸⁵ *diakonia* (service/mission), *kerygma* (gospel-rooted proclamation) and *leiturgia* (eucharist). Members of the house church formed a community in which they were concerned about each other's welfare and had a sense of belonging, of togetherness and of interconnectedness with other house churches. Indeed, the house church promoted a strong sense of community and broke down socio-cultural barriers. The head of the household and other members of the household church served each other's material and social needs since they were brothers and sisters in Christ. Such divine brotherhood/sisterhood urged them to serve even people in the larger world of society.

⁸¹ Osiek and Balch, *Families*, 6-19. A typical *domus* consisted of fauces, shops, *atrium*, *impluvium*, *conbiculum*, *tablinum*, *adron*, peristyle, *triclinium* and *oecus*. For a detailed description of *domus* and *insula*, see Osiek and Balch, *Families*, 5-35. A "*domus*" usually belonged to wealthy households living in less populated areas since it took a great deal of space for its construction.

⁸² A typical *insula* consisted of shops, lightwells, well, latrine and balcony. An *insula* could also be a place of gathering for Christians if no member of the community had a *domus*, which was probably often the case of the early church, although there has not been yet archaeological evidence for Christian habitation in *insulae*. The Christian community might gather in one or two rooms of an *insula*.

⁸³ Osiek and Balch, *Families*, 35.

⁸⁴ Bernard J. Lee and Michael A. Cowan, *Dangerous Memories: House Churches and our American Story* (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1986), 24-28.

⁸⁵ Cf. World Council of Churches (WCC), *The Nature and Purpose of the Church* (Switzerland: WCC/Faith and Order, 1998), 25. *Koinonia* is often translated as communion or participation. According to Faith and Order Paper no. 181 (1998), it evokes "the nature and quality of the relationship of God's people to God and to one another and to the created order, [which implies in the images of]: the people of God (1 Pet 2:9-10); the flock (Jn 10:14); the vine (Isa 5, Jn 15); the temple of the Lord (1 Cor 3:16-17); the bride of Christ (Rev 21:2; Eph 5:25-32); the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:27); the household of God (Heb 3:1-6); the new covenant community (Heb 3:8-10); the city of God - the new Jerusalem (Isa 61; Rev 21). The term *koinonia* expresses the reality to which these images refer". So *koinonia* can be translated as *community*. This translation is also used by Lohfink in *Jesus and Community* when he states that "we could do this [studying the praxis of togetherness], for example, with reference to the concept of *community* (*koinonia*), which was highly significant for the early church". Cf. Lohfink, *Jesus and Community*, 99.

During their gatherings, they proclaimed Jesus' gospel, shared with each other his teaching as well as their experience about the gospel and celebrated the eucharistic meal.

The house church is particularly referred to in Paul's letters although it was also mentioned in various New Testament accounts.⁸⁶ Paul often had a greeting to the house church either at the end or the beginning of his letters (1 Cor 16:19; Rom 16:3, 5; Phl 2; Col 4:15). In these greetings was found a repeated phrase *he kat' oikon* (plus a possessive pronoun) *ekklēsia*, which might be translated as "the assembly at N's house".⁸⁷ Such a term shows two significant features of the house church: the community dimension and the lay origin of the house churches.

Early Christians gathered into communities, but Christianity in the first century and afterwards was not recognised as an official religion in the Roman Empire.⁸⁸ This new movement did not offer animal sacrifices as Judaism offered in the temple and also did not have sufficient membership to build separate temples.⁸⁹ Christians celebrated the eucharist in a common meal when they gathered. Only in the middle or the end of the second century did the eucharistic liturgy expand in terms of ritual, to the extent that it needed a special place.⁹⁰ The Jewish Christians continued to go to their synagogues as in the case of the early Christians in Jerusalem. The Hellenistic-Jewish Christians gradually developed and grew in some other places, but they were merely Gentiles or new converts and so did not take the decisive roles in building special places for worship. In addition, Christians were also accused as criminals and were abused because they no longer lived the pagan lifestyle (1 Pet 2:12, 15; 4:3-4). Therefore Christians made use of their private houses or their household buildings as the first centres of church life⁹¹ or the place "where the first Christians met, prayed, and celebrated the Lord's Supper".⁹² In other words, a community of Christians or the house church was formed from people of

⁸⁶ Raymond E. Brown, *Biblical Exegesis and Church Doctrine* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1984), 123-126. Brown mentioned the existence of Johannine and other non-Pauline house churches in the early church. See also Rafael Aguirre, "Early Christian House Churches," *Theology Digest* 32 (1985), 151-155. Aguirre wrote of the house church in Pauline writings and in the Synoptic gospels; Elliot, *A Home for the Homeless*, 201-208. Elliot mentioned that the *1 Peter* showed much indirect evidence of the house churches, such as the prominent use of *oikos* and its paronyms or family terminology.

⁸⁷ Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 75.

⁸⁸ Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "House Churches and the Eucharist," *The Bible Today* 22 (1984), 33; cf. E. A. Judge, "The Social Identity of the First Christians: A Question of Method in Religious Studies," *The Journal of Religious History* 11 (1980), 201-217. Judge argues that describing early Christian groups as religion would amount to "mislocating them under ... an unhistorical rubric."

⁸⁹ Harrington, *The Church according to the New Testament*, 49.

⁹⁰ Osiek and Balch, *Families*, 35.

⁹¹ Murphy-O'Connor, "House Churches," 33.

⁹² Harrington, *The church according to the New Testament*, 51.

different backgrounds including Jew and Gentile, slave and free, man and woman who adopted Christian brotherhood/sisterhood when they joined the house church.

Christians of the house churches in the early church seriously practised and emphasised such togetherness with reference to the concept of community (*koinonia*) in many ways and in various situations. They lived in harmony; they welcomed and greeted one another with a holy kiss (Rom 12:16); they waited on and had the same care for one another (1 Cor 11:33). They bore one another's burdens, comforted one another and built one another up (Gal 6:2; 1 Thess 5:11).⁹³ Indeed, they particularly participated in their liturgy. The praxis of togetherness among Christians corresponds to Paul's missionary approach since he very often spoke of building up the community in connection with the responsibility which all Christians have for one another in their community. Indeed, togetherness constituted the nature of a community.

Lay Christians were the founders of the house churches in Paul's letters. Men and women were household owners and heads of the house churches. In particular, women were among the most prominent missionaries and leaders in the house churches (Acts 17:4, 12; 18:2-4; Phlm 2).⁹⁴ Aquila and Prisca in Rome established their house church before Paul came to Rome.⁹⁵ They were also responsible for the house church in Ephesus. Probably, Paul did not found any of the four house churches to which he sent his greetings.⁹⁶ According to Lucan accounts in *Acts*, Paul first went to proclaim the good news to the Jews in synagogues. However, having little success, he then shifted to establishing himself with an influential family in a given area and converted the members of such families. These families became Paul's bases in developing his missionary work which could be called house mission strategy (Acts 16:13-34; 17:2-9; 18:1-11). In cities or places having many Christians there was more than one house church (Rom 16:5, 14, 15). These house churches were connected to one another in a networking of house churches called the local church or assembly.

The network system of the house churches showed that the house churches had a strong ecclesial relationship in the early church, even when a single house church existed in a given area. This ecclesial relationship of the house churches can be recognised through activities like hosting travelling missionaries (Rom 16:1-2; Phil 2:27-

⁹³ Lohfink, *Jesus and Community*, 99-100. Other references to living the praxis of togetherness are: Rom 12:10, 16; Gal 5:13; 1 Thess 5:13, 15; Eph 4:2, 32; 5:21; Col 3:13; 1 Pet 1: 22: 4:9; 5:5.

⁹⁴ Cf. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1983), 177-184.

⁹⁵ Paul referred to Stephanas and his household as the "first fruits of Achaia". So, it is supposed that Aquila and Prisca had been Christians before Paul met them.

⁹⁶ Branick, *The House Church*, 14.

29), exchanging letters (1 Thess 5:27; 2 Cor 1:1; Col 4:16), helping each other in financial relief (Rom 15:25-28; 1 Cor 16:1-4; 2 Cor 8-9). The collection for the community of Jerusalem was also evidence of the central and unifying role of this community over other communities. The latter were indebted to the former for its spiritual heritage.⁹⁷ Overall, the house churches sought doctrinal and pastoral guidance from Paul and leaders assigned by the apostle. These activities between the house churches formed their ecclesial foundation and strengthened their ecclesial status. However, such a central structure did not destroy the partnership or the collaborations of local people.

The management of the house church followed the household code of Greco-Roman society with some Christian adaptations. In the Christian household code (Col 3:13-4:1, Eph 5:22-6:9; 1 Pet 2:18-3:7),⁹⁸ the submission of wives to husbands as well as the obedience of children to parents and of slaves to masters were considered as submission and obedience to God or to the Lord. The household code was also imposed on Christians gathered in the house church. However, with the influence of the civil and religious associations, hierarchical distinctions in the house church management often became blurred or were broken up.⁹⁹ The household code was also used as the criteria for discipline in the gatherings or for the elections of elders or deacons in the local church or the household of God.¹⁰⁰

The implications of the Greco-Roman household code in the house church or the conformity of the latter to the former might be criticised for the similarities between these two household codes. However, there were some differences between these two codes. Dunn acknowledged that both the Christian and the Greco-Roman households shared some similar concerns about the household management.¹⁰¹ Indeed, the Jewish and Christian features of the household code exist in Col 3:18-4:1. The former is characterised by the concern for the weaker members, which means the wife, the

⁹⁷ Hendrickx, *The Household of God*, 25; cf. Branick, *The House Church*, 29-33.

⁹⁸ The household code was also mentioned in 1 Tim 2:8-15; 6:1-2; Titus 2:1-10; and other Christian writings such as Did 4:9-11; Barn 19:5-7; 1 Clem 21:6-9; Ignatius, *Pol* 4:1-5:2; and Policarp, *Phil* 4:2-3.

⁹⁹ Schillebeeckx, *The Church With a Human Face*, 47: "Therefore it was not the Graeco-Roman codes of the *oikos* but the form or organisations of the more democratic or egalitarian (religious and non-religious) *collegia* or associations which lent itself as a model for the earlier Christian house communities"; Branick, *The House Church*, 46-49. Branick studied the impact of the Hellenistic private cults and social associations on the formation and the activities of the Christian household.

¹⁰⁰ For instance, women should be quiet and respectful during the instruction of the assembly (1 Tim 2:11-12). The presiding elder must have an impeccable character. Husband of one wife, he must be temperate, discreet and courteous in order to manage well his own household because he cannot take care of the church without knowing how to manage his household (1 Tim 2:2-6).

¹⁰¹ James D. G. Dunn, "The Household Rules in the New Testament," in Stephen C. Barton (ed.), *The Family in Theological Perspective* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996), 54-56. Christians could be persecuted because they advocated equality between men and women (Gal 3:28; Rom 16:1-3).

children, and the slave are often addressed directly, while the latter by the sevenfold reference to the Lord, that is, Christ.¹⁰² Dunn also explained two reasons for the practice of the Christian household code. First, the adaptation of the Christian communities to the household code was helpful in avoiding persecution since Christianity was viewed with suspicion as a new religion which might destroy the social order.¹⁰³ Secondly, the implication of the household code was encouraging early Christians to fulfil both secular as well as Christian responsibilities in their family because it is noted that “to become a member of the new family of Jesus did not justify neglect of household responsibilities”.¹⁰⁴ In other words, the household code needs to be understood in terms of apologetic and evangelistic purposes as Dunn concluded that:

...[I]nsofar as we can say that the common presence of *Haustafeln* across such a spread of Christian literature indicates a common concern, we can also say fairly confidently that shared concern included the concern for well ordered households as an integral part of being the church and of effective witness to the wider community.¹⁰⁵

Cahill pointed out that the main difference in the Christian household code compared with the Greco-Roman one, was the christological motivation or the Christian characteristic when household members carried out the household code.¹⁰⁶ The fulfilment of the household duty was given a specifically christological motivation as mentioned in the letters to Colossians and Ephesians because it was often encouraged that “it is Christ the Lord that you are serving” (Col 3:23-24). Cahill realised the positive effects of the Christian house code, but she also acknowledged the negative ones which came from the values and the structures of the patriarchal household in the house church. Besides, Osiek also mentioned that the Christian household code omitted the comments on household finance compared with the Hellenistic household code. Therefore she concluded that “the dominance-submission pattern is still there, but it has been radically changed, from treatise on male dominance to exhortation to mutual relationship in Christ”.¹⁰⁷ Thus the patriarchal characteristic of the Greco-Roman

¹⁰² Ibid., 52-53; cf. Col 3:18, 20, 22, 23, 24; 4:1.

¹⁰³ Dunn, “The Household Rules in the New Testament,” 57.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 56.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 58.

¹⁰⁶ Cahill, *Family: A Christian Social Perspective*, 40-41.

¹⁰⁷ Carolyn Osiek, “The Bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:22-33): A Problematic Wedding,” *BTB* 32 (2002), 30-31.

household code, which was problematic for the house church, was adapted in a Christian way for the benefit of the early church.

The house churches in Paul's letters showed some significant contributions to the development of the early church. The house church was made up of Jews and Gentiles of various backgrounds offering a gathering place for Jews living in *diaspora* and became "a home for the homeless" besides its function as a household of faith. This sense of support was not only a psychological one, but it was also a real support. Therefore it promoted brotherhood/sisterhood among the new Christians through the celebration of the eucharist at home. It also fostered local responsibility for the church through using the practice of household duties for church leadership and providing the opportunity for the gradual overcoming of socio-cultural barriers and for the promotion of equality. In particular, the house church was an appropriate place for catechesis as Paul considered the house church as the "household of faith" (Gal 6:6). The influences of the house church were significant as seen in Hendrickx's summary of the success of Paul:

Paul relied heavily on the use of the Greek household as a natural focal point for the Christian community. This "extended family" helped foster the family covenant bonds of the new faith. It provided an ideal setting for the development of Christian leadership. It was also helpful in launching the long struggle to remove the deep social barriers which divided the pagan and Jewish world.¹⁰⁸

The house church had its own values in the early church inferring that it cannot be normative for the church today. However, the activities in promoting the ecclesiality of the house church should become the model for the church as well as for Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs). Banks commented that the activities of the house church characterised an organic rather than an institutional relationship among Paul's communities.¹⁰⁹ The Pauline approach in strengthening the ecclesiality should be promoted in the church so that BECs' model becomes a new way of a participatory church.

However, besides the hierarchical and patriarchal issues of the household, some problems were also reported in the house church, such as factionalism and tension between Christian and social ethos.¹¹⁰ The fact that there were various groups gathered in one house church led to some forms of group rivalry as mentioned in 1 Cor 11:17-34. The practice of the elites in eating and drinking beforehand damaged seriously the

¹⁰⁸ Hendrickx, *The Household of God*, 27.

¹⁰⁹ Banks, *Paul's Idea*, 42.

¹¹⁰ Harrington, *The Church according to the New Testament*, 51.

nature and the orderliness of the Lord's Supper. The social stratification between the minority rich and the majority poor in Corinth was the cause of the tension.¹¹¹ Similarly, the mixture of membership of the house church, such as women and slaves, gradually caused tensions with the dominant cultural ethos of the patriarchal household (Phlm 8-21). Moreover, there was also the problem of the house church leadership when it developed in terms of membership. Some Christians who were proud of their spiritual gifts of speaking in tongues or *glossolalia* which they saw as superior to other charisms, failed to build up the community as a whole (1 Cor 12-14). Fuellenbach commented on the situation of the house church towards the end of the first century as follows:

The church adjusted itself fast to Greco-Roman culture and the 'household of freedom' soon belonged to the past. The patriarchal pattern became the pattern not only for structuring the house church but for the universal church as well.¹¹²

The house churches were well developed in the transitional period of the early church. They contributed to the building up of the early church while Paul and other apostles were still alive, but they also needed to be strengthened by another model or structure which was more congruent with the development of the early church in the later times.

1.3.3 The Household of God

The household of God (1Tim 3:15) is a preferred biblical reference to the family of God.¹¹³ This reference in the Pastoral letters is significant since these letters about the local church, probably in Ephesus, were written around the 80s or 90s when Christianity went through a transitional period.¹¹⁴ During that time most of the Twelve died, and some ecclesial structures, such as bishops, deacons and elders developed in order to cope with a new situation in church history.

The church is described as "the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and protector of the truth" (1Tim 3:15).¹¹⁵ This description evokes two images: family/household and house/building. First, the church consists of people who make the household: father, mother, children and grandparents as well as servants and other household members. They live in the spirit of the new Christian family since they are

¹¹¹ Abraham J. Malherbe, *Social Aspects of Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 71-84.

¹¹² Fuellenbach, *Church: Community for the Kingdom*, 256; cf. Hendrickx, *The Household of God*, 129-130.

¹¹³ Cf. *Instrumentum laboris* 25; Hendrickx, *The Household of God*, 109-110. According to Hendrickx, the terms *oikos* occurs eight times (1 Tim 3:4, 5, 12, 15; 5:4; 2 Tim 1:16; 4:19; Titus 1:11) and *oikia* three times (1 Tim 5:13; 2 Tim 2:20; 3:6).

¹¹⁴ Frederick J. Cwiekowski, *The Beginnings of the Church* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1988), 159.

¹¹⁵ Cf. William D. Mounce, *World Biblical Commentary: Pastoral Epistles* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publisher, 2000), 213. The quotation is the translation of *World Biblical Commentary*.

God's household. It implies the ideas of order and functional responsibility in the household. Secondly, the church is also seen in architectural terms with reference to the term *oikos* or house. This aspect is more explicit with the phases following the imagery of the household. The church is the pillar and the support of faith as the firm foundation for the truth. Therefore the Pastoral letters put "a heavy emphasis on church officers as guardians of the deposit of faith and as guarantors of the Church's good order and respectability in society" because the main purpose of the Pastorals was to deal with false teachings.¹¹⁶ However, both meanings can be implied in the metaphor "household" because they apparently appear in the reference as the intention of Paul, that is, the church is the temple of God and as such it houses the family of God.¹¹⁷

The imagery of the household implies the connection made between a householder and the church (1 Tim 3:4-5). The former has to treat different members of the congregation as household/family members, not with a worldly but with Christian spirit, since they are members of God's household which is the church of the living God (1 Tim 3:15; 5:1-2). The householder should know that the community gathered in his/her house is not constituted by the will and the decision of people, but it is based on God's call.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, the imagery of the household of God implies that of intimate family as described in Eph 2:19. The Gentiles become members of God's household. They are not only fellow-citizens with Jewish Christians but also children in God's family. The term "household of God" implies the relationships of the household members with God, the heavenly Father, and with one another. Indeed, these implications of the household image lead to the conclusion that the notion of the household in the *Pastorals* "is applied to the church in order to encourage appropriate and responsible behaviour (1 Tim 3:15; 2 Tim 2:20-21)".¹¹⁹ In other words, the positive advantage of the household image is that "it develops the notion of care for those who are needy within the congregation – in particular, indigent widows – in the same way as a household cares, or should care, for all of its members".¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ Harrington, *The Church according to the New Testament*, 161; cf. Mounce, *World Biblical Commentary: Pastoral Epistles*, 220-221.

¹¹⁷ Mounce, *World Biblical Commentary: Pastoral Epistles*, 220.

¹¹⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 221.

¹¹⁹ Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 211-212; Robert A. Wild, "The Pastoral Letter" in Brown *et al.* (eds.), *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 897-898. Wild states that God's house [or household] is "a biblical phrase referring to Israel but more often to the temple in Jerusalem. Here it also deliberately reflects the familial character of the early Christian communities, which typically met in private homes".

¹²⁰ I. Howard Marshall, "Congregation and Ministry in the Pastoral Epistles," in Richard N. Longenecker (ed.), *Community Formation in the Early Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2002), 114.

The structure of the household of God implies that of offices or ministries. The Pastoral letters show very convincing evidence of the ministry of bishops or presiding elders, deacons and elders (1 Tim 3:2; 5:17; Titus 1:6-7). It might also include deaconesses (1 Tim 3:11). Indeed, the *Pastorals* stressed the important role of local church leaders and gave them practical advice. Such ministries are necessary for the local church to be faithful to apostolic teachings. However, it did not describe the relationships among the bishop, deacons and elders of the local church. It is supposed that a bishop was the presiding elder of a council of elders in the congregation whose roles were not clearly identified (1 Tim 4:14). These ambiguities of the relationships between the offices led Verner to conclude that it appears that “the Pastorals’ author is not interested in describing and defending a particular ecclesiastical structure”.¹²¹

Church leaders, according to the *Pastorals*, were encouraged to follow the management of the household of God in carrying out their leadership. This management of the household of God was mainly based on the Greco-Roman household code, but the latter was practised in a Christian spirit, that is, the spirit of service or stewardship. The household code or management (*oikonomia*) either determined the reciprocal duties among household members or the responsibility and service of the leaders to the household of which they were in charge (1 Tim 2:8-15; 6:1-2; Titus 2:1-10). The leader of a household was called the household manager or steward (*oikonomos*). Christians who received gifts of a special grace had to use these gifts for the service of the community as good and responsible stewards. The elders (*presbyteroi*) in the community of Titus were to possess the qualities of good household management in order to become stewards of the household of God (Titus 1:5-9). The bishop (*episkopos*) in the community of Timothy and Titus (1 Tim 3:1-5; Titus 1:7) was the chief servant of the household which was analogically compared with the church. Indeed, the qualities of the bishop, deacons and elders, particularly those of service, in the community were emphasised in the formation of the managers of the household who were the stewards.

Some authors argued that the metaphor of the household and the household codes used in the *Pastorals* emphasise the structure of the church as a household in the Greco-

Cf. Richard N. Longenecker, “Paul’s Vision of the Church and Community Formation in his Major Missionary Letters,” in Longenecker (ed.), *Community Formation in the Early Church*, 77.

¹²¹ Verner, *The Household of God*, 150; Frances Young, *The Theology of the Pastoral Letters* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 100-114. Young concluded that “it is not clear that the *episkopos* has the kind of authority acquired later, but given the structures and assumptions of hierarchically ordered society, the implication is that he is ‘the chief cook and bottle-washer’, under the authority of God”.

Roman pattern which was hierarchical and patriarchal.¹²² In particular, Fiorenza highlights the patriarchalization of the church in the *Pastorals* by pointing out the subordination of women, wives, children and slaves to the head of the household as well as the stratification of church leadership according to age and gender qualifications.¹²³ However, according to Mounce, it is inappropriate for such an over-emphasis on the household metaphor because the metaphor of the household is relatively minor in the *Pastorals* and the household codes are commonly used in the letters of the New Testament.¹²⁴ The household metaphor implies the house church where Christians met in homes, but it is not used to enforce a rigid structure on the local churches in Ephesus and Crete.¹²⁵ The householders or the presbyter-bishops have to behave like fathers who take responsibility for a home, administer its goods and provide example and discipline. Their main tasks are to ensure “stability and close relationship similar to that of a family home [which] will hold the church together against the disintegrating forces that surround or invade it”.¹²⁶ So the early church as described in the *Pastorals* started developing some ministries; they were not totally hierarchical structures as in the Greco-Roman household.

The *Instrumentum laboris* of the African Synod, which provided some biblical references to the household of God, justifies the unfavourable argument for the hierarchical and patriarchal attitude of the householder in God’s family. According to this document as well as the Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*, the church as God’s family must promote positive values of the family and reject its negative ones.¹²⁷ Thus authoritarianism and patriarchy cannot be the attitudes of members of the church as God’s household. The gospel values and family spirit are those which the church wants to develop when it is modelled on the family of God or the Trinity.

¹²² Jouette M. Bassler, *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 73-74; cf. Verner, *Household of God*, 186. Verner argues that the use of *oikos* is to “bolster a hierarchical social structure in the church that is being threatened by disruptive forces”.

¹²³ Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 288-291.

¹²⁴ In the New Testament epistles the household code was used with some Christian adaptations as described earlier in the Christian household code.

¹²⁵ Mounce, *World Biblical Commentary: Pastoral Epistles*, 221. It is noted that the household metaphor is one of the five important themes in the *Pastorals* to understand the church described in this letter and that the household codes is also mentioned in Paul’s letters (Col 3:18 - 4:1; Eph 5:22 - 6:9). The five themes are: (1) a distinction between true and false teachings, (2) a promotion of cooperation with the state and Greco-Roman cultures, (3) the offices of bishops and deacon, (4) the household of God, (5) a link between charism and official ministry. Cf. Harrington, *The Church according to the New Testament*, 94-96; Brown, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind*, 34.

¹²⁶ Brown, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind*, 34.

¹²⁷ Cf. Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for Africa, *Instrumentum laboris* 25; EIA 63.

In addition, the teaching function of householders in the church and the family as the household of faith was highlighted and appreciated in the early church. The model of the household of God is good at preserving faith and tradition and passing them on to its members, particularly in families. These functions of the church as God's household might be criticised for only being favourable to those who are the head of the household and for not being open enough to learn from those outside the church.¹²⁸ However, they show advantages in faith formation in Christian families in many places, such as in Vietnam. As a matter of fact, the Vietnamese bishops chose the model of the church as family for this reason and have encouraged parents and family members to fulfil and renew their task in faith formation in order to strengthen Christian families.¹²⁹

1.4 Conclusion

This chapter identified the biblical understanding and foundation of the concept "the church as the family of God". In the Old Testament it was found that the Israelite family was an extended family model consisting of family members, marginal members and property. The Israelite family also disclosed some positive and negative values such as shared roles, communitarian participation and male dominance. Therefore the Israelite family functions and values should be interpreted from a theological rather than sociological perspective. This centrality of the Israelite family structure and relationship was a significant vehicle to describe the loving relationships between God and Israel. Indeed, the family/marriage metaphors and references were found in many accounts of the Old Testament describing God's relationship with people and also the duty of Israel towards God in the covenant context. The metaphor "the family of God" implied an ecclesiological meaning because the family of God was also chosen to become God's people in the Old Testament. The concept also described the vertical dimension of communion with God and the horizontal dimension of the interpersonal fellowship in the family of God.

Jesus in the *Synoptics* called for a new family which surpassed all social differences or divisions for the purpose of developing the reign of God. It was found that the terminology of family was used significantly by Paul to identify the relationship between church members based on the spirit of the new family of Christ. Thus the concept of

¹²⁸ Cf. Luke Timothy Johnson, "After the Big Chill. Intellectual Freedom & Catholic Theologians," *Commonweal* 133 (2006), 12.

¹²⁹ Cf. VBC, *Thư mục vụ năm 2002* [The 2002 Pastoral Letter], no. 2; Marie Nguyễn Thị Bạch Tuyết, "La transmission de la foi dans la famille vietnamienne," *Lumen Vitae* 60 (2005), 439-449. The task of the family in faith formation needs to adapt to the changes in Vietnamese society today.

family used exclusively for the Israelite people in the Old Testament became an inclusive concept for all peoples in the church as the family of God. Certainly, the latter metaphor includes all the nations in the church since all are the children of God in God's reign.

The "house church" in the early church was founded basically on the household structure of Greco-Roman and Jewish societies. The "house church" made good use of the household structure and management for the purpose of contextualisation into society and of the development of the early church. However, a close study of the household of God pointed out that the Christian or christological perspective was explicitly shown in the Christian household. Such a distinct Christian orientation was still found in the structure of the household of God which was characterised by the offices of bishops, deacons and elders as described in the *Pastorals*. These titles or positions must be understood in the context of the early church which was different from the understanding of the later periods as well as that of the modern church. Indeed, leadership in the house church and the household of God generally followed the model of stewardship and service which is a challenge for the church today. Such a leadership should be promoted when the church advocates the church as God's family. Indeed, genuine love of and care for one another which rise above hierarchical order and respect, are the main characteristics of the Israelite family/household or the communities of the baptised.

Overall, the Israelite family and the household of God showed a strong biblical foundation which benefits the ecclesiological concept of the church as the family of God in terms of understanding and implication. Both the metaphors of Israel and the church as God's family emphasised the relationships of brotherhood/sisterhood and stewardship which are modelled either on God's relationships to people or Jesus' teachings on the new Christian family. The household of God is the church. Such family relationships or love must be applied to the church as the family of God in order to overcome some shortcomings of the Israelite family and the house church which might become problematic when they are applied uncritically to the church today. Thus the model of these institutions may not be developed without adaptation to the modern era, but it may provide a direction in implementing the ecclesiological concept of the church as the family of God in the modern church.

The metaphors of Israel as the family of God and of the church as the household of God also demonstrated that the Israelites and the early church successfully integrated themselves into their socio-cultural contexts. This integration occurred with critical adaptation and Christian orientation. Thus the shortcomings of the Israelite family as well as the Greco-Roman household were overcome. Such integration must become the

model for the church today in developing the model of the church as the family of God. The church needs to be inculturated into socio-cultural structures for the benefit of local Christians while it maintains its Christian identity. It is in this context that the model of inculturation and leadership of the early church as the household of God provides significant lessons for the church today.

The development of the biblical concept of the church as the family of God in the church after the apostolic period will be the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

THE THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH AS THE FAMILY OF GOD

The biblical metaphor of the church as the family of God has been developing over the centuries. The model of the church as family of God and as mother appears frequently in the patristic writings from the earliest times, and continues to be influential in church documents. In particular, the concept of the church as the family of God has drawn much attention from the local churches in Latin America, Africa and Asia, due not only to the importance of the family in the church but also to the various cultures concerned. It has emerged as a theme requiring further critical examination.¹

The richness of the concept of the family of God is both theologically and pastorally productive. On the one hand, as an ecclesiological concept, it derives from the Trinity, the divine community of persons, and consequently affects our understanding of the church and its mission. On the other hand, the notion of the church as family is directly related to the human experience of family; and this can be explored in a variety of cultural, historical and social settings.

This chapter examines the concept of the church as the family of God in the writings of Church Fathers, in the liturgy, and in church documents since the Second Vatican Council, particularly in relation to local and regional churches. Through the discussion of the concept in these documents it also considers the theological developments that have taken place in this regard.

2.1 The Ecclesiological Image of Family and Mother in Patristic Writings

Rather than attempting a comprehensive survey of patristic sources, the discussion will be confined to a selection of images in relationship to the theme. These images appear in the patristic writings often in a pastoral context, rather than as formal theological expositions.²

¹ Cf. *EIA* 63.

² Eric Plumer, "The Development of Ecclesiology: Early Church to the Reformation," in Peter C. Phan (ed.), *The Gift of the Church* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 23. Plumer mentions that the earliest treatise in ecclesiology in technical sense was *On Christian Government*, written by James of Viterbo in 1301-1302, and the earliest systematic treatise in ecclesiology was *Summa on the Church* of John of Torquemada in 1436, published in 1489.

The “household/family” is one of the metaphors for the church aiming to express its relationship to its members. This image is found in the writings of a few Church Fathers from the second century. For example, Ignatius of Antioch (died c. 115), in *Letter to Ephesus* described the institution of the church as the “household of the master” in which, whoever is in charge of the “domestic affairs”, must act with the same spirit as Jesus did.³ Jesus loves people and receives repentant sinners. He also loves the church and gives himself for it (Eph 5:25). This is the example of love that the church has to learn from Jesus and to practise in order to become the mother of all Christian children. Hilary, Bishop of Poitiers (315-367), referred to bishops having the role of the trustworthy servant whom Jesus placed over his household to give the household members their food at the proper time (Mt 24:45). In his commentary on this passage of Matthew’s gospel, he wrote that bishops are placed as the head of the family of God to look after the needs of people who are entrusted to them. He used the word “family”, therefore in a strongly ecclesiological sense.⁴ Similarly, Augustine (354-430) in *The City of God*, written in answer to those who blamed Christianity for the fall of Rome to the Goths in 410, used the expression “family of God” as a theological concept for the church existing in its members throughout the world: “the whole family of God, most high and most true, has therefore a consolation of its own - a consolation which cannot deceive”.⁵ He also considered the community of the faithful as the family of the Lord: “Let these and similar answers be given to their enemies by the redeemed family of the Lord Christ and by the pilgrim city of King Christ”.⁶ Augustine also called bishops “stewards” of the household which is the local church because they supervise and have to watch those in their care.⁷

The church as mother is another metaphor relating to the family which appears often in patristic writings.⁸ This image was clearly seen as appropriate to describe the affectionate love of the church towards Christians and all people. But it also implied giving birth to new Christians through baptism, thus extending the unity and the catholicity of the church. The maternal character of the church underlies the meaning of

³ Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistula ad Ephesios* 6; PG 6, 650.

⁴ Hilary of Poitiers, *In Matthaemum* 27; PL 9, 1058.

⁵ Augustine, *The City of God*, I, 35 (New York: The Modern Library, 1950), 34; 38; cf. Tertullian, *De Patientia* 2; PL 1, 1252. Tertullian described the patience of God in “his family” (*familiam ipsius*). This description is also attributed to Christ. So, “his family” means the church.

⁶ Augustine, *The City of God*, I, 35.

⁷ Augustine, *Sermon 94: The Gospel of Matthew 25: 24-30*. “So everyone of you in his own house, if he is the head of the household, the job of bishoping, supervising, ought to belong to him...Don’t disdain the least of your people, keep a very watchful eye over the welfare and salvation of all your household”. Cf. Augustine, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament by St. Augustine*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Parker, 1845), 365.

⁸ Henri de Lubac, *The Motherhood of the Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), 47-58.

its mission and catholicity. The church is made up of many members, but they are united as one family. At the same time, the Catholic Church is inclusive of all people, as its name implies.

The title “our Mother the church” was first used among the Latin Fathers by Tertullian (c.160 - c.220) in one of his earliest works, *To the Martyrs*,⁹ as an expression of dignity and reverence for the church. Indeed, this title showed the church’s affection and love to the Christian martyrs. The relationship among God-the-Father, Mother Church, and God-the-Son is so close that the Son and the mother were included when the Father was invoked in the Lord’s Prayer.¹⁰ He also called the church the “house of your mother” when he described the place where the newly baptised, with divine grace, came for the first time.¹¹ The connection between Mother Church and baptism is highlighted by some Church Fathers, particularly Cyprian of Carthage.

Clement of Alexandria (c.150 - c.215), in *The Tutor*,¹² written by the end of the second century, applied the motherhood of God in Isaiah 66 to the concern of the church for its faithful. He believed that there was only one universal church, called the virgin Mother Church, as there was only one God, the Father, the Word and the Spirit. This church “draws the children to herself” and they responded to it because they knew the church would feed them with the milk of the word.¹³ Hippolytus (c.170 - 236) described the first communion after baptism as a meaningful expression of the motherhood of the church. The newly baptised received the body and blood of Christ and then also drank a mixture of milk and honey. These two products symbolised the promised land of the Israelites in the past and the church today into which the Christians entered, but they were also a kind of food given to newly-born children in the ancient world. Thus the church treated Christians as their true mother by giving birth and nourishment to them.¹⁴

Cyprian, the third century Church Father and Bishop of Carthage (248 - 258), was very concerned for the unity of the Catholic Church and used the image of a mother in the

⁹ Tertullian, *Ad Martyras* 1; *PL* 1, 619.

¹⁰ Tertullian, *De oratione* 2; *PL* 1, 1256. Tertullian argues that “[i]n the Father, the Son is also addressed. For Christ said, ‘I and the Father are one’. Nor is Mother church passed over without mention, for in the Son and the Father the Mother is recognised, since upon her the terms ‘father’ and ‘son’ depend for their meaning”.

¹¹ Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. 2 (Westminster, Maryland: Christian Classics, Inc., 1986), 330.

¹² Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus* 1; *PG* 8, 278.

¹³ Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. 2, 24.

¹⁴ Boniface Ramsey, *Beginning to Read the Fathers* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985), 105; Paul Fr. Bradshaw, Maxwell E. Johnson, L. Edward Philips, *The Apostolic Tradition - A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 120.

family as one of the signs of unity. The church is the mother of a single family “who is prolific in her offspring, from generation to generation” and from this mother church, one was “born of her womb, nourished by her milk, animated by her spirit”.¹⁵ The unity in the early church was related to the life of faith rather than to the organisational structure. More profoundly, unity among the Christians originates in love which will “exist forever in the kingdom [and] endure forever in the union of the brethren among themselves”.¹⁶ For Cyprian, then, the church is the mother who joined together all her children in one great family in the unity of the Trinity.¹⁷

The church was called mother because it gave birth to many Christians through baptism in the Holy Spirit.¹⁸ The faithful, though many, are united as “a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit”,¹⁹ because they belong to the “house of God” (the church) or “house of faith”,²⁰ in which bishops, presbyters, deacons, confessors and laity gathered to collaborate with one another. Through baptism, Christians are adopted as children by their spiritual mother, the church. They were born again into a new family, by the mother church, and lived, not with worldly, but with heavenly values inspired by the Holy Spirit.²¹ This rebirth in baptism was the fundamental reason for a distinctive Christian lifestyle, in contrast to that of their pagan contemporaries.

The issue of the salvation of the Gentiles has often been discussed in terms of the axiom usually attributed to Cyprian, “there is no salvation outside the church”.²² This has been a cause of misunderstanding, and as contrary to the concept of the church as mother whose love must be for all. One should note that Cyprian’s words about salvation dealt with schismatic and heretical Christians, not with Gentiles. He based his argument on the teachings of Paul about love for the church which is the bride of Christ (Eph 5:32). He

¹⁵ Cyprian, *De ecclesiae catholicae unitate* 14; *PL* 4, 518.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*; cf. “Message of the Eleventh Plenary Assembly of SECAM,” 280.

¹⁸ Cyprian, *Epistulae* 74; *PL* 4, 414.

¹⁹ Cyprian, *De Dominica oratione* 23; *PL* 4, 555.

²⁰ Cyprian, *De mortalitate* 6; *PL* 4, 586.

²¹ Ramsey, *Beginning to Read the Fathers*, 106.

²² Francis A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church? Tracing the History of the Catholic Response* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1992), 20. Cf. Origen, *Homiliae in librum Jesus Nave* 3; *PG* 12, 842. Origen saw the house of Rahah (Josh. 3; 5) as a type of the church for those who want to be saved “outside this house, that is, outside the church, no one is saved”. His warning was sent to the Jews to invite them to “come to this house, so that [they] may find salvation”; Cyprian, *Epistulae* 73, 21; *PL* 4, 412. The axiom “no salvation outside the church” had existed in the church since the early part of the second century, but it was usually associated with Cyprian because of its frequency and its urgency in his writings. For him the church was the only way to salvation, and therefore he stated clearly “outside the church there is no salvation”.

emphasised the need for Christian love to be extended to the church itself by belonging to the church, in order to be saved, because someone “who is not with the bride of Christ” cannot be “with Christ”.²³ Therefore the strong words of Cyprian about salvation in the church have to be read in context to be properly understood, so that the motherhood of the church implies a care for all people, including even sinners or schismatics.

The motherhood of the church expresses and, at the same time, strengthens its catholicity and unity. The more the church acts lovingly as mother, the more it attracts those beyond it, and the more its catholicity and unity are shown to all. This catholicity and unity make the faithful consider themselves as members of one family, that is, the family or the household of God. Indeed, these metaphors, family/household and mother, emphasise the loving relationship among church members and their fidelity in relation to God, and so evoke a more comprehensive ecclesial sense, especially in the celebration of the sacraments.

2.2 The Church as the Family of God in the Liturgy

The ecclesial metaphor “the family of God” figures in the liturgy. This is significant because the liturgy of the church is a manifestation of the “real nature of the true church”.²⁴ Liturgy is “the most important organ of the ordinary magisterium of the church”.²⁵ The primary aim of the liturgy is to give form to Christian prayer. Through liturgical celebrations, the sacramental signs actualise church teaching, communicate it, and even form it: *lex orandi, lex credendi*. However, liturgical communication is “less direct, less conceptually precise and less intellectual” than the other means which the church uses in the formation of faith of the Christians.²⁶ As a result, in terms of influence, there is a symbiotic relationship.²⁷

²³ Cyprian, *Epistulae* 52,1; *PL* 4, 346; cf. *Epistulae* 73, 21; *PL* 4, 412. Love for the church meant to be in union with the church and its sacraments, therefore, “neither baptism of public confession [of the faith under torture], nor of blood [shed for the faith], can avail the heretic anything towards salvation, because there is no salvation outside the church”.

²⁴ *SC* 2.

²⁵ Cyprian Vagaggini, *Theological Dimensions of the Liturgy* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press 1976), 512.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 512-518.

²⁷ Cf. “*Lex orandi, lex credendi*”. This formula used to be understood that *lex orandi* would determine *lex credendi*. But, nowadays, this order is reversed or they mutually influence each other. Liturgy determines the content of the doctrines which in turn influences the shape of liturgy. The precise meaning of this formula has been debated in the church. See Anchar J. Chupungco, “Sacraments and Sacramentals,” in *Handbook for Liturgical Studies*, vol. 4, xxi-xxii.

2.2.1 The Church as the Family of God in Baptism

The following will deal with some particular references to baptism. It is based on baptism that the concept of the family as an anthropological and sociological reality becomes a theological concept “the family of God”.

There is no immediate reference to the church as family in the celebration of baptism. But there are some writings of Church Fathers and the teaching of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994) that portray the baptismal font as a mother’s womb. The main purpose of baptism is incorporation of the baptised into Jesus and the church, the Body of Christ (Gal 3:26-27; Eph 4:5). These symbols evoke the image of a family of many members, with the Church as the mother of many children in the one family of God.

Cyril of Jerusalem (c.315 - 386) called baptism the moment of “dying” and “being born”, while its “saving water” is the “grave and mother” of catechumens.²⁸ Catechumens were baptised in waters of the baptismal font. By this water, catechumens died to sin in order to be born to a new life. So the baptismal font is the grave and, at the same time, the womb of our mother who is the church. Through baptism, catechumens are adopted as God’s children. They become “sharers in Christ” and are appropriately called “Christ”,²⁹ privileged now to call God “Father”.³⁰ Some Church Fathers in the second and third centuries also described baptism of adults in stages as a process of gradual socialisation and growth into the Christian community/family.³¹ This process was revised and decreed in the conciliar *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*.³² The rite of Christian Initiation of Adults consists of four steps and is practised in the church today, particularly during Lent. The purpose of this entire process which deliberately takes time is to show the growth into the faith, especially through the help and examples of other members of the Christian community/family. In other words, the communitarian aspect of the church as family is emphasised in baptism.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, in its treatment of the sacraments of Christian initiation, presents baptism as the beginning of a new life in Christ.³³ Baptism makes a neophyte “a new creature, an adopted son [or daughter] of God, who has become a

²⁸ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses mystagogicae* 2; PG 33, 1078; CCC 2782. See also Geoffrey Preston, *Faces of the Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 122.

²⁹ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses mystagogicae* 3, 1; PG 33, 1088A; CCC 2782; Raymond Burnish, *The Meaning of Baptism* (London: Alcuin/SPCK, 1985), 1-22.

³⁰ Cyprian, *De Dominica oratione* 9; PL 4, 525A; CCC 2782.

³¹ They are: Justin in *First Apology*, Tertulian in *Baptism*, and Hippolytus of Rome in *Apostolic Tradition*.

³² SC 66.

³³ CCC 1212.

partaker of the divine nature, member of Christ and co-heir with him”.³⁴ The baptised share the trinitarian life when they receive the life of the Holy Spirit in union with the only Son to call God “Father”.³⁵ It is on this trinitarian foundation that rests the model of the church as family. The baptised are also incorporated into the church which is the people of God of the New Covenant from all “nations, cultures, races and sexes”, and includes all Christians “who are not yet in full communion with the Catholic Church”³⁶ because through baptism and in Christ, they form one family and one people of God.³⁷

Baptism makes one belong to the family of God, but not in a “romantic or idealised” manner.³⁸ So one should not be too disappointed if one does not always find a level of closeness and intimacy that one finds in a human family. The church that one enters when being baptised is a community of faith that is very often not homogenous in ethnic and racial background or in socio-economic status. But the members of the church must consider themselves as brothers and sisters. Therefore the church as family of God, which is formed by baptism, must surpass all these differences or diversities to become a place of hospitality among people and with God and a place of authentic unity in Christ.³⁹ Certainly, filial adoption and the grace of baptism become the most important qualification for entrance into the church as the family of God. This implies a rupture of those restrictive and particularistic relations of human consanguinity.

The first sacrament of Christian initiation also enables the baptised to live in the Communion of Saints. The church as the family of God consists of the living and the dead members who are connected to one another in a living communion. The incorporation into the Communion of Saints is expressed by the invocation of the Litany of the Saints, placed before baptism in the rites of Christian initiation as celebrated at the Easter Vigil and in the ordinary liturgies of Baptism.⁴⁰

The meaning of incorporation into the family of God and into the church is of special importance to some African and Asian peoples. In the Christian Initiation of Adults, the

³⁴ CCC 1265; cf. 1 Cor 6:15; 2 Cor 5:17; 2 Pet 1:4; Rom 8:17; Gal 4:5-7.

³⁵ CCC 1997; 790; cf. John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici (ChL)* 10-13. The Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* states “the baptised person is reborn to the life of the children of God, united to Jesus Christ and to his Body, the church, and anointed by the Holy Spirit, thereby becoming a spiritual temple” (*ChL* 10).

³⁶ CCC 1267; 1271.

³⁷ CCC 804; cf. *LG* 13; *AG* 1.

³⁸ Maxwell Johnson, *Images of Baptism* (Archdiocese of Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2001), 110.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 112-113.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 122-126; cf. *The Rites of the Catholic Church* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1988), 149-150; 397.

rite of choosing a baptismal name may be celebrated on Holy Saturday.⁴¹ This rite could be seen as a symbol of the incorporation into God's family. This new incorporation will not alienate the baptised from their human family, but it expresses a new stage of individual growth. In Congo (formerly Zaire), for example, in order to emphasise this aspect, the clan or family name of the baptised will be mentioned before the new Christian name in the baptism of adults or the naming rite in the baptism of children.⁴² When the priest asks the godparents for the candidate's name, they answer by reciting the godchild's genealogies, at the end of which they pronounce the name chosen for baptism as the "crowning" of the candidate's identity.⁴³

This practice emphasises the need of inculturating the baptismal rite, but it also helps to avoid the misunderstanding between strong family relationship and solidarity among Asian as well as African people and the incorporation into a new family which is God's family and the church. The inter-generational solidarity of Asian families is particularly expressed in the context of birth, underlining respect for authority and commitment to the care of the elderly. The incorporation into a new family, that is, God's family and the church in which the baptised calls God "father" and shows respect to church ministers as elders, could be problematic in Asian culture. This arises when the rite of baptism does not include "the traditional cultural pattern of filial piety, with its associated 'virtues' with regard to brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, and neighbours".⁴⁴ In order to counter the problematic cultural elements of baptism, the participation of the parents of the baptised and the congregation must be emphasised to show family relationships and solidarity with the baptised.

The incorporation into a new family through the naming rite in baptism also has great significance in Vietnamese culture, for the personal and/or family name characterise personal and familial identity.⁴⁵ The change of a name or the addition of a new name

⁴¹ *The Rites of the Catholic Church*, 142. The celebrant of baptism asks each of the elect who has chosen a new baptismal name; then he says the following or similar words: "N., from now on you will be called N.", and the elect responds by saying "Amen" or in some other suitable way.

⁴² Kabaselle Lumbala, "Black Africa and Baptism," in Thomas F. Best and Dagmar Heller (eds.), *Becoming a Christian* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1999), 37.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 39. "To the question as to what name they have given to the child, the parents answer by reciting the family tree, at the end of which they pronounce the Christian name, as if to indicate that baptism is a matter of new personal fulfilment, a new stage of growing of the same individual...Beneath this we can discern an African soteriology and ecclesiology: As a baptised African, I do not move from my village by entering the church, but the church becomes the place where my village acquires new dimensions".

⁴⁴ Changbok Chung, "Baptism in Asia and Its Cultural Settings," in Best and Heller (eds.), *Becoming a Christian*, 48-50.

⁴⁵ The Vietnamese put the family name first and the individual name (the first name) last. This practice emphasises the communality among the Vietnamese which means that the family is more important than

must be considered as a serious matter, since such changes might lead to possible changes in the life of a person. When the baptised receives a Christian name, he/she is incorporated into a new family. The meaning of this incorporation into God's family and the church is evident because Christian names are written only in church certificates, such as baptismal or confirmation, and are not used as given names as in western culture.⁴⁶ It seems that the problematic issue of the naming rite in baptism, as mentioned above, has not yet been raised among the Vietnamese Catholics. However, the church in Vietnam also needs to study this issue in order to promote the concept of the church as the family of God and to help people realise the importance of being incorporated into the life of Christ and the church in baptism.⁴⁷ However, having a Christian name in baptism can create some misunderstandings if it suggests that Christians are neglecting the respect of ancestors from whom they get their family name.

2.2.2 The Church as the Family of God in the Eucharist

The eucharistic community is called the family of God. Instances of this are found in the first (the Roman canon) and the third eucharistic prayers. The first reference appears in the *Hanc igitur* ("We therefore beg you to accept") as a request for God to "accept this offering from your whole family".⁴⁸ The second reference is the intercession for the celebrating congregation that God would "hear the prayers of the family" gathered before him.⁴⁹ The Roman canon was formed between the end of the fourth and seventh centuries and has been widely used for long periods without significant changes up to the present.⁵⁰ Apart from that, the usage of the term emphasises the communality of Christians and shows the significance of the term "family" for the church.

The congregation gathered for the eucharist is also considered as family in the penitential rite,⁵¹ in the prayers⁵² and in the canon because this term immediately

individuals. Individuals exist for the family. This practice differs from westerners who put the individual name first and the family last.

⁴⁶ In the baptismal certificate, the name of a child includes his/her Christian name followed by the family and given names. However, in his/her other civil certificates, his/her name is written without the Christian name.

⁴⁷ The Vietnamese Catholics often choose the names of the western saints as Christian names in baptism. Since the canonization of the Vietnamese martyrs in 1988, the names of the Vietnamese saints have been chosen as Christian names, but this practice has not yet been popular among the Catholics.

⁴⁸ *The Saramentary* (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1985), 544.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Enrico Mazza, *The Eucharistic Prayers of the Roman Rite* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, Inc., 1986), 53.

⁵¹ *The Sacramentary*, 360. In the Penitential Rite, there are three introduction formulas to call people to the repentance. The formula B and C begin as follows: "Coming together as God's family, with confidence let us ask the Father's forgiveness..." and "My brothers and sisters, to prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacred mysteries..."

indicates the kind of relationships which must exist among the participants of the eucharist, that is, in the fraternal community that is the family of God. It is in this family-relationship that the community members must behave towards one another. Christians ask for the forgiveness from God, seek to forgive and to pray for one another because God is their loving father and they are brothers/sisters. This family gathered together is seen as a “church” because the church is defined as “the holy assembly before God”.⁵³

The community gathered for the eucharist, particularly when the members share the “Eucharistic Sacrifice”, becomes one family in Christ and among themselves. Through the eucharist, the full meaning of the community of the people of God is manifested.⁵⁴ Indeed, the eucharist is “a sacrament of love, a sign of unity [and] a bond of charity”.⁵⁵ Christians receive Christ and Christ also receives them, because Christ enters into friendship with them and vice versa. It is a mutual relationship which forms the family, a eucharistic community, and builds up the church as mentioned in the Encyclical Letter, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (2003): “eucharistic communion brings about in a sublime way the mutual ‘abiding’ of Christ and each of his followers”.⁵⁶ The Christian community, formed in the eucharist by the unifying power of Christ and of the Holy Spirit to become one body in Christ, is not closed in on itself. It becomes a sacrament of and for the whole of humanity, as a sign and instrument of intimate unity between God and the whole of humanity. In this way, it overcomes disunity, deeply rooted in humanity as a result of sin that afflicts the human race. The eucharistic family is gathered in order to become a worshipping community before God. In this eucharistic manner, the church unites its members as one body in Christ and also creates a “human community” in the world.⁵⁷ Indeed, the family values such as love, hospitality, sensitivity towards each other will help the church as family to reduce social injustice in society today.

The oneness of the eucharist and of those who receive it was emphasised by Paul. The central theme of the Lord’s Supper is solidarity. Accordingly, Paul reminds Christians about this solidarity which is a warning to those who would introduce discrimination into the eucharist (1 Cor 11:27-29). He makes this message even clearer when saying that

⁵² There are many prayers in which the word “family” is used for the church, such as the Preface of Lent II (“This great season of grace is a gift to your family”), of Marriage I (“You have designed the chaste love of husband and wife for the increase...of your own family born in baptism”), or the prayer over the gift of Fridays of the 2nd, 4th and 6th Week of Easter.

⁵³ *The Sacramentary*, 148.

⁵⁴ World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Geneva: WCC, 1982), 14.

⁵⁵ *SC* 47.

⁵⁶ John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (*EE*) 22.

⁵⁷ *EE* 23-24.

“as there is one loaf, so we, although there are many of us, are one single body, for we all share in the one loaf” (1 Cor 10:17). According to Magesa, Paul’s teaching of the oneness must have sounded more outrageous to people than that of Jesus of his body and blood as food and drink because the very idea of Paul’s message is that “a member of Jewish aristocracy could be ‘one body’ with a peasant or an expendable was loathsome”.⁵⁸

There is a further point. The eucharistic community is called family because the eucharist itself is a family meal. The bread and wine used in the eucharist were the daily nourishment of the Jewish people, and now serve to represent all people gathering around the table of the eucharist. All who are in communion with the church are called to eat and drink the body and the blood of Christ with one another. There is only one bread or one body of Christ; people who are many are one body because all partake of the one bread (1 Cor 10:16-17).⁵⁹ All socio-cultural boundaries of the faithful gathered for the eucharist will be broken because the eucharist promotes a “fraternal communion”.⁶⁰ Such a communion makes people able to share their joys and sufferings, to sense their desires, to attend to their needs and to offer deep and genuine friendship. In other words, it helps people to know how to make room for their brothers and sisters, to bear each other’s burdens (Gal 6:2) and to resist the selfish temptations which constantly beset them and provoke competition, careerism, distrust and jealousy in society today.⁶¹ This communion can happen because, in the eucharist, Christians, in faith and hope, “foreshadow and anticipate the eschatological banquet in the kingdom of the Father”.⁶²

The eucharistic aspect of the church as the family of God could be seen in the life-giving gift of this sacrament to the church. The eucharist builds the church because it is the eucharistic celebration that is the centre of the process of the church’s growth.⁶³ The Second Vatican Council returned to the teaching of Church Fathers when it affirmed that the “altar community” or the “One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church” was united and

⁵⁸ Laurenti Magesa, “Christ’s Spirit as Empowerment of the Church-as-Family” *Sedos Bulletin* 32 (2000), 293.

⁵⁹ *EE* 23; John Paul II, *Mane Nobiscum Domine* (*MND*) 21.

⁶⁰ *MND* 21; cf. Jeffrey Vanderwilt, *A Church Without Borders* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 25-33. Vanderwilt examined the radical openness of Jesus’ meal in which marginal men and women were welcomed (Mk 2:15-17; Mt 9:9-13; Lk 5:27-32).

⁶¹ *MND* 21.

⁶² The Sacred Congregation of Rites, *Instruction on the Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery (Eucharisticum Mysterium)*, 3; *EE* 18.

⁶³ *EE* 1. Cf. Henri de Lubac, *Corpus mysticum: L’Eucharistie et l’Eglise au moyen âge* (Paris: Aubrie, 1944), 292-293: “The church and the eucharist make each other, everyday, each by the other: the idea of the church and the idea of the eucharist must likewise be promoted and deepened each by the other”; Paul McPartlan, *The Eucharist Makes the Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 77.

constituted when the “Lord’s Supper” was celebrated.⁶⁴ This council also emphasised how the growth of the church was brought about by the sacrifice of Christ.⁶⁵

According to Békés, there is a structural similarity among the Old Testament Passover meal, the Lord’s Supper and the eucharistic celebration because “all the essential elements of the Old Testament Jewish Passover liturgy are still in the Christian eucharistic celebration”.⁶⁶ He emphasised the family or domestic community character of the three celebrations. The eucharist was held in the context of a family or community meal (Acts 2:42, 46) and was the source that gave birth to the church. In this sense, for the Vietnamese Catholics, there is a close and reciprocal relationship between the family and the eucharist. Mass is attended by a great number of Catholics thanks to the catechetical formation in parishes and families. In return, eucharistic worship has brought healthy results, such as the growth of Christian life, community activities, communion and mutual aid among families.⁶⁷

The New Testament and the documents of the Second Vatican Council mention a close relationship between the eucharist and the church. This understanding is based on the soteriological foundation of reconciliation because, through the sacrifice of Christ, God has granted his reconciliation to the world and has gathered people in communion with him and with all creation, so that the church is formed.⁶⁸ Moreover, the family possesses an ecclesial character; it is called the “domestic church” or *ecclesiola*. When the model “church as family of God” is taken as the paradigm, its ecclesio-genetic role is brought out. The Christian family, when it truly becomes the domestic church, contributes to the development of the reign of God in the world.⁶⁹

The number of references to the family in the eucharist including the prayers makes apparent the familial and the ecclesial characters of this celebration. The family

⁶⁴ LG 26, cited in Gerardo J. Békés, “The Eucharist Makes the Church,” in René Latourelle (ed.), *Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives: Twenty-five Years After (1962-1987)*, vol. 2 (Mahwah, New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 347-348.

⁶⁵ LG 3: “As often as the sacrifice of the Cross by which ‘Christ our pasch is sacrificed’ (1 Cor 5:7) is celebrated on the altar, the work of our redemption is carried out. At the same time in the sacrament of the eucharist bread, the unity of the faithful, who form one body in Christ (cf. 1 Cor 10:17), is both expressed and brought about”.

⁶⁶ Békés, “The Eucharist Makes the Church,” 352.

⁶⁷ Trần Đình Tứ, “Role of Family in the Faith”, *OR* 19 October 2005, 16: “Vietnamese Catholics are practising. For them, the eucharistic celebration is of special importance. About 80% attend Mass on Sundays, and 15% during week days...Eucharistic worship in Vietnam has brought healthy results: religious life has increased, community activities are more animated, fraternal communion is more sensitive and mutual aid among families has become more natural and numerous”.

⁶⁸ Békés, “The Eucharist Makes the Church,” 355-356.

⁶⁹ *EIA* 85.

dimension is seen through the call for an active participation of the eucharistic community which is also the very nature of the liturgy. Indeed, the conciliar teaching emphasises the communal nature and the active participation in the liturgical celebrations by saying that they are the aims “to be considered before all else” when people come together for the eucharistic celebration.⁷⁰ The ecclesial character develops when all Christians are called to become one body in Christ. This character challenges Christians to liberate them from individualism and egocentricity because the eucharist is “a supreme expression of community - the Body of Christ, the body of the church, the body of the eucharist”.⁷¹ In the eucharist, Christians realise their identity as being church and also understand profoundly the vertical communion with Christ and the horizontal communion with their brothers and sisters.

Because of the family character of the church, some Christians including bishops wish the church to do something more for those who cannot receive communion because of their family or marriage situations so that they do not feel excluded from the life of the church as family.⁷² In response to this concern, the church affirms that it does not exclude these people from its prayer and pastoral concern.⁷³ This affirmation must be carried out by concrete actions in order to show that the church is truly a family and all Christians are brothers and sisters, no matter who they are.

Both the sacrament of baptism and the eucharist maintain a sense of the Church as the family of God and open to the whole “Communion of Saints”.⁷⁴ The process of these sacraments needs the church as family/community and also builds up the church as family. To this degree, these sacraments not only celebrate faith, but inspire forms of pastoral action and principles governing the mission of the church. The next section will consider some of the developments that have occurred in the theological understanding of “the church as the family of God”.

⁷⁰ SC 14.

⁷¹ John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985), 64.

⁷² Cf. Michel Christian Cartatéguy, “Intermarriage, Communion,” *OR* 19 October 2005, 20. In some places with a Muslim majority, there are many cases of mixed marriages between Muslims and Christians. Christian women marrying Muslim men are often excluded from the Muslim as well as the Christian communities. They cannot receive the sacrament of communion because of the church applies some restriction from receiving communion of those who are remarried, divorced and couples without marriage in the church. In his intervention during the 11th Synod of Bishop (2005) Bishop Michel raised his concern for the difficulty of these women. “We are the spokesmen for these women who suffer and who are locked in this situation, which cannot evolve. Is there a possibility for a bishop to allow these women to participate in the eucharist?”

⁷³ Synod of Bishops, 11th Ordinary General Assembly. *Final Message of the Synod of Bishops* 15.

⁷⁴ Chung, “Baptism in Asia,” 117-126.

2.3 The Development of the Concept “the Church as the Family of God” in Church Documents

Many documents of the church describe the nature and the mission of the church as the household or family of God. This image is apt to elicit a sense both of ecclesial communion and mission. In what follows, there will be reference to the relevant documents of the Second Vatican Council, of the Synod of Bishops for Africa and for Asia, as well as in the documents of the Episcopal Conference of the Latin America (CELAM) and of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC).

2.3.1 The Ecclesiological Image of Family of God in the Documents of the Second Vatican Council

Before discussing the ecclesiological image of the family of God in the conciliar documents it is worth reviewing the interventions of some council fathers about the concept “the family of God” in order to appreciate the renewal of the theology of the church in the Second Vatican Council.

In the schema of *Lumen Gentium*, the Belgian theologian, Gérard Philips, one of the main contributors to this conciliar document, emphasised that the members of “the church as family”, are “only those who know the organisations and the means of the salvation and those who are integrated to Christ - Head of the visible structure which is governed by his Vicar”.⁷⁵ It is clear that Philips gave an ecclesiological significance to the word “family”.

During the intervention sessions, some bishops emphasised the concept of family for the church. Archbishop Geraldo de Proenca Sigaud maintained that the church is the family of God since, for him, “God is Father, Christ is the first-born brother, Mary is mother and all members are brothers through baptism”.⁷⁶ Bishop Simon Hoà Nguyễn Văn Hiền said that the concept would provide an open door to all peoples, particularly to Asians.⁷⁷ Some other bishops submitted their comments concerning the church as the family of God. Archbishop Joseph d’Avack mentioned that people become Christians in the

⁷⁵ Cf. G. Aberigo, *Constitutionis Dogmaticae Lumen Gentium Synopsis Historica* (Bologne: Instituto per le Scienze Religiose, 1975), 20; cited in Dabiré, “Eglise-Famille de Dieu,” 97. Dabiré mentions that “[l]a toute première allusion claire de l’Eglise ‘familia Dei’ se trouve dans le schéma ‘Concilium duce Spiritus Sancti’ attribué au théologien belge Philips qui dit ‘[i]ls appartiennent réellement et sans restriction à la famille de l’église (ad Ecclesiae familiam pertinent) seulement ceux qui connaissent toute son organisation et tous ses moyens de salut, et sont intégrés au Christ, Tête de la structure visible gouvernée par son Vicaire”.

⁷⁶ Xavier Rynn, *Vatican Council II* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 172; Floyd Anderson (ed.), *Council Daybook*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1965), 160.

⁷⁷ *Acta Synodalia*, vol. 2, pars II, 44.

church which is not only a society but also a family.⁷⁸ Bishop André Charue cited the image of the family of God as one of the images of the church and added the trinitarian aspect to this image by arguing that “the church is the household of the family of God in which, along with Christ and the Holy Spirit, we call God - Abba”.⁷⁹ In the efforts of describing the nature of the church from a biblical point of view and from the interventions of some council fathers, the metaphor “the family of God” appeared many times in the conciliar documents.

In the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* (1964), the church is called “the household of God”, one among many biblical images describing the mystery of the church, in which dwells the family of God.⁸⁰ The family of God comprises bishops, priests and lay people all who live in communion with the saints and have Jesus as their brother; it also includes all people in the world. The family character must be practised by all members in the church. Bishops should follow the service and sacrifice of Jesus in governing the family of God.⁸¹ Priests assemble the family of God to live as brothers and sisters as well as to bring all people into the unity of God’s family.⁸² The service and love of bishops and priests towards people, which they learn from Jesus, make the laity feel that the clergy and the laity form a family of God in which Jesus is their eldest brother and the practice of the commandment of love is their priority.⁸³ This communion in the family of God, which includes communion with the saints, unites the church into “one family in Christ” that is led in the Spirit to God the Father.⁸⁴

The frequency of references to “family of God” among the conciliar documents is greatest in the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (1965). There are nine references in this pastoral constitution out of nineteen in all the documents.⁸⁵ Generally, the solidarity between the family of God or the church and the human family or the world is emphasised and developed in the references appearing in this *Pastoral Constitution*. The church is not founded for itself but for the world; therefore its mission in

⁷⁸ Cf. *Acta Synodalia*, vol. 1, pars IV (Rome: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1970), 148-149.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 433.

⁸⁰ LG 6.

⁸¹ LG 27.

⁸² LG 28.

⁸³ LG 32.

⁸⁴ LG 51.

⁸⁵ There are nineteen references to the family of God in the documents of the Second Vatican Council: six in *Lumen Gentium*, nine in *Gaudium et Spes*, and one each in *Christus Dominus*, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, *Ad Gentes* and *Presbyterorum Ordinis*. These are the references which are used explicitly as the image of the church. Cf. Dabiré, “Eglise-famille de Dieu,” 99-100.

history is to help the human family to become the family of God by practising the spirit of incarnation and love of Jesus.⁸⁶ The church as the family of God, composed of all peoples, must be present in the world as a leaven, but at the same time it also needs to be renewed to become the family of God for the world.⁸⁷ In solidarity with the world the church and its members should not reject temporal duties,⁸⁸ but they should make use of the human values, such as unity, family life and cooperation of people of good will, in order to develop the family of God in the present world.⁸⁹

In other decrees of the Second Vatican Council, the church as the family of God has different roles and responsibilities in fulfilling its universal mission. The Catholic Church must live with other churches in “fraternal harmony of the family of God” to promote ecumenism.⁹⁰ The church, as the salt of the earth and light of the world, has the mission to compose “one family and one people of God”,⁹¹ and through the ministry of its priests, the church gathers its faithful into “the family of God” in which they live in unity and communion.⁹²

In addition, the church is often called “mother church” in the conciliar documents to describe the motherhood of the church for its faithful. The church exercises this motherly role according to the model of Mary when it receives, preaches the Word of God and baptises people to become the children of God.⁹³ The Christian family was also called “domestic church”,⁹⁴ an expression of the relational character of two institutions. Thus the Christian family implies the ecclesial character while the church has the familial character.

The reference to the church as the family of God in many conciliar documents showed the double dimensions of the church: *in se* and *ad extra*, which are described in the dogmatic and pastoral constitutions.⁹⁵ While the references in *Lumen Gentium* proved that it had a sound foundation in ecclesiology, those in *Gaudium et Spes* developed the pastoral dimension of the church. Through the image of the family of God one can

⁸⁶ GS 32.

⁸⁷ GS 40.

⁸⁸ GS 43.

⁸⁹ GS 42; 50; 92.

⁹⁰ UR 2.

⁹¹ AG 1.

⁹² PO 6.

⁹³ LG 6, 64; GS 43. See also Karol Wojtyła, *Sources of Renewal* (London: Fount Paperback, 1980), 198.

⁹⁴ LG 11.

⁹⁵ Dabiré, “Eglise-famille de Dieu,” 100.

recognise the ecclesiology of the people of God in the conciliar *Dogmatic Constitution*. The church comprises all the faithful who relate to one another by service and love, not by domination. The church also includes deceased members, saints and people from all nations. Besides, the image of the family of God in the *Pastoral Constitution* promotes and clarifies the relationship between the church and the world. The church exists in the world as “a leaven”, “the soul of human society”, “a source of commitment, direction and vigour to establish and consolidate the community of men according to the law of God”.⁹⁶ In relation to the world the church acknowledges the good to be found in different institutions. Thus the church-world relationship is one of dialogue and mutual cooperation. They recognise that they are embodied in each other. This relationship ends the “alienation of the church from the modern world” which was the characteristic of the church in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and opens a new approach for achieving the social mission of the church.⁹⁷

The references to this ecclesiological image in the *Decrees on the Missionary Activity of the Church* (1965), on *Ecumenism* (1964), and on *Priests* (1965) indicate that this image could be used as a model of the church in these respective areas. In particular, the image “the family of God” referred to the relationship between the clergy and the laity (PO 6) which was also the understanding of this image in the patristic writings. However, the church as the family of God had a low profile compared with other images of the church, particularly the people of God, in the conciliar documents as well as other subsequent ones.⁹⁸ This situation has changed with the publication of the documents of the Latin American and Asian churches and of the African and Asian Synods.

2.3.2 The Church as the Family of God in the Documents of the Synod for Africa

In the preparation for the Jubilee of 2000, a series of continental synods was organised to promote evangelisation in the world and in the respective continents.⁹⁹ The Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa was the first one of these continental synods held in Rome from 10th April to 8th May 1994. The African Synod endorsed an ecclesiological concept of “the church as the family of God” in the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* which was promulgated at Yaounde, Cameroon on 14th

⁹⁶ GS 40; 42.

⁹⁷ T. Howland Sanks, “The Social Mission of the Church,” in Phan (ed.), *The Gift of the Church*, 279.

⁹⁸ The 1985 Synod of Bishops, *Final Report* II. A. 3; CCC 756. The church as the family of God was mentioned once in each of these two documents, but it was not developed nor further analysed.

⁹⁹ The continental synods are: Synod for Europe (1991 and 1999), Africa (1994), America (1998), Asia (1998), and Oceania (1999).

September 1995. Indeed, the reference to this concept was discussed and highlighted many times in the documents of the African Synod to emphasise the nature and the mission of the church.¹⁰⁰

According to the Message of the Synod for Africa (1994), the church as the family of God is the community of believers which has its cultural characteristics from the African family and its origin from the Trinity. This church-as-family manifests to the world “the Spirit which the Son sent from the Father so that there should be communion among all”.¹⁰¹ In other words, the church is a living family made up of bishops, priests, men and women, religious and lay people. The church as family which “finds anthropological resonance in the African culture” consists of all the baptised who form a new family “of whom God is the Father and Supreme Ancestor”.¹⁰² The concept makes people understand the nature of the church and promotes the sense of co-responsibility in evangelisation because in the African mentality, members who belong to the same family feel tied by the same solidarity of faith.¹⁰³ Beside its values, the African family has its shortcomings which must be overcome when people are baptised in order to build the church as the family of God. In the church as the family of God the blood and the life connecting members in the natural family must be replaced by the blood of Jesus Christ and the life of the Spirit so that members in the family of God become brothers and sisters in Christ.¹⁰⁴

The concept of the church as family must be exercised in the church through its members, its ecclesial communities and Christian families as the agents of evangelisation. It is in these institutions that the family of God is an ecclesiological model and fulfils the prophetic role of the church.¹⁰⁵ In particular, the church as family highlights a shift from an authoritative to a ministerial church in which the role of the laity, especially women, must be emphasised.¹⁰⁶ This model develops and promotes the experience of

¹⁰⁰ The concept of church as family of God was emphasised in the following articles of the Message of the Synod for Africa: 2, 3, 7, 10, 20, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 44, 56, 57, 59, 68, 70, 71. “The Synod highlighted that you are the Family of God. It is for the church-as-family that the Father has taken the initiative in the creation of Adam. It is the church-as-family which is Christ, the New Adam and heir to the nations... It is the church-as-family which manifests to the world the Spirit which the Son sent from the Father” (*MOS* 24); “Not only did the synod speak of inculturation, but it also made use of it, taking the church as God’s family as its guiding idea for the evangelisation of Africa ... For this image emphasises care for others, solidarity, warmth in human relationships, acceptance, dialogue and trust” (*EIA* 63).

¹⁰¹ Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for Africa, *MOS* 24.

¹⁰² Bernard Bududira, “Create Living Church Communities,” *OR* 4 May 1994, 7.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for Africa, *MOS* 25.

¹⁰⁵ Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for Africa, *MOS* 27-28; *EIA* 80-85, 89. Cf. Ryan (ed.), *New Strategies for a New Evangelisation in Africa* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2002), 66-72.

¹⁰⁶ A. Ramazani Bishwende, “Le synod African, dix ans après: enjeux et défis,” *NRT* 127 (2005), 548-549.

fraternity, the spirit of disinterested service, solidarity and a common goal in order to be able to transform the church as well as society. Indeed, the church as family should be at the service of society to work for justice and peace in the world.¹⁰⁷ In other words, it is not only a notion or a theory, but it must be practised and concretised in church life, such as small Christian communities and leadership style, and in its prophetic mission in the world. The concrete agents are the necessary environment for the development of the church as family as the Message of the African Synod highlights.¹⁰⁸

The ecclesiological concept “church as family of God” is based on anthropological and theological foundations. The anthropological aspect is the first ground for the development of this concept because the concept primarily refers to the African extended family and its values. They have been the basis for the faithful to understand and appreciate the mystery of the church.¹⁰⁹

The African family has been an extended family with close relationships among its living and dead members.¹¹⁰ However, the anthropological aspect of the African family, particularly family values, such as care for others, solidarity, warmth in human

¹⁰⁷ Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for Africa, *MOS* 27-32; *EIA* 105: “The church as the family of God must bear witness to Christ also by promoting justice and peace on the continent and throughout the world”. See also *EIA* 106-114. Cf. SECAM, “Message of the Eleventh Plenary Assembly of SECAM: Church as Family of God and Hope for Africa,” 278-285; “Pastoral Letter of the Twelfth Plenary assembly of SECAM: Christ our Peace,” (2000); accessed 25 April 2004; available from <http://www.sceam-secam.org/english/document>; Internet. The Message developed the social and political implications of the church as family while the Pastoral Letter studied the conflictual state of the world and Africa in order to provide “an effective pastoral strategy to combat division and hatred, violence and war both in Africa and the world. See also A. E. Orobator, *The Church as Family* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2000); Jean-Mac Éla, “The Church - Sacrament of Liberation,” and John Mary Waliggo, “The Synod of Hope at a Time of Crisis in Africa,” in Africa Faith & Justice Network, *The African Synod: Documents, Reflections, Perspectives* (Maryknoll, NY: 1996), 131-138; 199-210; Mary Gerard Nwagwu, “Communion and Self-Reliance: Signs of Church as God’ Family in Africa,” *AFER* 42 (2000), 18-26.

¹⁰⁸ Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for Africa, *MOS* 25: “We must have priests who live their priesthood as a vocation to spiritual paternity, Christian families that are authentic domestic churches, and ecclesial communities that are truly living”. See also *MOS* 26.

¹⁰⁹ Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for Africa, *Instrumentum laboris* 25: “In many answers to the *Lineamenta*, there is a strong emphasis on the notion of the church as the family of God among human beings. It is felt that Africans can be more easily enabled to experience and to live the mystery of the church as community by utilizing to good advantage the African’s understanding of the family”. Cf. D. Nothomb, “L’Église-famille: concept-clé du Synode des évêque pour l’Afrique,” *NRT* 117 (1995), 57-63; Bénédet Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1999), 69-106; Paul J. Sankey, “The Church as Clan: Critical Reflections on African Ecclesiology,” *International Review of Mission* 83 (1994), 437-438; Charles Nyamity, “African Ancestral Ecclesiology: Its Relevance for African Local Churches,” in A. Radoli (ed.), *How Local Is the Local Church: SCCs & Church in East Africa?* (Kenya: AMECEA Gaba Publications, 1993), 37-39. Nothomb emphasises some similarities between the human family and the church-as-family of God in terms of origin, relationship and responsibility; however, the degree of these similarities is bound to different levels: human and spiritual/divine ones. Sankey argues that “whether speaking of nation, people or family, the Old and New Testaments present first Israel and then the church in terms of kinship group”. Nyamity developed the ancestral relationship in the Trinity based on the teaching of three Persons in God and on the application of the African ancestral characteristics (consanguineous/non-consanguineous kinship, superhuman/sacred status, mediation, exemplary of conduct and right/title of regular sacred communication with descendants) to the Trinity.

¹¹⁰ *EIA* 107.

relationships, dialogue and trust,¹¹¹ cannot be a complete foundation to develop and describe the church as the family of God. Moreover, the African family values have been eroded by western influences and challenged by internal issues, such as polygamy, tribalism and unequal roles of women.¹¹² The family has deep roots in African culture, but it is also an image of the whole of humanity. It is not only the African family, but all peoples, who are called to form the family of God. This implies the task of evangelisation in order to welcome “all peoples and each person into this great family, as a conscious member or as one moved by the Spirit”.¹¹³ It is God who “builds up his family, for evangelisation invites humanity to participate in the very life of the Trinity, called it to return, through the Son, in the Spirit, back to the Father ‘so that God may be all in all’ (1 Cor 15:28)”.¹¹⁴

The theological foundation of the concept was significantly stressed in the Message of the Synod. “The church-family has its origin in the Blessed Trinity” in which the activities of the three divine Persons were developed.¹¹⁵ Thus the anthropological foundation of the concept of the church as the family of God needs to be strengthened by referring to the model of Trinity which is also a divine community or family. In other words, the church as family reflects the community of the triune God. This is a unanimous agreement of all African theologians when they debate about the church as family of God. It is also from this trinitarian foundation that all implications of this ecclesiological model within the church and with society are derived.

In an evaluation of the African Synod after ten years of the promulgation of its Exhortation *Bishwende* identified three important theological and pastoral issues of the concept “the church as family of God” for evangelisation in this continent.¹¹⁶ The concept highlights the need for inculturation which is a dialogue with culture, social life of local people and the world. These are: (1) faith must be contextualised in a local culture or faith is considered an expression or metaphor of culture; (2) faith must be engaged with plans of action for justice; (3) faith is a dialogue with the world, society and all believers as well as non-believers. In other words, the African churches have promoted the ecclesiological model of the church as the family of God for the purpose of inculturation

¹¹¹ *EIA* 63

¹¹² Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for Africa, *Instrumentum laboris* 23; *EIA* 84.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, *Relatio ante disceptationem* 3.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* Cf. Acts 2:4; 2 Cor 13:13.

¹¹⁵ Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for Africa, *MOS* 20; 24.

¹¹⁶ *Bishwende*, “Le synod African, dix ans après,” 514-556.

and evangelisation. Therefore they only become the family of God when they carry out these tasks.

The Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* is one the main documents explicitly emphasising the theology of the church as the family. However, the image of the church as family has also been the concern of the local churches in Latin America and in Asia.

2.3.3 The Church as the Family of God in the Puebla Document

Latin Americans value the family as a primordial trait of their culture. In particular, for Catholics, Latin American families are educators in the Christian faith, shapers of persons and promoters of social development. The family is the image of God since God, who in his innermost mystery is a family, embodies “paternity, filiation and the essence of the family that is love”.¹¹⁷ It is in these cultural and theological contexts that the Puebla Document (1979) considered the church as the people and the family of God. The church gathers people and forms the family of God journeying towards God as brothers and sisters.¹¹⁸ Indeed, the church as the family of God, expressed and developed in basic communities, has the mission to renew and strengthen the human family.

The Puebla Document emphasised that the title of the church as the family of God is not a matter of psychological tactics, but rather it is of fidelity to the church’s own identity. In the church, people do not merely feel, but they truly, deeply and ontologically belong to the family of God because they really become children of the Father in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit who gives life in and through baptism. This divine affiliation is the great treasure that the church should offer to people. The Holy Spirit inspires “the communion of faith, hope and charity” among people so that they can be converted and assimilated to the Lord and that they can be united into one family of God amid the tensions of human beings.¹¹⁹

The unity in the church as the family of God does not form a monolithic reality, but it is the unity in the diversity of the gifts which the Holy Spirit has given to each church

¹¹⁷ John Paul II, “Homily in Puebla,” in J. Eagleson and P. Scharper (eds.), *Puebla and Beyond* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), 78. Cf. For the background of the conference of Puebla, see Moises Sandoval, “Report from the Conference,” in Eagleson and Scharper (eds.), *Puebla and Beyond*, 28-43. The Third General Conference of the Latin America Episcopate was held in Puebla de los Angeles, Mexico (27th January-13th February 1979). It was attended by some 370 delegates including cardinals, bishops, priest, deacons, religious and lay people from Latin America as well as from outside, with the presence of Pope John Paul II. The Final Document of this conference entitled “Evangelisation in Latin America’s Present and Future” is often called the *Puebla Document*. Some main issues of this document are: human rights, the church preferential option for the poor, grassroots Christian communities and the family.

¹¹⁸ CELAM, *Puebla Document* 223-239, in Eagleson and Scharper (eds.), *Puebla and Beyond*, 153-154.

¹¹⁹ CELAM, *Puebla Document* 240-243, in Eagleson and Scharper (eds.), *Puebla and Beyond*, 154.

member. Such a unity contributes to the richness of the whole church. The diversity exists through the different roles of the clergy, religious and lay people. Indeed, the role of the laity is emphasised in the church as family. The clergy or pastors in the church are necessary for the church, particularly for the celebration of the eucharist and of the sacrament of reconciliation. These sacraments together with the communion of faith and love in the Holy Spirit, keep unity, communion and service among church members.¹²⁰

In the church as the family of God, the role of pastors implies the paternal character as described in the documents of the Second Vatican Council.¹²¹ However, this characteristic does not mean dominating power. It is an authority, but it must be used for service. Pastors are brothers called upon to serve the life that the Spirit freely sparks in their brothers and sisters in the family of God. The Puebla Document concluded the section on the family of God by a reminder of the role of pastors as follows:

Pastors must respect, accept, foster, and give direction to that life, even though it may have arisen independently of their own initiative...Pastors live for the sake of others, so that others might have life and "have it to the full" (Jn 10:10). The task of ensuring unity does not mean the exercise of an arbitrary kind of power. Authority is to serve life. This service of pastors includes the right and the duty of giving correction and making decisions with the clarity and firmness that may be necessary.¹²²

The document of Puebla described briefly but quite completely the church as the family of God. This metaphor will be studied in detail in the context of Asian churches.

2.3.4 The Church as the Family of God in the Documents of the Synod for Asia and the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences

The documents of the Synod for Asia¹²³ and particularly the Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* (1999) did not present explicitly an ecclesiology of the church as the family of God, though in the Responses to the *Lineamenta*,¹²⁴ some bishop conferences suggested this model or described the familial characteristic of the church. The Bishops' Conference of

¹²⁰ CELAM, *Puebla Document* 244-247, in Eagleson and Scharper (eds.), *Puebla and Beyond*, 155.

¹²¹ *LG* 28, *CD* 16, *PO* 9.

¹²² CELAM, *Puebla Document* 249, in Eagleson and Scharper (eds.), *Puebla and Beyond*, 155.

¹²³ The Synod for Asia was held in Rome (19th April - 13th May 1998) and the Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* was made public in New Delhi, India (5th November 1999).

¹²⁴ The *Lineamenta* of the Synod for Asia described the relationship of the church with other religions and cultures in terms of family and also valued the Asian family. See *Lineamenta* 1, 5, 6. Moreover, *Instrumentum laboris* 3 writes: "In Christ - the Church believes - all peoples, including those of Asia, can live as brothers and sisters in one large family of God in authentic freedom and newness of life". Cf. Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for Asia, *Instrumentum laboris* (Vatican City, 1998).

Vietnam in its Responses stated the necessity to build the church as a family of God's children since it is appropriate to the Asian society.¹²⁵ The Bishops' Conference of Korea mentioned the family structure of the parish as the model of the church in Korea and also in the world.¹²⁶ Similarly, the bishops of Laos acknowledged a "family spirit" prevailing in the local church.¹²⁷ Instead, the church as communion, particularly communion within the church and among people, was presented in the Propositions of the Asian Synod and in the Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*.¹²⁸ The church as communion, which implies the concept of the church as family since both concepts focus on relationships,¹²⁹ is significant and important in Asia because this continent is the home of many peoples and of the great religions of the world.¹³⁰ Communion, therefore, is union in the Trinity, unity in the church and solidarity or harmonious relationship with all people regardless of culture, religion and race. The concept of the church as communion is theologically broader than that of the church as family of God. However, it is noted that the church as the family of God incorporates all the essential richness of the concept of communion and is more familiar to ordinary Christians as Corboy states:

¹²⁵ Cf. "The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Vietnam," in Phan (comp. and ed.), *The Asian Synod*, 47-51.

¹²⁶ Cf. "The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Korea," in Phan (comp. and ed.), *The Asian Synod*, 33.

¹²⁷ Cf. Laos - UCAN Document , "Bishops of Laos Stress Lay Responsibility in Evangelisation," 7 (17 March 1998); accessed 1 May 2003; available from <http://www.ucanews.com>; Internet.

¹²⁸ EA 24-25. "At the heart of the mystery of the church is the bond of communion which unites Christ ... to all the baptised ... United to the Son in the Spirit's bond of love, Christians are united to the Father, and from this communion flows the communion which Christians share with one another through Christ in the Holy Spirit. The church's first purpose then is the sacrament of the inner union of the human person with God, and, because people's communion with one another is rooted in that union with God, the church is also the sacrament of the unity of the human race" (EA 24).

¹²⁹ Cf. The 1985 Synod of Bishops, *Final Report*, II. C. 1: "Fundamentally, it [communion] is a matter of communion with God through Jesus Christ in the sacraments. Baptism is the door and the foundation of communion in the church. The eucharist is the source and the culmination of the whole Christian life". According to LG 1, the two essential elements of communion is communion with God and unity among all people. See also Dennis M. Doyle, *Communion Ecclesiology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 12. Communion ecclesiology is a web of interwoven relationships. It focuses on relationships, whether among the persons of the Trinity, human beings and God, the members of the communion of saints, members of a parish, or the bishops dispersed throughout the world.

In the Message and the Exhortation of the African Synod, the image of the family of God emphasises "care for others, solidarity, warmth in human relationships, acceptance, dialogue and trust" (EIA 63) which must be modelled after the trinitarian family. In particular, according to the Synod Message, "the church-as-family is a church of communion" (MOS 57). Moreover, for Asian churches, "as in marriage, so at the heart of the family is communion, communion with God, communion of spouses, ...of young or elderly parents and their children, communion with grandparents and other members of the extended family...It is also a union of hearts and minds that in a human way reflects the communion with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit – the triune God from whom the family came to be" (FABC VIII, *The Asian Family Towards a Culture of Integral Life*, 105).

¹³⁰ EA 24: "In the midst of so many different peoples, cultures and religions the life of the church as communion assumes greater importance".

...[T]he notion of Church as Family can be more meaningful for the people than the Church as *communio*. It is much more homely. It affects the hearts. It is less remote from the ordinary lives of the people.¹³¹

Similarly, Doohan strongly supported the image of the church as family because it is much more easily understood than other images. He also argued that the dimension of unity, communion, community and love is included in family life. For him, the image of the church as family has many advantages because it is “non-technical enough to be appreciated by the non-theologian; it evokes appropriate attitudes among people; it deepens our understanding of church and can help solve some of our current problems of church structures and interrelationships”.¹³²

The church is seen primarily as the special place of encounter between God and people in which the mystery of God’s inner life is revealed and God’s plan for the salvation of all people is carried out. In this church, men and women are baptised and united in the Trinity to “walk in the newness of life”, therefore they no longer belong to themselves, but they are the Lord’s very own children.¹³³ It is the foundation for the development of communion within the church and with people as in a family which is also the content of the concept of the church as the family of God.

For the Asian Synod fathers, the diocese is described as “a communion of communities gathered around the shepherd, where clergy, religious persons and the laity are engaged in a ‘dialogue of life and heart’ sustained by the grace of the Holy Spirit”.¹³⁴ It is in this context that the local church is participatory. Similarly, the parish should be a place to promote greater opportunity for fellowship and communion. Communion is promoted through BECs.¹³⁵ Moreover, it must be expressed within and beyond the church in order to foster unity and equality among Christians as well as dialogue with believers of other faiths and beliefs.¹³⁶ The equality of all Christians, rooted at the deepest level in the life

¹³¹ Cf. James Corboy, “Church as Communio and Family of God,” *Sedos Bulletin* 28 (1996), 158. In page 157, he writes: “it seems to me that of all the images or concepts of the church used by the Second Vatican Council, the concept of *communio* is the most helpful for a better understanding of the church ... Unfortunately, it is not an easy concept to grasp. Both Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II had to ask the questions, ‘What does the complex notion of *communio* mean?’... And so perhaps the new model of the ‘church as family’, which incorporates all the essential riches of the concept of *communio*, has appeared at the right time. It seems to add whatever *communio* lacked”.

¹³² Leonard Doohan, *The Lay-Centered Church: Theology and Spirituality* (Minneapolis, MN: Winston Press, Inc., 1984), 72.

¹³³ EA 24.

¹³⁴ EA 25.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Cf. EA 24 - 28; Propositions 13 - 17, in Phan (comp. and ed.), *The Asian Synod*, 144-146.

of the Trinity, needs to be exercised in order to show that the church is really a communion of communities. On the other hand, dialogue requires the church to reach out to all men and women without distinction in order to build with them a civilisation of love which is based on universal human values, such as peace, justice, solidarity and freedom.¹³⁷ In other words, communion and mission must go hand in hand or communion will be meaningless if it is not expressed through church activities within the church, among the churches, and with people of various socio-cultural backgrounds.

In particular, the Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* develops communion within the church by emphasising the required quality of pastors and the formation of the laity in carrying out their roles and mission in the church as in society. Pastors, including bishops and priests, are seen not merely as charity workers and institutional administrators but as “men whose minds and hearts are set on the deep things of the Spirit (cf. Rom 8:5)”.¹³⁸ Prayer, zealous service and exemplary conduct must be their identity in order to bear witness to Jesus’ love for all. Priests should shepherd the faithful in a way that makes the latter feel truly a part of the church.¹³⁹ In other words, pastors should live in communion and in cooperation with all the faithful including those in consecrated life. With the laity, their task is “to encourage all lay people to assume their proper role in the life and mission of the people of God” and to “ensure that the laity are formed as evangelisers able to face the challenges of the contemporary world”.¹⁴⁰ In so doing the church fulfils its mission as the witnessing church in Asian societies in which there have been favourable as well as challenging conditions for the proclamation of the reign to God.

The church as a communion of communities has been mentioned and emphasised in the FABC documents even prior to the Asian Synod. According to the Fifth FABC Plenary Assembly (1990), the Asian church needs to develop a new way of being church characterised by four features. First, the church is to become “a communion of communities” where laity, religious and clergy recognise and accept each other as sisters and brothers, supporting one another and working together.¹⁴¹ Such communion recognises explicitly the fundamental equality among all church members. Secondly, it is “a participatory church where the gifts that the Holy Spirit gives to all the faithful - lay,

¹³⁷ EA 22 - 41. *Ecclesia in Asia* mentions communion (EA 24), participation (EA 25), and triple dialogue (EA 22, 31, 32-41).

¹³⁸ EA 43.

¹³⁹ EA 25.

¹⁴⁰ EA 45.

¹⁴¹ FABC V, *Journeying Together Towards the Third Millennium*, in G. Rosales and C. G. Arévalo (eds.), *FAPA*, vol. 1 [hereafter *FAPA I*] (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1997), 287.

religious and cleric alike - are recognised and activated".¹⁴² Participation is one of the fruits of communion that church leaders need to show at all levels and to encourage people to practise it in all church activities. In other words, the first two characteristics deal with communion within the church while the last two features relate to the mission of the church with other believers and in the world. Thirdly, the church needs to "witness to the Risen Jesus and to reach out to people of other faiths and persuasions in a dialogue of life".¹⁴³ Lastly, it is in this mission that the church needs to be "a leaven of transformation" in order to serve as "a prophetic sign" in the building up the reign of God in the world.¹⁴⁴

The characteristics of the ecclesiology of the church as communion described in *Ecclesia in Asia* 24-25 more or less implied those of the church as family. These two references discuss communion with the world (*EA* 24) and within the church (*EA* 25), which is also the understanding of the church as the family of God as described in the document of the African Synod. In other words, "the church-as-family is a church of communion".¹⁴⁵ *Ecclesia in Asia* also highlights the Asian family and its values. According to the Asian Synod fathers, the Christian family in Asia is "not simply the object of the church's pastoral care; it is also of the church's most effective agents of evangelisation".¹⁴⁶ The church needs the evangelised Christian family in order to help it to fulfil its own mission as well as the mission of the church. Indeed, the Asian Synod fathers emphasise the Christian family as the domestic church and as the agents of evangelisation.¹⁴⁷ These themes are particularly explained in the FABC documents because dialogue with Asian cultures in which the family is profoundly treasured is one of the threefold dialogue which is considered as a new way of being church in Asia.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 287-288.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 288.

¹⁴⁵ Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for Africa, *MOS* 57; cf. *MOS* 24; *EIA* 63.

¹⁴⁶ *EA* 46: "The family occupies a very important place in Asian cultures; ...family values like filial respect, love and care for the aged and the sick, love of children and harmony are held in high esteem in all Asian cultures and religious traditions. Seen through Christian eyes, the family is the domestic church". Cf. Proposition 32, in Phan (comp. and ed.), *The Asian Synod*, 153-154.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. *EIA* 85: "The Special Assembly for Africa affirmed that the goal of evangelisation is to build up the church as the family of God, an anticipation on earth, though imperfect, of the kingdom. The Christian families in Africa will thus become true 'domestic churches', contributing to society's progress toward a more fraternal life". The evangelised family is an expression of the church as the family of God. It is in this context that *Ecclesia in Africa* and *Ecclesia in Asia* are similar in describing the church as God's family.

¹⁴⁸ The triple dialogue is dialogue with the poor, with Asian cultures, and with other faith-communities. Cf. FABC I, *Evangelisation in Modern Day Asia*, in G. Rosales and C. G. Arévalo (eds.), *FAPA* I, 14-16.

FABC have had a special concern for the apostolate for the family. According to its plenary statements since 1986, the Asian family has many values, but it has also undergone many challenges. On the one hand, the family is the strength of Asian society because it is the bearer of the heritage of humanity. Indeed, the Christian family is the church in the home.¹⁴⁹ But on the other hand, the Asian family is the cellular receptacle of all Asia's problems, such as poverty, repression, division and conflicts.¹⁵⁰ The theme of the family became more significant in the document of the Eighth FABC Plenary Assembly (2004) entitled "The Asian Family Towards a Culture of Integral Life". This document, after studying the pastoral challenges to the family in Asia, develops a theological-pastoral reflection about a regnocentric theology of family which is coherently related to a culture of integral life. This theology follows a framework and a process of reflection as follows:

To the culture of death in the Asian situation we respond by presenting a vision of a culture of integral life ... centred on covenant life with God, where the values of the Reign of God, such as love, communion and solidarity among individuals, families and societies reign. We present this culture of integral life as a gift as well as a task given by God in and through Jesus who raised human life to the divine and shared it with us in the church through the Holy Spirit. We reflect then on the church itself as the *Family of God* that serves as a sign as well as a promise of integral life in the Reign of God.¹⁵¹

This is the first time a document of FABC plenary assembly used the term "the church as the family of God". The Eighth FABC document refers to the Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* as the original source of this term. Indeed, the church is a gift of "the life of God's family on earth" which is another way used by FABC VIII to describe the church as God's family.¹⁵² The term is mentioned in the context of the theology which emphasises the promotion of a culture of integral life in order to counter a culture of death which threatens family values. A culture of integral life condemns everything that dehumanises, exploits and oppresses human life, such as a massive poverty and the breakdown of Asian family values due to negative impact of globalisation. They are condemned because they are against God's will and the reign of God. On the other hand, a culture of

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Third Bishops' Institute for Missionary Apostolate (BIMA III), *Letter of Participants*, in G. Rosales and C. G. Arévalo (eds.), *FAPA I*, 104; FABC IV, *The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World of Asia*, in G. Rosales and C. G. Arévalo (eds.), *FAPA I*, 184-185; FABC VII, *A Renewed Church in Asia: A Mission of Love and Service*, in F-J. Eilers (ed.), *FAPA*, vol. 3 [hereafter *FAPA III*] (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2002), 10.

¹⁵⁰ FABC VII, *A Renewed Church in Asia*, in *FAPA III*, 10.

¹⁵¹ FABC VIII, *The Asian Family Towards a Culture of Integral Life*, 50; Italics emphasised. The FABC VIII statement has six paragraphs on the church as family of God (nos. 50, 60-64).

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 50.

life “respects, nurtures, enhances, promotes and serves human life in all its dimensions” from the beginning of human life to its return to God at the end of time in God’s reign.¹⁵³ It is noted that the underlying foundation of the culture of integral life is trinitarian and covenantal. The culture of life expressed in families is based on the covenant between God and his people which is concretised in the life of Jesus who comes to share God’s life and love to all people through the works of the Spirit.

God who is the Creator and Giver of all life, particularly of human life, creates human beings out of his love and puts them in a web of interdependent relationship with the whole cosmos including God, people and creatures. In other words, since the beginning of the world there has been solidarity of all creation characterised by interdependence and harmony. God also made a familial covenant with the chosen people which expresses God’s limitless patience, kindness and forgiveness. Therefore the covenant people had to be in active solidarity with everyone. However, people broke that covenant, and Jesus was sent into the world in order to reveal the meaning of life as a sharing in the very life of God. Jesus describes his mission as life-giving and as salvific solidarity with people who will be saved through baptism and receiving his body and blood. He is the founder of the family of God because the church is born as a new creation (2 Cor 5:17), God’s household, his own family (Eph 2:19; 1 Tim 3:15). In fact, Jesus through his sacrificial love gives rise to a new community which is a family of faith born in the Spirit. Indeed, the church has to live according to the fruits of the Spirit, which mean love, joy and peace (Gal 5:22), and avoid the works of the flesh, such as jealousy, anger and selfishness (5:19-21). Living in the Spirit, the church will experience “unity in diversity, complementariness amid differences, and co-responsibility for the building up of the whole (Rom 12:4-5; 1 Cor 12:4-7; 12:12; Eph 4:16)”.¹⁵⁴

Through the theological-pastoral reflection of a culture of integral life the document of FABC VIII argues that the family needs to promote life, love, communion, and solidarity following the model of God in his creation and salvation, of Jesus in his life and teachings, and of the Spirit in his works for the development of the church. The church as the family of God should reflect that culture of integral life in its structure and relationship and find ways to help Asian families to preserve that culture of life. When the church mirrors the culture of life it will counteract the culture of death which has influenced Asian families and societies, such caste-ism, patriarchy and gender inequality.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ Ibid., 52.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 62.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 47.

The metaphor of the church as the family of God is related to that of the domestic church as the latter is an expression of the former. The church needs to follow and practise the model of the trinitarian family while the family exercises the fundamental tasks of the church. The Christian family participates in the life and mission of the church. At the first glance one might find it difficult to recognise the relationship between these two metaphors. However, the Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (1981) identifies the mutual relationship when it argues that “the church as mother that gives birth to, educates and builds up the Christian family” and in return, “the Christian family is grafted into the mystery of the church to such a degree as to become a sharer [...] in the saving mission proper to the church”.¹⁵⁶ The metaphor of the church as the family of God comes from the trinitarian family, but that metaphor is also perceived by people through the image of the human family. Therefore the natural family of Christians needs to be evangelised so that it becomes a prophetic and meaningful metaphor for the church as the family. Indeed, the statement of the Eighth FABC Plenary Assembly emphasises the prophetic role of the Christian family to the whole church as follows:

When the church fails to live according to its identity as the sanctuary of covenant love and life, as communion and solidarity; [...] when its pastors behave as less than shepherds after the heart of God; when equality in dignity, co-responsibility, participation, and self-giving generosity no longer animate the church; when power, selfishness and discrimination threaten its inner structure - it is the family that prophetically calls the *Family of God* to the road of profound renewal.¹⁵⁷

In terms of ecclesiological importance the document of the Eighth FABC Plenary Assembly proposes a radical paradigm shift when mentioning that ‘the church begins in the home, not in the parish’.¹⁵⁸ However, it is important to take into consideration patriarchy in Asian families so that the church as family can counteract such authoritarian leadership.¹⁵⁹ This family/bottom-up model of building the church, which is also found in the Basic Ecclesial Communities or Basic Human Communities,¹⁶⁰ is similar to that of society which is also built on the institution of the family. This model explains the ecclesiology-sociology nexus that the church as the family of God promotes.

¹⁵⁶ FC 49.

¹⁵⁷ FABC VIII, *The Asian Family Towards a Culture of Integral Life*, 102. Italics emphasised.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 46. Cf. Asia - UCAN Document, *Final Statement of Lay-Organisation Forum on 2004 FABC Plenary Assembly*, 11; accessed 1 October 2004; available from <http://www.ucanews.com>; Internet. According to the final statement, “families are potential springboards for ministry in the wider world and active apostolates in society with a specific ministry of their own. The heart of the church should be and is the family rather than the parish”.

¹⁵⁹ FABC VIII, *The Asian Family Towards a Culture of Integral Life*, 27.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 100.

Consequently, the mutual relationship between these two disciplines facilitates the social mission of the church as family.

With regard to the social transformation the family has a social role because of its very nature as the basic cell of society. For the Christian family, this mission is more special; it is part of the kingly mission of the family through its family politics. The document states that the family has a “political intervention in promoting transparency and accountability among public servants, or fostering mediation and reconciliation among conflicting parties” because of the lack of social justice and peace as well as of integrity in public service and of creation in Asian societies.¹⁶¹ The church as family has to carry out the social mission as assigned to the Christian family.

The emphasis of the church as the family of God encourages Asian churches to reassess their family ministry. “Family ministry should empower families to become evangelisers, such that ministry is not only for families but by families”.¹⁶² Families and its members are often considered objects or recipients of pastoral care of priests and consecrated people. Family members are called to participate in church life in parishes. With family ministry by families people become subjects whose primary involvement in the church is in the home. In other words, the pastoral paradigm of the church as the family of God seeks to strengthen the church already established and existing in the home and to value the role of the laity as subjects or promoters of evangelisation.

The church as the family of God is the ecclesiological concept that appeared in complementary ways in the documents of the Synod for Africa and Asia and of CELAM as well as FABC. The church as God’s family is referred to the trinitarian and human family which becomes the foundation of trinitarian ecclesiology as well as the ecclesiology of ancestral veneration, BECs and liberation which will be discussed in the next chapter. These ecclesiologies are also implied in other documents although they are not explicit as in that of the African Synod. For Asian bishops, the church as communion is another way to describe the church as family. Thus one important characteristic of the church as the family of God that all documents emphasise is communion within the church, that means, participation and co-responsibility among the laity, religious and the clergy in building up the church as the family of God. In other words, a participatory leadership in the church as the family of God is highlighted in order to overcome authoritarian hierarchy and patriarchy in the human family. Besides, communion will not be complete without solidarity with people from various socio-cultural backgrounds.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 91-93.

¹⁶² Ibid., 116.

Therefore the above documents also refer to the social mission of the church as an important one for the church as God's family. The church as the family of God also needs to prioritise a family ministry in order to help Christian families become the domestic church. To sum up, the church as the family of God is an ecclesiological model for the nature and the mission of the church which is promoted by these local churches because the concept/model of family is familiar and very close to local people. Such a familiarity with the model will help evangelisation in these local churches.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the theological foundation and the development of the concept of the church as the family of God in the writings of selected Church Fathers, in the liturgy, in the conciliar documents, particularly in the Exhortations of the Synod for Africa and for Asia and the statements of CELAM and FABC. The study showed that the understanding of the concept of the church as the family of God was gradually developed in the tradition of the church. From the understandings and implications of the church as God's family limited within the church, this concept has been broadened in order to include implications regarding other believers and with social realities in the world.

In some patristic writings the image of the church as the family/household of God and as mother was used to encourage church leaders to be responsible for, and sensitive to, the needs of its church members and people outside the church. Since the Second Vatican Council the metaphor of the church as the family of God has been extended in order to promote the role of the laity as well as to emphasise the social mission of the church and the need for an inculturated ecclesiology for the evangelisation of Latin American, African and Asian people. Therefore it is necessary for the church, particularly the Vietnamese church, to make good use of these documents in order to enrich the ecclesiological concept of the church as the family of God particularly in the areas of participatory relationship in the church and its social mission.

The metaphor of the family of God is primarily a reference to the life of the Trinity. This theological meaning of the metaphor needs to be emphasised and developed in order to overcome the negative characteristics of the human family. Indeed, "if the Triune God serves as model for the church-as-family, then the narrow bonds of kinships and consanguinity no longer constitute a hindrance to our entrance into and membership of this church".¹⁶³ This trinitarian foundation is significant because it contributes to

¹⁶³ Orobator, *The Church as Family*, 148.

strengthen communion, participation and co-responsibility in the church following the trinitarian model of the church as the family of God.

The church as the family of God is also founded on the human experience particularly of Latin American, African and Asian people. Indeed, the cultures of these peoples highlight family values, structure and relationships. Although the natural family has some limitations it is still valued among people of these continents because it has more positive than negative values. Apart from it, the human family is the basic foundation of society, particularly in Latin America, Africa and Asia. It is “the basic, resilient human network that is creatively constructing a human space for the future”.¹⁶⁴ The family includes vertical and horizontal relationships. Therefore it can be relevant to describe relationships with God, with members in the church and with people in society. The fact that the family is very close to people is a significant basis for the development of an inculturated theology of the church as the family of God which has many pastoral implications for the benefit of the church and the family in society today. In other words, in these documents the image of the church as God’s family is closely related with the church as communion, but it is easier for people to understand the church as family rather than the church as communion. Indeed, the church as family appeals to Latin American, African and Asian sensibility more than any other image of the church.¹⁶⁵

The contents of the metaphor of the church as the family of God appeared explicitly in the writings of some Church Fathers and in church documents. It is time for putting them into practice which has been a challenge for the church as the family of God. The relational and communal dimension of the metaphor of the church as the family of God, particularly in the eucharist, has challenged the church and the faithful to fulfil their mission. There is a need for showing more concern and empathy as well as for carrying out concrete actions in dealing with people of all walks of life. Such an attitude helps people realise the expressions of the church as family in which all people are included. Besides, the family metaphor used in baptism, serves to overcome the limitations of the human family in order to build up the church as God’s family. In particular, a participatory leadership and the prophetic role of the church as God’s family, which are highlighted in church documents, need to be lived out by all members of the people of God so that the ecclesiological model of the church as the family of God becomes an authentic model of the Trinity in the world.

¹⁶⁴ John Prior, “The Asian Family Towards a Culture of Integral Life: a Personal Reflection on the Eighth FABC Plenary Assembly, Daejeon, South Korea,” *EAPR* 42 (2005), 285.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. *Puebla Document* 239, in Eagleson and Scharper (eds.), *Puebla and Beyond*, 154; *EIA* 63; FABC VIII, *The Asian Family Towards a Culture of Integral Life*, 50.

The discussion of the concept/model of the church as the family of God in this chapter provided the theological understanding to develop an ecclesiology of the church as the family of God which will be studied in detail in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

ECCLESIOLOGY OF THE CHURCH AS THE FAMILY OF GOD

The Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* (1995) urged the development of an ecclesiology of the church as the family of God along with other biblical images of the church, such as the people of God, flock and shepherd, and the temple of the Spirit.¹ These images mainly describe the divine and human relationships. According to the Message of the Synod for Africa, the ecclesiological concept of the family of God originates from the Trinity,² adopts the cultural characteristics of the African family,³ is expressed through Small Christian Communities⁴ and is directed to evangelisation through the promotion of justice and peace.⁵

The ecclesiology of the church as the family of God is founded on trinitarian communion which is also a relational communion. On the theological level the church as the family of God is referred primarily to the Trinity since the church is the mystery of trinitarian communion. Communion is a fundamental matter of communion with the Trinity which leads to communion within the church and its members. In the ecclesiological field the church as the family of God must promote participation and co-responsibility which is developed through basic communities “as a means for the construction of a more profound communion”.⁶ In terms of cultural and pastoral contextualisation the church as the family of God has to address the world and be for the world. This relationality must extend to the whole creation because the church as family and as communion has “to be close enough to the social reality to identify with the real anguish of those to whom salvation is brought”.⁷

This chapter will examine four inter-related ecclesiologies of trinitarian communion, Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs), ancestral veneration and liberation in order to

¹ *EIA* 63.

² Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for Africa, *MOS* 20; 24-25.

³ *Ibid.*, 27; *EIA* 63.

⁴ Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for Africa, *MOS* 28.

⁵ *Ibid.*, *MOS* 31-34.

⁶ The 1985 Synod of Bishops, *Final Report*, II. C 6; cf. *EA* 25.

⁷ *Ibid.*, *Final Report*, III. D 1.

provide a theoretical framework for the development and the implications of an ecclesiology of the church as the family of God.

3.1 Trinitarian Ecclesiology

Theologically, the family of God is the Trinity since “the church-family has its origin in the Blessed Trinity at the depths of which the Holy Spirit is the bond of communion”.⁸ The Spirit is the principle of communion in the Trinity and in the church, and hence the study of the role of the Spirit is significant in any ecclesiology. In particular, a theology of the church as the family of God must be a trinitarian ecclesiology in which the role of the Spirit needs to be emphasised since the Spirit is the dynamic power for church life within the church and with the world.⁹

Trinitarian ecclesiology of the Catholic Church can be traced back to the nineteenth century,¹⁰ but since the Second Vatican Council, it was officially proclaimed in church documents and has been developed by Catholic theologians and scholars in various theological fields.¹¹ Generally, Catholic ecclesiology has been developed from two perspectives: christological/christocentric and pneumatological/pneumatocentric. Trinitarian ecclesiology studies the theology of the Trinity, or both Christology and Pneumatology, especially the reception of the power of the Holy Spirit, in order to highlight communion within the church and with society according to the trinitarian model, to promote ecumenism among Christian churches and to witness to human development. The scope of this section is limited to the trinitarian perspective in church

⁸ Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for Africa, *MOS 20*; cf. *MOS 24*.

⁹ *EIA 63* emphasises that an ecclesiology of the church as the family of God must take into account the image of the mystical body, the people of God and the temple of the Holy Spirit. It is noted that the trinitarian foundation of the church as the family of God is also emphasised by the Vietnamese bishops. Cf. *Acta Synodalia*, vol. I, pars IV, 515; *Acta Synodalia*, vol. II, pars II, 44.

¹⁰ Trinitarian ecclesiology can be traced back to the work of Johann Adam Möhler (1796-1838) who started his theological work in the area of Spirit-centred ecclesiology which later turned into Incarnation-centred ecclesiology. His theology and doctrine influenced the Catholic Church up to the first half of the twentieth century. Cf. Bradford E. Hinze, “Realising the Spirit in a Trinitarian Ecclesiology,” in B. E. Hinze and D. L. Dabney (eds.), *Advents of the Spirit* (Milwaukee WI: Marquette University Press, 2001), 347-348; Michael J. Himes, “The Development of Ecclesiology: Modernity to the Twentieth Century,” in Peter C. Phan (ed.), *The Gift of the Church* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 56-59; Roger Haight, *Christian Community in History*, vol. 2 (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2005), 336-355.

¹¹ Hinze, “Realising the Spirit in a Trinitarian Ecclesiology,” 353-366. Hinze identified the contributions to the development of trinitarian ecclesiology from Yves Congar (1904-1995), Heribert Mühlen (1927-), Karl Rahner (1904-1984), and from some theological issues, such as liberation and inculturation theologies of Leonardo Boff and Edward Schillebeeckx and the critique of excessive pneumatism of Henri de Lubac (1896-1991), Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988) and Joseph Ratzinger (1927-). These contributions show that trinitarian ecclesiology has been developed and applied to various theological areas.

documents since the Second Vatican Council and the developments of trinitarian ecclesiology in the church as the family of God.¹²

3.1.1 Trinitarian Ecclesiology in Church Documents since the Second Vatican Council

Ecclesiology in the decades prior to the Second Vatican Council was mainly from a christocentric perspective or on a christological foundation. It gave special attention to the christological aspect of the church and thus to its visible and institutional structure. The church was considered as the Mystical Body of Christ and a perfect society. These two images of the church were found in the Encyclical *Mystici Corporis* (1943) which situated ecclesiology in the context of apologetics. As the Mystical Body of Christ, the church is an organisation which is one, visible and hierarchically organised; it has Christ as its founder and head who sustains the church's mission by his command and his Spirit.¹³ Therefore membership is exclusively restricted to Roman Catholics who are related to Christ.¹⁴ As a perfect society, the church is far superior to all other human societies although the church and the human societies have a fundamental similarity.¹⁵

The Encyclical *Mystici Corporis* centred the church on Christ and tried to harmonize these two images.¹⁶ It certainly made advances on the development of ecclesiology compared with the preceding documents. The image "the Mystical Body of Christ" shows a renewed investigation of ecclesiology, a recovery of the communal dimension of the

¹² For the history and the development of trinitarian ecclesiology, see Bruno Forte, *The Church Icon of the Trinity* (Makati: St Pauls Publications), 17-24; Jean Rigal, *Découvrir l'Église* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2000), 57-64; Hinze and Dabney (eds.), *Advents of the Spirit*, particularly "Realising the Power of the Spirit in a Trinitarian Ecclesiology," 347-381.

¹³ Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis* (MC) 13: "If we would define and describe this true church of Christ - which is the One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic Roman Church - we shall find nothing more noble, more sublime, or more divine than the expression "the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ". See also MC 1; 31; 53; 56. Cf. Himes, "The Development of Ecclesiology," 64: "A much richer development of the christological ecclesiology ... ultimately traceable to Möhler was to be found in *Mystici Corporis* ... The encyclical emphasised that the spiritual, charismatic community of grace and the institutional, hierarchically-ordered society are one and the same". See also Yves Congar, *Le Concile de Vatican II* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1984), 164.

¹⁴ MC 22: "Actually only those are to be included as members of the church who have been baptised and profess the true faith, and who have not been so unfortunate as to separate themselves from the unity of the body, or been excluded by legitimate authority for grave faults committed". See also MC 13; 40; 41; 44. For the theological explanation of the title "the mystical body of Christ" of the Encyclical, see Jean Rigal, *L'ecclésiologie de communion: son évolution historique et ses fondements* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2000), 39-41.

¹⁵ MC 63: "Hence, this word [body] in its correct signification gives us to understand that the church, a perfect society of its kind, is not made up of merely moral and juridical elements and principles. It is far superior to all other human societies". The Encyclical tries to overcome the concept of the church as a society. However, it could not exclude this concept since the term "body" implies the meaning of community or society.

¹⁶ Cf. Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 44-45. Dulles writes that *Mystici Corporis* "attempts to harmonise the 'Mystical Body' concept with the societal concept of Bellarmine".

church, and a new dynamic metaphor.¹⁷ However, the Encyclical also reflects some limitations. Due to its exclusive identification of the body of Christ with the Roman Catholic Church it fails to offer a legitimate inclusion of all the baptised into the body of Christ and to reflect on the deeper and profound implications of this biblical image. In addition, the Encyclical could not move beyond the overly juridical and hierarchical understanding of the church and did not sufficiently develop the inclusion and participation of the laity in the church.¹⁸ However, parallel to the dominant christological ecclesiology there were also some revivals of biblical and patristic studies which emphasised the pneumatological aspect of the church.¹⁹

The Second Vatican Council known as the council of the church provides a new vision of the church. The council developed an ecclesiology, which though significantly based on the scriptures and patristic writings, could not be separated totally from the influences of the earlier periods. It described the church both in trinitarian and christological perspectives by using three important ecclesiological images: the People of God, the Body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit.²⁰ Each divine person in this trinitarian image has a distinctive but reciprocal role in the development of the church.

The trinitarian ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council is recognised particularly in *Lumen Gentium*. This document describes the church in the context of the trinitarian

¹⁷ John J. Markey, *Creating Communion: The Theology of the Constitutions of the Church* (New York: New City Press, 2003), 42-43; Jean Rigal, *Le mystère de l'Église - fondements théologiques et perspectives pastorales* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1992), 174-176. According to Rigal, the Encyclical is of great importance in terms of ecclesiology because of the following reasons. It centres on Christ; it marks a recovery from a long period of ecclesiocentrism where the societal and juridical concepts were predominant; it underlines the mystical identity of Christ and of the church in the biblical and patristic traditions.

¹⁸ Markey, *Creating Communion*, 44; cf. Rigal, *Le mystère de l'Église*, 179; *Découvrir l'Église*, 62. According to Rigal, the references to Trinity and God the Father are rare in the Encyclical. Besides, there are only three paragraphs out of 110 in the document studying particularly the Holy Spirit. Edward Hahnenberg, "The Mystical Body of Christ and Communion Ecclesiology: Historical Parallels," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 70 (2005), 11-13: "While the Encyclical [*Mystici Corporis*] gave the juridical concept of the church a deeper theological base; its emphasis on the papal office exceeded even the language of the First Vatican Council". Cf. *MC* 40.

¹⁹ Himes, "The Development of Ecclesiology," 63-66; Markey, *Creating Communion*, 44-50.

²⁰ *LG* 17; *PO* 1; *AG* 7. Hans Küng, *The Church* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967), 107-206. Küng called the three images: the People of God, the Body of Christ, and the Temple of the Holy Spirit, the fundamental structure of the church. Indeed, these three images, which express the essence of the church and the description of the role of the Holy Spirit in the church, keep the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council as well as the church balanced between the christological and pneumatological orientations. The trinitarian perspective of the council is also recognised through 258 references to the Holy Spirit in the conciliar documents or a great number of reference to the term "Christ's Spirit" (*LG* 8; 13; 14; 36; *GS* 48; *PO* 12; *AG* 11; 15). Cf. Congar, *Le Concile de Vatican II*, 163-177; *Acta Synodalia*, vol. II, pars I, 187. According to Congar, Christ is the founder (*LG* 8; 18; 22; 27) as well as the foundation of the church (*LG* 48, *PO* 5). However, the church cannot be defined without the Spirit of Christ (*LG* 14). Pope Paul VI declared on the opening of the second session of the council: "May this council have always in mind the relationship between us and Jesus Christ, between the saintly and live Church and Christ. Let no other light shines on this assembly, that is not the Christ, light of the world".

economy of salvation.²¹ The Father calls people to participate in his own divine life; he sends his Son to do this work and also the Holy Spirit to sanctify the church.²² The Trinity is also considered the origin or foundation, nature and destiny of the church. The church “comes from the Trinity [and] is fashioned to the image of the Trinity and journeys towards a trinitarian fulfilment of history”.²³ As the icon of the Trinity, the nature of the church is structured according to the model of the trinitarian communion. The church is compared with the mystery of the Incarnate Word and its people are called to follow the communion in God’s own life.²⁴ Therefore the church is analogically likened to the divine communion which is characterised by unity in a diversity of divine Persons. This trinitarian model of communion helps to promote the variety of gifts and ministries in the church. It makes the church “maintain its distance both from uniformity which would flatten out and deaden the originality and richness of the gifts of the Spirit, and from all divisive discord, which would fail to harmonise the tension between the various charisms and ministries”.²⁵ The destiny of the church is to be in union with the heavenly church. The church does not end in this world, but moves towards the origin from whence it came.²⁶ In other words, the church in the in-between time has to strive for the trinitarian communion as its goal.

The conciliar trinitarian ecclesiology also mentions particularly the activity of the Holy Spirit in the church. The Spirit accomplishes Jesus’ work by way of building up the church. The Spirit is communicated to Christians since Christ “has shared with us his Spirit ... who vivifies, unifies and moves the whole body”.²⁷ The Spirit also works among the people of God to help them to accept the word of God, to distribute charismatic gifts for the needs of the church, and to inspire the call to consecrated life, mission and ecumenism.²⁸ Besides, the charismatic dimension of the church is also recognised in the conciliar description of the effect of the Spirit through the bishops and of the sense of

²¹ The trinitarian economy salvation is also found in the *Constitution on Divine Revelation* and the *Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church*, for example, DV 2 and AG 4.

²² Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, “The Ecclesiology of the Constitution on the Church, Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*,” OR 19 September 2001, 5. According to Ratzinger, “the christological vision of the church necessarily expands to become a trinitarian ecclesiology” because “no one can speak correctly ... of the Son without at the same time speaking of the Father, and since, it is impossible to speak correctly of the Father and the Son without listening to the Holy Spirit”. Cf. LG 2-4.

²³ Forte, *The Church Icon of the Trinity*, 29. Cf. LG 2-4.

²⁴ LG 8; 2.

²⁵ LG 17.

²⁶ LG 48.

²⁷ LG 7; 8.

²⁸ LG 12; 44; DV 8; 23; AA 3; AG 29; UR 1.

faith of all faithful.²⁹ Based on this charismatic structure of the church, Kasper concludes that in the church there should not be “any one-sided top-down relationship between bishops and priests or between laypeople, priests and bishops. Rather, there should be a mutual relationship built on brotherhood and friendship”.³⁰

The trinitarian ecclesiology of the council, expressed in the trinitarian perspective of the church’s nature and mission, makes the theology of the church balanced which has many advantages in terms of communion, mission and ecumenism. In particular, the emphasis on the Spirit in relation to the church helps the Catholic Church to overcome the pyramidal hierarchy, to dialogue with the world including religious and cultural institutions, and to promote interreligious dialogue with other Christians.³¹

The trinitarian ecclesiology of the council reappeared in post-conciliar documents. In the Encyclical *Dominum et Vivificantem* (1986), the Holy Spirit is described as the Person who constituted the church in relation to the work of the Father and the Son.³² The relationship within the Trinity is considered an exchange of mutual love between the divine Persons. This document acknowledges the pneumatological perspective in the conciliar ecclesiology.³³ The Exhortation *Pastores Gregis* (2003) refers to the trinitarian ecclesiology in the conciliar teaching when this Exhortation describes the ministry and the pastoral governance of the bishop. In his duty of “governing people as the family of God”, the bishop exercises authority “without authoritativeness” in order to promote the communion and also to awaken “new forms of participation and shared responsibility in the faithful of every category”.³⁴ In other words, church documents have often affirmed the existence of the pneumatological and trinitarian foundations in the conciliar ecclesiology.³⁵ In the post-conciliar documents, the role of the Spirit is emphasised in

²⁹ LG 12; 21; 24; 27; DV 8.

³⁰ Walter Kasper, “Current Problems in Ecumenical Theology,” *CTI Reflections* 6 (2002), 77; cf. LG 28; 37; PO 7; 9; CD 16; 28; AA 25.

³¹ Cf. LG 4; 32, GS 1; UR 2-3.

³² John Paul II, *Dominum et Vivificantem* (DeV) 25: The Holy Spirit “was already at work in the world before Christ was glorified” and dwells “in the church and in the hearts of the faithful”. Cf. LG 4.

³³ DeV 26: “At the same time, the teaching of this council is essential ‘pneumatological’; it is permeated by the truth about the Holy Spirit, as the soul of the church”. Cf. DeV 10.

³⁴ John Paul II, *Pastores Gregis* (PG) 7: “The synod fathers chose explicitly to describe the life and ministry of the bishop in the light of the trinitarian ecclesiology contained in the teaching of the Second Vatican Council”. Cf. PG 42-44.

³⁵ Cf. Forte, *The Church Icon of the Trinity*, 7-38; Michael G. Lawler and T. J. Shanahan, *Church: A Spirited Communion* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1995); George H. Tavard, *The Church, Community of Salvation* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical press, 1992); Peter Drilling, “The Genesis of the Trinitarian Ecclesiology of Vatican II,” *Science et Esprit* 45 (1993), 61-78.

church life, particularly church leaders are asked to follow the Spirit, the Giver of Life, to give life to others since they are members of God's family.

However, the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council has not yet fully developed both pneumatological and trinitarian perspectives. Actually, trinitarian ecclesiology proposed in the council needs time to be further studied. Paul VI twice invited theologians to deepen the study and the reflection on the Holy Spirit.³⁶ McDonnell commented on the deficiencies of the pneumatological perspective in which the mission of the Spirit is seen as secondary compared to that of Christ.³⁷ According to Rigal, the deficiency of the trinitarian perspective exists partially because the council presents many different ecclesiological concepts by putting them one after another without having a sufficient and unifying connection for the development of new ways in ecclesiology.³⁸ In fact, a trinitarian ecclesiology with its main contents has been described in conciliar and post-conciliar documents. But such an ecclesiology needs to be developed in terms of implications for church life within the church and with the world.³⁹

Rigal pointed out that some conciliar documents emphasised the christological aspect of ministry.⁴⁰ *Lumen Gentium* 28 mentions that the ministry of bishops, priests and deacons is connected to Christ and the apostles. Such a description shows historical continuity connecting the church of the present and the past, but it fails to locate ordained ministers

³⁶ General Audience of June 1, 1973: *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, XI (1973), 477. Paul VI encourages that "[t]he Christology and particularly the ecclesiology of the council must be succeeded by a new study of and devotion to the Holy Spirit, precisely as the indispensable complement to the teaching of the Council". In *Marialis Cultus* 27, promulgated in 1973, Paul VI writes that "[i]t is the task of specialists to verify and weigh the truth of this assertion, but it is our task to exhort everyone, especially those in the pastoral ministry and also theologians, to meditate more deeply on the working of the Holy Spirit in the history of salvation, and to ensure that Christian spiritual writings give due prominence to his life-giving action".

³⁷ LG 4; Kilian McDonnell, "Vatican II (1962-1964), Puebla (1979), Synod (1985): *Koinonia/Communio* as an Integral Ecclesiology," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 25 (1988), 402-405. Based on the description of the mission of the Spirit in LG 4, McDonnell called pneumatology in *Lumen Gentium* "consequent pneumatology". Cf. Nikos Nissiotis, "The Main Ecclesiological Problem of the Second Vatican Council," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 2 (1965), 31-62; Rigal, *Le mystère de l'Église*, 223-224; Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, vol. 2 (New York: The Seabury Press, 1983), 167. Congar writes that "the pneumatology of the council is not pneumatocentric".

³⁸ PO 2; 12. Cf. Rigal, *Découvrir l'Église*, 66. The christological emphasis can be also found in LG 18; 19; 20; PO 14.

³⁹ Cf. Markey, *Creating Communion*, 95. "However, while this pneumatology remains central and implicit, various aspects need to be more fully expanded, articulated, and systematised. In particular, how the Spirit actually coordinates and directs the church's life and mission; how the Spirit relates to the hierarchy, to all believers, and to humanity".

⁴⁰ Rigal, *Découvrir l'Église*, 66; *Le mystère de l'Église*, 223-224. Rigal also mentioned the inconsistency between the conciliar texts on ministry. For a similar evaluation of the conciliar teaching on ministry, see William J. Rademacher, *Lay Ministry: A Theological, Spiritual, and Pastoral Handbook* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997), 79-83: "Vatican II's teaching on ministry, as is widely recognised today, has proved to be incomplete and deficient in several aspects. Specifically, a review of the teaching on the priestly ministry found in section 28 of the third chapter of the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* reveals several inconsistencies with the theology contained elsewhere in the same document".

in the diversity of ministries and charisms. In the *Decree on Priestly Ministry and Life* the priestly ministry is conferred by the anointing of the Spirit, but the general description of this ministry in the whole decree is mainly a christological emphasis. Priests perform their priestly office in the name of Christ.⁴¹ According to Rigal, the deficiency or the weakness of the emphasis of the pneumatological aspect might lead to some negative consequences, such as the weakness of collegial aspect of ordained ministers, the lack of promotion of the charisms of the Holy Spirit and the over-emphasis of the vertical dimension of the apostolic ministry.⁴²

The christocentric emphasis and the christological aspect of the ministry in the church are essential. Christ is the foundation and the source of ministry in the church. Ordained ministers must be connected to Christ as the unique Priest and Head of the church. They act in *persona Christi* and *in persona Ecclesiae*, that means, they perform their ministry as Christ's representatives for the service of the church.⁴³ The reference of ministry to Christ should not be isolated from the Spirit on the one hand, and on the other, it must be complemented by the pneumatological aspect because the Holy Spirit is the one who sends the ministers and acts in them for the success of the ministry.⁴⁴ Actually, *Lumen Gentium* also presents the ministry, especially the episcopacy, in a pneumatological context (LG 21). The council grounds the sacramentality of the episcopacy both in the action of Jesus and the Holy Spirit.⁴⁵ The *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, promulgated by the end of the council, acknowledges the trinitarian aspect of the ministry in which the Holy Spirit is the source of Christian communities as well as of ministers (AA 3). Therefore it is important to understand the conciliar ecclesiology in its whole context in order to avoid a one-sided perspective in the theology of ministry.

The emphasis on either Christology or Pneumatology has a different impact on ecclesiology. Congar, one of the prominent theologians who raised the impact of Christology and Pneumatology on ecclesiology, affirmed the necessity of both these theological disciplines in ecclesiology. Prior to 1969 Congar's ecclesiology advocated

⁴¹ Cf. SC 7. For the sacramental meaning of the term "in persona Christi", see Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, vol. 3 (New York: The Seabury Press, 1983), 235-237.

⁴² Rigal, *Le mystère de l'Église*, 224.

⁴³ LG 28, PO 2; 5-6.

⁴⁴ Cf. Elizabeth Teresa Groppé, "The Contribution of Yves Congar's Theology of the Holy Spirit," *TS* 62 (2001), 473. Elizabeth argues that "[N]or can the ministerial office be efficacious without the activity of the Holy Spirit who acts not only through this office but also through the ecclesial body as a whole".

⁴⁵ Cf. Hermann J. Pottmeyer, "The Episcopacy," in Phan (ed.), *The Gift of the Church*, 346-348.

church hierarchy.⁴⁶ He considered such an ecclesiology follows the christological perspective but, later, he admitted the shortcomings of this linear scheme.⁴⁷ However, his post-conciliar ecclesiology promoted the pneumatological perspective as well as the relationship between Christ and the Holy Spirit as theological grounds for building up the church. The Holy Spirit co-institutes the church. In other words, Congar based his trinitarian understanding on the divine mission of both the Son and the Spirit⁴⁸ and was also interested in the pneumatological and trinitarian character of ecclesial communion.⁴⁹

Some other authors also comment on the impact of the one-sided emphasis in ecclesiology. The christomonist perspective or the purely christological theology of the church could only focus on the historical and institutional origin of the church. Jesus, who was sent by God, chose his apostles and formed the community of the new covenant in order to continue his mission in the world. On the other hand, the purely pneumatological theology of the church could only emphasise the period after Pentecost when the church was gathered by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and consequently forgets the relationship of the church with the activities of Jesus in his life.⁵⁰ The priority of christological over pneumatological understanding or vice versa in liturgy and theology makes the issue problematic. Zizioulas referred to biblical and theological arguments to call for a synthesis of Christology and Pneumatology which has many implications in the church.⁵¹ For him, the trinitarian relationship of the divine persons must be taken into account and

⁴⁶ Congar's writing was divided in two time spans (1937-1968 and 1969-1991) which reflect his theological changes on the mission of the Holy Spirit in the church. Cf. Groppe, "The Contribution of Yves Congar's Theology of the Holy Spirit," 468. Yves Congar, *The Mystery of the Church*, rev. ed. (Baltimore and Dublin: Helicon Press, 1965), 25: "The Church is, in the first place, the Body of Christ; it forms with him, a single entity, a single beneficiary of the good things of God".

⁴⁷ Yves Congar, "My Path-Findings in the Theology of Laity and Ministries," *The Jurist* 32 (1972), 175: "Christ makes the hierarchy and the hierarchy makes the church as community of faithful...it places the ministerial priest before and outside the community... It would in fact reduce the building of the community to the action of the hierarchical ministry"; cf. Yves Congar, *Lay People in the Church* (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1965), 47.

⁴⁸ Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, vol. 2, 5-14; Yves Congar, *The Word and the Spirit* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row Publishers, 1986). In *The Word and the Spirit* Congar emphasised the link between the Word and the Spirit as he recalled Irenaeus's expression of the Son and the Holy Spirit as the two hands of God. Cf. Jean Rigal, "Towards an Ecclesiology of Communion," *Theology Digest* 47 (2000), 117-118; "L' ecclésiologie trinitaire du Père Congar," *Bulletin de Litterature Ecclesiastique* 106 (2005), 159-170.

⁴⁹ Cf. Hinze, "Realising the Spirit in a Trinitarian Ecclesiology," 360.

⁵⁰ Rigal, *Le mystère de l'Église*, 225; 247; Metropolitan John of Pergamon, "The Church as Communion," in Thomas Best and Gunther Gassmann (eds.), *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1994), 107; J. D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in the Personhood and the Church* (New York: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 1985), 123-142; 209-246; Zizioulas called the ecclesial situation in which "Pneumatology is weak or dependent in relation to Christology" a sort of "filioquism" and the ecclesiology in which Christology is submitted to Pneumatology "Spiritiquism".

⁵¹ John of Pergamon, "The Church as Communion," 104-110; Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 126-142; "The Pneumatological Dimension of the Church," *Communio* 1 (1974), 142-157. Zizioulas studied the relational identity of the church in the New Testament and developed the relational characteristic to the church's structure, the authority, and the mission in the church. Cf. Rigal, "Toward an Ecclesiology of Communion," 118-120.

emphasised in order to overcome institutionalism. LaCugna pointed out the impact of the trinitarian doctrine on the church.⁵² For her, the doctrine of Trinity is that of “neither hierarchy nor division nor competition” but of “unity in love amid diversity”.⁵³ She also argued that the trinitarian relationship could form a monarchy, but it is a “monarchy always in trinitarian terms”.⁵⁴ In other words, according to LaCugna, church management will be different depending on whether it comes from trinitarian or non-trinitarian ecclesiology.⁵⁵

The lack of a fully developed pneumatological perspective in the present Catholic ecclesiology can be settled if either more studies on the intra-relationships of the three divine Persons or the relationship of the Spirit to the church are developed in order to apply them to the church’s life and structure.⁵⁶ The divine communion in the Trinity or *perichoresis* must be applied to the church. Trinitarian communion needs to be developed in order to provide a model of communion for the institutional church and to complement the christological ecclesiology which is often characterised by a vertical communion in centralisation, hierarchical functions and authority. Similarly, Drilling suggested five areas of the conciliar trinitarian ecclesiology that need to be developed: (1) the trinitarian foundation of the church’s structures and ministry, (2) the charisms of all the baptised faithful, (3) the church as communion, (4) communion in ecumenism, (5) communion with the world.⁵⁷

3.1.2 Developments of Trinitarian Ecclesiology in the Church as the Family of God

The council pointed out the foundations of trinitarian ecclesiology. However, a more fully developed trinitarian ecclesiology, which is totally responsive to the person and mission of the Spirit, has been emerging with some different approaches in which the role of the

⁵² Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993), 402. She mentioned that “the trinitarian doctrine of God...might not specify the exact forms of structure and community to the church, but it does provide the critical principle against which we can measure present institutional arrangements”.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 403.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 391. According to LaCugna, the monarchy exists “on the basis of what is revealed of God through Christ and the Spirit, without subordinationism, without unitarianism, and without positing substance as more ultimate than person or relation”.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 402: “We may ask whether our institutions, rituals, and administrative practices foster elitism, discrimination, competition, or any of several ‘archism’, or whether the church is run like God’s household: a domain of inclusiveness, interdependence, and cooperation, structured according to the model of *perichoresis* among persons”.

⁵⁶ Rigal, *Découvrir l’Église*, 66; 75-88; Richard Lennan, *Risking the Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 88; Hinze, “Realising the Power of the Spirit,” 366-372.

⁵⁷ Drilling, “The Genesis of the Trinitarian Ecclesiology of Vatican II,” 76-78.

Spirit must be considered the “co-institutor” of the church.⁵⁸ In the trinitarian ecclesiology of the church as the family of God the Spirit will be developed for the promotion of (1) communion, (2) ministries and (3) the church’s mission.⁵⁹

The role of the Holy Spirit in the creation of the church was never denied in Catholic theology. But to understand the church more in terms of the Spirit of God is a challenge because most often the christological aspect was more emphasised than the pneumatological in western theology since the separation of East and West in 1054. Thanks to the influence of Congar,⁶⁰ the Orthodox Churches, particularly Zizioulas,⁶¹ and the World Council of Churches, the Catholic Church has been more aware and appreciated of the constitutive relationship between the church and the Holy Spirit.⁶²

The gospel narratives and the *Acts* present adequately the role of the Spirit in the life of Jesus and the church. The Holy Spirit was associated with the birth of Jesus and also the beginning of his ministry. In other words, Jesus’ life was filled with the Spirit. In fact, there is a relationship between Jesus, the Holy Spirit and the Father.⁶³ The Holy Spirit was given to the disciples to assist them to proclaim the good news to the whole creation, particularly at Pentecost.⁶⁴ Consequently, the Christian tradition has associated the coming of the Holy Spirit with the birth of the church. Thus such a biblical approach in trinitarian ecclesiology adopts a broader perspective on Jesus as the founder of the church which is also a product of the Spirit. The Spirit is given to Jesus’ disciples in order to transform them into a community of witness to Jesus as Christ.⁶⁵ However, the roles of Christ and the Spirit in the church are mutually related or connected but not identical. Christians are incorporated into Christ but not into the Spirit. The Spirit who is given to

⁵⁸ Hinze, “Realising the Power of the Spirit,” 366-367. Hinze identified the emergence of three main approaches in a trinitarian ecclesiology during the second half of the twentieth century. They are: (1) the construction of complementary ways of speaking about the traditional ordering of Father, Son, and Spirit in the Trinity; (2) the development of Spirit Christology as presented in the gospel narratives; and (3) the renewal of the appreciation of the perichoretic communion of persons in the Trinity.

⁵⁹ Hinze, “Realising the Power of the Spirit,” 368.

⁶⁰ Congar, *The Word and The Spirit*, 99; *I Believe in the Spirit*, vol. 2, 6.

⁶¹ J. Zizioulas, “L’Église comme communion,” *Documentation Catholique* 90 (1993), 824; Christologie, pneumatologie et institutions ecclésiales,” in G. Alberigo (ed.), *Les Église après Vatican II* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1981), 137. Cf. Rigal, “Towards an Ecclesiology of Communion,” 117-123.

⁶² Cf. Rigal, “Towards an Ecclesiology of Communion,” 117-123.

⁶³ Lk 1-2; 3:21-22; 4:14-30; Mt 3:16; Mk 1:4-13; Jn 4:8-17.

⁶⁴ Lk 24: 49; Mk 16:15; Acts 2:1-36; 10:45; 15:4.

⁶⁵ Cf. Lennan, *Risking the Church*, 87-101.

Christians stays with them so that they become the children of God to build up the church and return with Christ to the Father.⁶⁶

The biblical approach highlights the relationship in the Trinity which is the basic foundation for trinitarian ecclesiology. The three divine persons exist for one another and this relationship is the identity of the Trinity.⁶⁷ Following the relational character of the Trinity, trinitarian ecclesiology also describes the church in terms of communion. The church is the mystery of communion or the sacrament of vertical and horizontal communion. "The church, in Christ, is a sacrament - a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of the unity of the entire human race" (LG 1). Members of the church live in communion with God who is the source of, and the model for, communion with their brothers and sisters. Communion is not only the foundation but also the mission of the church. Such a description of the church shows that, first of all, the church is not made up of structures, but it is made up of people united in faith and brotherhood/sisterhood love.⁶⁸ In other words, the description of trinitarian ecclesiology in terms of the divine relationship or communion with people after the divine model can save ecclesiology from the separation of Christology and Pneumatology.

Trinitarian ecclesiology is also considered ecclesiology of communion because the Trinity is the source and the model of communion and because they both focus on relationship.⁶⁹ The communion which trinitarian ecclesiology promotes, in a broad sense, is an organic communion,⁷⁰ that is, the holistic communion among God, humans and all creation. In the church, it is the organic communion in the Body of Christ that promotes participation, sharing, unity in diversity, co-responsibility and inter-dependence. It is also a dialogical communion with God and each other in which the agency of the Holy Spirit is understood as active in the promotion of communion.⁷¹ The Spirit facilitates communion between the universal and local church. In society, it is a communion of healthy

⁶⁶ Rigal, *Découvrir l'Église*, 68. Cf. 1 Cor 12; 13; Rom 8:9.

⁶⁷ Cf. Rigal, *Découvrir l'Église*, 67.

⁶⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 67-69; Anthony Kelly, *The Trinity of Love* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1989), 228-234.

⁶⁹ Cf. Kasper, "Current Problems in Ecumenical Theology," 79; Doyle, *Communion Ecclesiology*, 12. Kasper argues that "[T]he most profound justification for a *communio*-ecclesiology is based on the eternal trinitarian communion of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit". Doyle describes that communion ecclesiology "focuses on relationships, whether among the persons of the Trinity, among human beings and God, among the members of the Communion of Saints, among members of a parish, or among the bishops dispersed throughout the world".

⁷⁰ Rigal, *Le mystère de l'Église*, 234.

⁷¹ Hinze, "Realising the Power of the Spirit," 371.

relationships among people and with the environment.⁷² Following the model of trinitarian communion the church needs to develop a community which will discourage competition and exploitation but encourage life-sharing and responsibility for the needy in community.⁷³

The trinitarian model is also that of self-communication for the church and human communities. The trinitarian communication is a kind of transparent and loving one expressed in such a way that the “communication is the communicator”.⁷⁴ It is also called the perichoretic communion of persons of a shared trinitarian life in which the Holy Spirit is the principle of vital communication.⁷⁵ Such communion must become the model for communication in the church and in human communities in order to promote dialogue, consultation and collaboration and to avoid misunderstanding as well as conflict in communication among people.⁷⁶

The above description of communion in trinitarian ecclesiology covers or includes the issues of ministries and mission in general. Communion helps to develop the diversity of ministries or charisms and the promotion of mission. They are the fruits of communion. However, one can expand the emphasis of the role of the Spirit in trinitarian ecclesiology in these two areas. The trinitarian foundation in ministry is quite explicit in biblical and theological teachings in which the Spirit takes an important role. The Spirit confers charisms which promote the mutuality of ministries and also animates the church by various charisms. The Spirit is the only source of ministry which is beyond the expression of personal charisms. Therefore ministry in the name of the Spirit must be in the service of the whole community.⁷⁷ The Spirit also motivates Christians for mission which is the very *raison d'être* of the church. Indeed, the church is empowered by the Spirit to continue Jesus' mission in the world. In other words, a church grounded in the Spirit

⁷² Skublics, “Communion Ecclesiology,” *One in Christ* 34 (1998), 132-133: “Trinitarian communion ecclesiology provides the only radical and consistent theological foundation for a Christian affirmation of such projects [social, political, and liberation projects] for the life of the world”.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Hinze, “Realising the Power of the Spirit,” 372.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 369-372; cf. Skublics, “Communion Ecclesiology,” 133-134.

⁷⁷ Peter Drilling, “Discipleship, Ministry and Authority: A Trinitarian View of Ecclesial Life,” *Seminary Journal* 2 (2001), 13-31; Richard R. Gaillardetz, “The Ecclesiological Foundations of Ministry within an Ordered Communion” in Susan K. Wood (ed.), *Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 26-51; Lennan, *The Risking Church*, 224-225. Cf. Lk 4:18; Jn 20:21-22; Acts 2:38; 1 Cor 12:1; 14:1; LG 4; 12; 14; AA 3; GS 40.

must show its sympathy for the world and its realities. This mission includes evangelisation, liberation and integral salvation.⁷⁸

Overall, trinitarian communion does not advocate domination, uniformity and dependence. However, it happens that sometimes communion is understood as one-way communion or a kind of subordination. Such an understanding is not organic and perichoretic but destructive communion. Thus for the development of trinitarian ecclesiology of the church as God's family, it is necessary to build up BECs. In other words, the development of trinitarian ecclesiology in which the harmonious reception of the power of Christ and the Holy Spirit is kept will facilitate the ecclesiology of BECs, ancestral veneration and liberation. These ecclesiologies showing the relationships in the family of God are the expressions of inculturation which is the work of the Spirit.

3.2 Ecclesiology of Basic Ecclesial Communities

Ecclesiologicaly, the church as the family of God is expressed through BECs because, as the Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* argues, "the church as family cannot reach her full potential as church unless she is divided into communities".⁷⁹ BECs are often also called new ways of being church in Asia.⁸⁰ These basic organisations in the church advocate the relationship among the faithful as well as the participation in the church as in a family. The term "BECs" is chosen because it was often used in some church documents.⁸¹ This section will explore the emergence of BECs based on church documents and some of their characteristics which are more relevant to the family of God.

3.2.1 Basic Ecclesial Communities in Church Documents

"Basic Ecclesial Communities" is one of the titles often used for the Christian communities which appeared in the 1960s in the church, particularly in Latin America, Africa and Asia. These communities were generally inspired by liberation theology.⁸² They emerged independently in the continents although they were started almost in the same period. So the initial developments of BECs in different continents had their own reasons; however, its significant reasons are: the urgency for lay participation in church

⁷⁸ Cf. LG 4; AG 2; GS 1; EN 9; 29. Cf. Lennan, *Risking the Church*, 117-118.

⁷⁹ EIA 89; Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for Africa, MOS 28.

⁸⁰ Cf. EA 24-25.

⁸¹ It is noted that BECs were used in EN 58 and EA 25 and Ecclesial Basic Communities in RM 51. Basic ecclesial communities are also called by other names, such as basic/small Christian communities, ecclesial basic communities, and grassroots Christian communities.

⁸² Fuellenbach, *Church: Community for the Kingdom*, 252.

activities and for genuine Christian witness of the laity in society and the need of real interpersonal relationships as well as the sense of communal belonging.⁸³

BECs had been acknowledged in the documents of the Episcopal Conference of Latin America since 1968. But it was until the 1974 Synod of Bishops on Evangelisation that BECs were advocated as an evangelisation strategy for the whole church and were first mentioned in the Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975). In this document, BECs were characterised as the communities which “spring from the need to live the church's life more intensely, or from the desire and quest for a more human dimension such as larger ecclesial communities can only offer with difficulty, especially in the big modern cities which lend themselves both to life in the mass and to anonymity”.⁸⁴ In a similar way, the Puebla document (1979) noted the positive characteristics of BECs, such as the close links between BECs and the family/neighbourhood and the BECs personalised/familial style of evangelisation.⁸⁵

From this first reference in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* BECs were often mentioned in subsequent church documents. The Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae* (1979) considered BECs as a suitable locus for catechesis.⁸⁶ The Final Report of the 1985 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops identified BECs in the ecclesiology of communion by stating that these basic communities were “a true expression of communion and a means for the construction of a more profound communion” when they truly live in unity with the church.⁸⁷ The Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (1988) called BECs “true expression of ecclesial communion and centres of evangelisation”.⁸⁸ The Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (1990) devoted a section to describe the strength of BECs as a “force for evangelisation” since these communities developed rapidly in the young churches as “centres for Christian formation and missionary outreach”.⁸⁹ The Exhortation *Ecclesia in*

⁸³ FABC, *Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church*, in G. Rosales and C. G. Arévalo (eds.) *FAPA* vol. 1 (hereafter *FAPA I*) I, 76. Other reasons are the shortage of priests and the need of being supported in big parishes or in a non-Christian environment. For a detailed history of BECs in the different continents, see John Paul Vandenakler, *Small Christian Communities* (Kansas City: Heed & Ward, 1994), 97-125; James O' Halloran, *Small Christian Communities* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 18-39; Oliver Alozie Onwulibiko, *The Church in Mission in the Light of Ecclesia in Africa* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2001), 160-164.

⁸⁴ *EN* 58.

⁸⁵ Cf. Alfred T. Hennelly, “The Grassroots Church,” in *CTSA Proceedings* 36 (1981), 185.

⁸⁶ John Paul II, *Catechesis Tradendae* (CT) 47.

⁸⁷ The 1985 Synod of Bishops, *Final Report*, II. C. 6.

⁸⁸ *ChL* 26.

⁸⁹ John Paul, *Redemptoris Missio* (RM) 51: “These are groups of Christians who, at the level of the family or in a similarly restricted setting, come together for prayer, scripture reading, catechesis, and discussion on human and ecclesial problems with a view of a common commitment. These communities are a sign of

Asia (1999) highlighted BECs as “an effective way of promoting communion and participation ... [and] a positive feature of the church’s evangelising activity” for the third millennium.⁹⁰ BECs have taken a special role in the church as family because, according to the Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*, the church as family cannot reach its full potential as church unless it is divided into communities to foster close human relationship.⁹¹

The frequent references to BECs in many church documents showed that BECs have been officially acknowledged and encouraged by the magisterium. These communities were considered as an indispensable means to promote the ecclesiological concept of the church as God’s family for the participation of lay ministries in evangelisation.

3.2.2 Characteristics of Basic Ecclesial Communities

The characteristics of BECs are mainly determined by its title. The following will look closely at the meanings of “basic ecclesial communities” to see the relationship between BECs and the ecclesiological concept of the church as the family of God.

First, by communities, they generally mean togetherness and solidarity among members who choose a lifestyle which is in contrast with the “individualistic, self-interested and competitive” pattern of people in the contemporary world.⁹² Like family members those of these communities come together regularly to relate to one another, to support their common needs and concerns, and so is the foundational meaning of a community. In addition to the above purposes, particularly for Christians, these communities must be inspired, modelled and centred on Jesus. They must be guided by the charisms of the Holy Spirit which makes ministries more flexible and creative.⁹³ They frequently meet one another for prayer, Bible study and sharing the spirit of community in mutually helping in faith as well as in ordinary life.⁹⁴ From these goals they promote among themselves two characteristics: communion and participation. The first characteristic will be attained by stressing that Christian faith is not a privatised, but a shared, real experience which is mutually nurtured and supported. This kind of Christian life will improve the relationship among members to facilitate participation. The second one aims at fostering community

vitality within the church, an instrument of formation and evangelisation, and a solid starting point for a new society based on a civilisation of love”.

⁹⁰ EA 25.

⁹¹ EIA 89.

⁹² Marcello de C. Azevedo, “Basic Ecclesial Communities,” *TS* 46 (1985), 602.

⁹³ FABC, *Asian Colloquium on Ministries*, in *FAPA* I, 76-77; FABC Office of Theological Concerns, *The Spirit at Work in Asia Today*, in F-J. Eilers (ed.), *FAPA* vol. 3 (hereafter *FAPA* III), 309-311.

⁹⁴ These activities were also those of the first Christian community described in Acts 4:32. Indeed, these activities lead to the formation of community of believers who are “united heart and soul”.

life through active participation especially in decision-making and in leadership. Indeed, communion and participation are important qualities to maintain community life.

As in any community, members could be homogeneous or heterogeneous. They could belong to the same or different groups in terms of interest, career, age or gender. BECs include laity, religious and clergy. The laity consists of many sectors, such as catechists, educators and social workers or of people being responsible for various ministries, like the ministry of the eucharist and the word of God. Religious and clergy are made up of men and women, of congregations from different charisms or spiritualities, of religious or secular priests and bishops. Because of that diversified membership, BECs are communities where there is no class distinction and leadership in these communities and also in the church must be participatory in style which promotes consultation, dialogue, and sharing. Such participatory leadership will benefit the church and BECs because “the people will feel responsible for and part of the decision-making process in matters that affect the whole community”.⁹⁵

Biblically, the community of Christians in the New Testament can be traced back or referred to the chosen people in the Old Testament. God did not make the covenant with individuals but with all the Israelites, the people of God. Redemption came to everyone through the membership in the community. In the New Testament, discipleship is also a call to join a community called the church.⁹⁶

Secondly, the term “ecclesial” implies that these communities have some connection or relationship with church organisations like parishes or dioceses. This “ecclesiality” has a special identity to show that BECs are in communion with the church and, at the same time, that BECs are different from basic communities of other denominations or of social organisations. It is described and proven by the communion in Christian faith and in the church hierarchy.⁹⁷

For some Latin American theologians, the religious character is the “specific quality of BECs” which is its “rootedness in the Catholic faith”.⁹⁸ This faith is expressed in two dimensions: vertical and horizontal communion. In the first sense, it is faith in God. It acts as a criterion to build these communities and bind members together as well as to

⁹⁵ FABC, *Asian Colloquium on Ministries*, in *FAPA I*, 77.

⁹⁶ Cf. Bernard J. Lee *et al.*, *The Catholic Experience of Small Christian Communities* (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2000), 123.

⁹⁷ Marcello De C. Azevedo, *Basic Ecclesial Communities in Brazil: The Challenge of a New Way of Being Church*, trans. John Drury (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1987), 66.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 67.

distinguish BECs from other social communities. It is also an important element to sustain BECs as independent, living and active communities in areas where a shortage of priests and religious occurs. The faith of Christian lay people in BECs also helps to transform the old face of the church as a clerical church into a church of the people or the family of God in which the majority are laity. This religious or Christian element, according to Asian Bishops, is centred in the sharing of the word of God and particularly in the eucharistic celebration.⁹⁹

The horizontal communion could be seen through the linkup with the institutional church. It is essential and challenging for BECs to keep this ecclesial communion. BECs could be started from initiatives of clergy such as in Africa, but in most places they come from the laity as in Latin America.¹⁰⁰ In both cases, either from clergy or laity, they need support from church pastors or leaders to keep them in communion and in unity with the church. But at the same time, they also need a certain autonomy within the boundary of the church to develop their initiatives in living their Christian life. To keep BECs in this harmonious position between the institutional and charismatic church is a challenge which seems to become more problematic since these communities are pastoral but not juridical structures yet. Fuellenbach mentioned some problems facing BECs due to the latter's character, such as difficulty in direction discernment and the tendency to become socio-political communities or independent ecclesial communities.¹⁰¹

Communion with the church explicitly constitutes the ecclesiality of BECs. In this sense, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* offered a clear definition of basic communities and BECs. Indeed, BECs have to be united with the church in order to foster the growth of the church.¹⁰²

By ecclesiality it is often understood that these communities consist of Catholics since they started from the Catholic Church. Later on, the ecumenical aspect of these communities could be recognised as Basic Christian Communities which included all Christian denomination members in this organisation. These communities also had another name, basic human communities, where believers of non-Christian

⁹⁹ Cf. PO 4: "No Christian community is built up which does not grow from and hinge on the celebration of the most holy eucharist". FABC, *Asian Colloquium on Ministries*, in *FAPA I*, 77.

¹⁰⁰ Fuellenbach, *Church: Community for the Kingdom*, 178.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 184.

¹⁰² Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi (EN)* 58. "Communities which separate themselves from the church by their spirit of protest and damage its oneness may well call themselves 'basic communities'; but in such cases the term is purely sociological in its thrust. It would be an abuse of language for them to call themselves 'basic ecclesial communities', even though they might still claim to be persisting in church unity despite their hostility to the hierarchy. This designation applies to other groups that come together as church, to be united with the church and to foster the growth of the church".

denominations live or are in the majority.¹⁰³ These basic human communities consist of all people regardless of religion or faith who form into communities to look after their own common human needs rather than only their religious concerns. Indeed, human communities make members feel that they all belong to a family. In this task, the Spirit is also at work impelling Christians and people to reach out to one another and to build up Christian and human communities.¹⁰⁴

This ecclesiality of BECs, however, needs to be clarified in terms of theology, canon law and ecclesiology. Theologically, BECs can claim their ecclesiality as “a basic element of the church, as a church of the bishop’s church and of the whole church”.¹⁰⁵ They can represent an “emerging form of ecclesiality” in the church today.¹⁰⁶ Canonically, the ecclesiality of BECs does not mean that they have the same ecclesial status as a parish or the same ecclesial character as the family as the domestic church although both BECs and the Christian family share many of the same kinds of ecclesial activities in the parish.¹⁰⁷ Ecclesiological, the ecclesiality of BECs does not entitle them to be fully church yet they really need to be connected with the local and universal church. Such a need of being connected with the church prevents BECs from the danger of separation from the church, particularly in the area of leadership. This ecclesiological view differs from that of Boff who states that “they [BECs] are indeed authentic universal church which becomes reality at the grassroots”.¹⁰⁸ BECs need to allow a certain level of ecclesiality to develop within themselves but at the same time they also need “to be linked to the local parish, diocese and universal church” so that they can avoid “the possible danger of their becoming too inward-looking and too exclusive”.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰³ FABC Bishops’ Institute for Social Action (BISA) VI, *Final Reflections*, in G. Rosales and C. G. Arévalo (eds.), *FAPA I*, 225.

¹⁰⁴ FABC Office of Theological Concerns, *The Spirit at Work in Asia Today*, in *FAPA III*, 308.

¹⁰⁵ Karl Rahner, *The Shape of the Church to Come* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974), 109.

¹⁰⁶ T. Howland Sanks, “Forms of Ecclesiality: The Analogical Church,” *TS* 49 (1988), 696.

¹⁰⁷ Vandenakker, *Small Christian Communities*, 233. The Christian family as the domestic church shows its importance for the life of the church and its unique “ecclesial” entity within the church (*FC* 49) because family life is grounded in a sacramental reality which is matrimony. The sacramental ground of the family as the domestic church which is matrimony or baptism has some different explanations from universal and local church documents. Most of the magisterial reflections on this matter are derived from theology of marriage, such as *LG* 11; *FC* 36, 38, 49; *CCC* 1656, or from baptism as in *FC* 52, *CCC* 1657. Cf. Lee *et al.*, *The Catholic Experience of Small Christian Communities*, 118-122. According to Lee, the fact that BECs do not have a canonical status often makes BECs so marginalised that sometimes they do not get the full attention of local church leaders.

¹⁰⁸ Leonardo Boff, *Ecclesiology: The Base Communities Reinvent the Church*, trans. Robert Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), 22.

¹⁰⁹ FABC, *Asian Colloquium on Ministries*, in *FAPA I*, 77.

Lastly, by basic communities, is meant that they are “at the base” of the church and of society. In general, members of these communities are predominantly lay people in the church and people at grassroots levels in society who are often the poor or the marginalised. This characteristic is not exclusive of clerical or religious members in the church and of the rich or middle class people in society. But, in reality, most of the members in these basic communities are the marginalised in church and social institutions. For this practical fact, they were called BECs.

The term “basic” or “at the base” has had some different connotations.¹¹⁰ Some Latin American theologians from the 1970s to the 1980s explained this concept in terms of the social and ecclesial status of members which could create a certain exclusion of membership of others of a different status or class. Being “basic” means members belong to the base of society who are poor or deprived of property, power and knowledge.¹¹¹ These situations happen because of social injustice in some countries. It also means BECs members are considered as laity who are the majority in the church with little power in church activities compared with a small number of clergy who hold the authority in administration and in administering the sacraments.¹¹²

BECs have been considered as a locus of inculturation. Diouf¹¹³ argued that BECs in Africa must become “*foyers d'inculturation*” (the locus of inculturation) because the face of a local church was seen not only by the efforts of theologians in inculturation but also through the lives of all Christians.¹¹⁴ The statement of FABC Office of Evangelisation (2000) explicitly emphasised that the locus of inculturation is the local community. It is an inculturated Christian community in terms of relationship with people of other faith, activities in evangelisation as well as in solidarity with the marginalised and communion with the church. These characteristics “will perhaps be best realised in the Small Christian Communities that live in constant communion and sharing of life with their brothers and sisters in the neighbourhood”.¹¹⁵ In other words, BECs is a locus of inculturation in order to foster evangelisation as highlighted in church documents.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁰ Azevedo, *Basic Ecclesial Communities*, 75-79.

¹¹¹ Cf. *Ibid.*

¹¹² Cf. *Ibid.*

¹¹³ J. Diouf, “L'Église en Afrique. Pour une Église locale,” *NRT* 120 (1998), 255-256.

¹¹⁴ Hyacinthe Thiandoum, *Relatio ante Disceptationem* 16. Inculturation is “not only a question of theological speculation by experts, but [it] involves the Christian life of the people at the grassroots”.

¹¹⁵ FABC Office of Evangelisation, *Consultation on Evangelisation and Inculturation*, in F-J. Eilers (ed.), *FAPA III*, 218.

¹¹⁶ Cf. *CT* 47, *ChL* 26, *RM* 51, *EA* 25.

The official documents of local churches, however, seem not to determine the “basic” element of BECs in terms of status but in terms of size of membership. The reason behind this choice might be for the purpose of inclusiveness. According to the Puebla document (1979), it was called “a base-level community because it is composed of relatively few members as a permanent body, like a cell of the larger community”.¹¹⁷ In the same way, a FABC document also described a BEC as “a basic community when the number of members is such that they can really know one another, meet with one another, relate to one another [and] come together fairly frequently”.¹¹⁸

These communities are often small in terms of membership in order to promote the spirit of sharing or solidarity among members. People group in communities because they really need mutual supports or have the same concerns to develop themselves as well as to improve their religious and social life. So sometimes they are called small Christian/ecclesial communities as in Africa in particular.

The three characteristics of BECs show their connection with the church as the family of God. This close connection is clearly described in the Message of the African Synod:

The church, the family of God, implies the creation of small communities at the human level, living or basic ecclesial communities. In such communities, which are cells of the church-as-family, one is formed to live concretely and authentically the experience of fraternity. In them the spirit of disinterested service, solidarity and a common goal reigns. Each is moved to construct the family of God, a family entirely open to the world from which absolutely nobody is excluded.¹¹⁹

The ecclesiology of BECs is about the study of a new way of being church or a shift in ecclesiology. The function of the family is significant in the building of Basic Ecclesial/Human Communities towards a new way of being Church. Therefore, for participants of FABC VIII, “the church begins in the home, not in the parish”.¹²⁰ Being church in this new perspective is to be a communion of communities and a participatory church. In fact, in FABC documents, the laity are always mentioned first among all the church members (laity, religious and clergy) as a new way of looking at the majority membership in the church.¹²¹ BECs have also developed new ministries for “a fuller

¹¹⁷ CELAM, *Puebla Document* 640, in Eagleson and Scharper (eds.), *Puebla and Beyond*, 212.

¹¹⁸ FABC, *Asian Colloquium on Ministries*, in *FAPA I*, 76.

¹¹⁹ Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for Africa, *MOS* 28.

¹²⁰ FABC VIII, *The Asian Family Towards a Culture of Integral Life*, 50.

¹²¹ FABC V, *Journeying Together Towards the Third Millennium*, in G. Rosales and C. G. Arévalo (eds.), *FAPA I*, 287: “The church in Asia will have to be a *communion of communities*, where laity, religious and

participation in the life” of local churches.¹²² Thus the ecclesiology of BECs fosters the model of the communion and servant church and also overcomes that of authoritarian or paternalistic leadership in the church.

BECs also promote “a new pattern of personal and social relationships” among church members.¹²³ This sociological advantage must be applied in the church and be transformed by the gospel to show the relevance of BECs in the present situation of the church as well as in the journey to the reign of God. The ecclesiology of basic ecclesial and human communities has had a significant impact on society. BECs have certainly brought people together for religious and social purposes. Contemporary life in many societies promotes living or working together through globalisation, but, to some extent, it also enhances particularism, individualism and competition. The negative aspect of globalisation has affected community and family life. People have less time for living together in family. They hardly come together for religious celebrations or services. However, they still have expectations of enjoying community life which is expressed in other suitable ways. BECs, therefore, are appropriate means to respond to human needs in contemporary community life.

Recognising the importance of these communities in the church and society the document of the Episcopal Conference of Latin American (1979) appreciated them as “some way to salvage family values amid the growing cold-bloodedness of the modern world”.¹²⁴ BECs contribute to building up and strengthening the institution of family and society, because they “accentuate committed involvement in the family, one’s work, the neighbourhood and the local community”.¹²⁵ The development of BECs or similar Christian communities and basic human communities is proof of the positive impact of these communities on the church and on society today.

The three characteristics of BECs show their strengths as discussed above; however, BECs have to face some problems because they do not as yet have explicit juridical structures. The autonomy of the independence of BECs might lead to fragmentation

clergy recognise and accept each other as sisters and brothers ... It is a *participatory* church where the gifts that the Holy Spirit gives to all faithful - lay, religious, and cleric alike”.

¹²² FABC International Congress on Mission, *Basic Christian Communities and Local Ministries*, in G. Rosales and C. G. Arévalo (eds.), *FAPA I*, 149-150.

¹²³ Azevedo, “Basic Ecclesial Communities,” 616-617.

¹²⁴ CELAM, *Puebla Document* 339, in Eagleson and Scharper (eds.), *Puebla and Beyond*, 154. “It is evident in the resurgence of a family-oriented pastoral effort and in the increase of CEBs [*Comunidade eclesial de base*]. These experiences on the ordinary human level enable people to live the reality of the church as the Family of God in an intense way”.

¹²⁵ CELAM, *Puebla Document* 629, in Eagleson and Scharper (eds.), *Puebla and Beyond*, 211.

when bonds between these communities and parishes are not fostered. Some communities can be misled by ideologies of power particularly when they undertake the work of social liberation. The persistence of mass religion and some activities of BECs might make people less aware of the need of holding onto the sacraments and other forms of religious expression.¹²⁶ In addition, BECs also have the possible danger of becoming inward-centred and exclusive communities.¹²⁷

It can be said that the ecclesiology of BECs provides a new ecclesiology through its three characteristics and develops these communities as the organisations for the promotion of the family spirit and participation. The Holy Spirit is really emphasised in these communities through the acknowledgment of charisms of the laity and the communion of BECs with the local church. The Spirit is also essential in BECs to overcome its intrinsic problems. BECs, indeed, are communities of families animated by the Spirit. This family spirit will be deepened in the ecclesiology of ancestral veneration.

3.3 Ecclesiology of Ancestral Veneration

Culturally, the church as the family of God develops and promotes the human family and its values. The church as family emphasises “care for others, solidarity, warmth in human relationships” and “the veneration of ancestors”.¹²⁸ In a family or clan human relationships become very close among its members. This characteristic is very special to the peoples in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the indigenous people of Australia. For them, the human relationships extend not only to the living but also the deceased members of their family or clan. This third aspect of communion ecclesiology will look at Jesus in the African and Asian images of family and at the Communion of Saints.

Some theologians acknowledged a certain relationship or analogical similarity between human and divine family and between family and church-family of God.¹²⁹ From this starting point an ecclesiology of ancestor veneration has been developed in terms of Jesus as the Eldest Son/Brother and Ancestor in African and Asian cultures and of the close relationship between the living and deceased members as Christian faith in the Communion of Saints. Such an analogical understanding helps Christians feel part of

¹²⁶ Fuellenbach, *Church: Community for the Kingdom*, 226-227.

¹²⁷ FABC, *Asian Colloquium on Ministries*, in FAPA I, 77.

¹²⁸ *EIA* 63-64.

¹²⁹ Nothomb, “L’Église-famille,” 57-62; Nyamiti, “African Ancestral Ecclesiology,” 36-56; Bénézet Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context* (Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa, 1999). The anthropological and theological foundations of the church as the family of God show some similarities between the human family and the church-family of God in terms of origin, relationship, and responsibility. However, the degree of these similarities is bound to different levels: human and spiritual/divine.

Jesus' family and develop an inculturated ecclesiology which will enable theological and ecclesiological expressions to be better understood by people. This cultural understanding of Jesus is necessary because people are cultural beings, therefore "Jesus must be *culturally* relevant if he is really to be understood and appreciated".¹³⁰

3.3.1 Jesus as the Eldest Son

In the New Testament, Jesus was described as the male first-born son of Mary and Joseph; his position in the family is explicitly recognised when his parents brought him to Jerusalem to be presented to the Lord and to offer sacrifice for him (Lk 2:6; 23-24; Mt 1:25). As a Jew living in Jewish tradition and family, Jesus knew, practised and taught people the command of the Torah concerning the duties of children towards their parents (Ex 20:12; Deut 5:16; Lk 2:51; Mt 19:18). Beside his human family, Jesus also belongs to a divine one. He was the only "natural" Son of God (Mk 1:22; 9:7; Jn 3:16; Rom 8:32). He calls God his Father by an intimate title *Abba* because Jesus is the Son of God by nature (Jn 14:6-31). In the divine family, through God's grace and providence, people become adopted children of God (Gal 4:5; Eph 1:4-5) and younger brothers/sisters of Jesus and of one another because Jesus is "the Eldest [brother] of many brothers" (Rom 8:29).¹³¹ Through his death and resurrection, Jesus became the first-born of all creation and also from the dead (1 Cor 15:20; Col 1:15).

As the Eldest Son/Brother, Christ is the head of the church which is his family (Eph 5:23). He has the rights over the whole body to take care of his brothers and sisters as he calls them to come to rest in him (Mt 11:28). He is willing to give his life as a ransom for them (Mk 10:45; Jn 10:11; Rom 5:8; 1 Pet 3:18). In so doing, he becomes the high priest (Heb 2:17; 5:7-10) and is enthroned in heaven (Phil 2:5-10; Eph 1:20).

Jesus also presented himself as brother to those who practised the will of God and to the outcastes and marginalised in society. He declared his disciples those brothers and sisters who listened and practised the will of God, regardless of race, colour, status and gender (Mk 3:34-35; Mt 12:48-49; Lk 8:21). The offer that Jesus shared with humankind is a privilege that cannot be found in any other religion. In the eschatological/final

¹³⁰ Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures*, 374. The authors also comments that "this [the fact of Jesus must be illustrated humanly] is a *most obvious fact unfortunately only too often overlooked*". Cf. José M. de Mesa, "Making Salvation Concrete and Jesus Real Trends in Asian Christology," *Exchange* 30 (2001), 8-9: "In a sense, a cultural approach to Christology is unavoidable. We are all inextricably cultural".

¹³¹ Jesus as the eldest brother/son made people think that he had other brothers and sisters, whether they were blood brothers and sisters, or half-brothers and sisters, or cousins. For the question of Jesus' brothers and sisters, see John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 318-332.

judgment, Jesus would not be ashamed to identify himself with the hungry, the sick, the naked, the strangers, prisoners and to call them brethren (Mt 25: 40; Heb 2:11).

Besides the above biblical foundation, Jesus could be considered as the Eldest Son/Brother in African and Asian cultures and particularly Confucianism. These cultures identify Jesus' role with the roles, functions and attributes of the eldest son/brother in the context of family or clan. In African culture, the roles of an eldest brother/son are significantly respected in the areas of administrative, religious, social and political matters.¹³² These roles are also highlighted in the sense of anteriority and of a model.¹³³ In Confucian and particularly in Vietnamese culture, the functions of the eldest son/brother are significant in terms of relationship with other family members, particularly with parents and ancestors in terms of expressing his filial piety.¹³⁴

The eldest son/brother in Vietnamese culture has similar roles and attributes as those of the Africans and is summed up in filial piety. This filial piety consists of giving support and care, reverence and obedience to living and dead parents or ancestors, continuing the ancestral line and glorifying the family name. All these filial duties are expressed in ancestor veneration which can also provide some foundations for the empowerment of the laity in the church.¹³⁵

Some privileges of the eldest son/brother are mentioned to facilitate the understanding of Jesus the Eldest Son/Brother in Vietnamese culture. He is the confidant of the father as well as of other family members and knows all the family secrets and properties and the family governance, such as the marriages of other younger brothers/sisters, particularly after the death of the father. To some extent he has authority over his mother since she must be dependent on the eldest son when she is widowed.¹³⁶ He is also the mediator between the father/mother and other members in solving some tensions or conflicts. In ancestor veneration, he is the main officiator of this rite in the family.

¹³² Nkwoka, "Jesus as Eldest Brother," 92-94.

¹³³ François Kabasélé, "Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother" in Robert J. Schreiter (ed.), *Faces of Jesus in Africa* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 121-122.

¹³⁴ C-P. Yu, "Filial Piety and Chinese Pastoral Care," *Asia Journal of Theology* 4 (1990), 316-321. See also Phan, "Jesus as the Eldest Son and Ancestor," 125-143.

¹³⁵ The roles and functions of the ancestors and the eldest son in Vietnam were described in detail in Chapter Four. The empowerment of the laity will be discussed in Chapter Six.

¹³⁶ In Confucian culture, there are three dependence/obediences (*tam tông*) that a woman has to practise: obedience to her father, submission to her husband, and dependence on her eldest son. Traditionally, she stays on as a widow. Cf. Thu, "The Vietnamese Family Moral Code," 76; Liêm, "Indochinese Cross-cultural Communication and Adjustment," 52.

There are some similarities between the biblical and cultural descriptions of Jesus, the eldest son/brother. When Jesus is considered as the Eldest Brother/Son in African and Asian cultures, he takes the roles and the attributes of the eldest son/brother in a human family in an analogous way.¹³⁷ Particularly for the Vietnamese, Jesus who was born in Asia¹³⁸ can be referred to as the head of the family-clan who has the duty in officiating at ancestor veneration and who acts as a means of unifying the family-clan.¹³⁹ Jesus indeed is the head of the church as the people or family of God whose members are unified through his salvation.

3.3.2 Jesus as the Ancestor

In human societies, ancestors take the role of giving birth, of transmission and of safeguarding life for their descendants. The former are the origin of the latter, biologically and spiritually. They owe their ancestors for their biological life, but they also inherit spiritually the ancestral heritage, such as relationship in family and clan. Ancestors are also the mediators and intermediaries. In popular belief, they go back to the Creator when they die and have a close relationship with the Source of life who is God. Therefore the ancestors become the intercessors for their descendants before the Creator and also the link between the dead and the living. Even though the ancestors are deceased their presence is still alive among their descendants, a presence which preserves the stability and welfare of the family and clan.¹⁴⁰

Human ancestorship is used to explain the role of Jesus as the ancestor *par excellence*. Jesus is the new Adam (1 Cor 15:45-49; Rom 5:12-21) in the sense that the former starts a new generation which, like the latter, was the origin of humankind. The first Adam ancestor caused death and condemnation and the second Adam ancestor restores life and salvation through his death and resurrection. Jesus is the mediator between people and his Father. He proclaimed himself to be the only door through which people come to his Father since he is the one who lives with his Father and comes down from heaven (1 Cor 15:45-49; Rom 5:12-21). In this way Jesus is the only genuine mediator because he

¹³⁷ Some questions might be raised about the filial duties of Jesus as the eldest son in Vietnamese culture. These questions mainly relate to the existence of ancestor veneration in Israel and to producing offspring for the family or lineage. The Israelites did not have ancestor veneration, but they had practices and expressions honouring the dead. Jesus fulfilled filial piety by honouring his earthly parents and by offering himself as a sacrifice to his heavenly father. On the cross, Jesus gave birth to the church with many children. Thus, in analogical way, Jesus fulfilled the filial duties in ancestor veneration. Cf. De, *A Cultural and Theological Foundation for Ancestor Veneration*, 266.

¹³⁸ EA 1: "Jesus was born, lived, died and rose from the dead in the Holy Land, that small portion of Western Asia became a land of promise and hope for mankind".

¹³⁹ Cf. Phan, "Jesus as the Eldest Son and Ancestor," 139-143.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Kabasélé, "Christ as Ancestor," 116-117.

is truly human and divine and also the only true intermediary between God and people (Col 2:9; Rom 5:15-19; 1 Tim 2: 5). He sums up all mediations when he established the new covenant of salvation for all peoples (Heb 8:6-13). Jesus completes revelation and brings about grace to unite people and reconcile them with God (Jn 1:16-17; Eph 1:1-7). In heaven Jesus continues being mediator to intercede for all who are faithful to him.

According to Nyamiti,¹⁴¹ a sort of ancestral kinship exists in the trinitarian relationship. This relationship exists because Jesus as a divine and human person shares his intimate association with the two other divine persons in the inner life of Trinity. In this kinship, God is the Parent-Ancestor, Jesus is the Brother-Ancestor and the Holy Spirit is the communicator between them.

For the Vietnamese, ancestorship is applied when it has the following qualifications: consanguineous or non-consanguineous kinship between the ancestor and his/her descendants, exemplarity of conduct in earthly life and supernatural or sacred status of the ancestor acquired after death. The sacred status of the ancestor makes him/her the mediator between the Supreme Being and his/her descendants. Thus the ancestor should be given offerings and might intercede for his/her descendant in return. This Vietnamese ancestorship could be applied analogically to Jesus. In addition, Jesus died and has since been worshipped; therefore he is the ancestor. Such an understanding of ancestorship is helpful for the Vietnamese to see Jesus as their ancestor.¹⁴²

The above description of Jesus as the Elder Son/Brother and as the Ancestor is mainly christological. What is the relation of this Christology to the ecclesiology of ancestral veneration? Christology defines an ecclesial community and the titles of Christ form models of community.¹⁴³ Indeed, ecclesiology “follows from more basic positions taken (implicitly or explicitly) in Christology”.¹⁴⁴ Moreover, the Christology of Jesus, the Elder Son/Brother and the Ancestor, facilitates the Communion of Saints which is closely

¹⁴¹ Nyamiti, “African Ancestral Ecclesiology,” 36-56: “Analogically speaking, there are ancestral relationships in the Godhead. God the Father is the Ancestor of the Logos and this latter is the Descendant of the Father. The two are entitled to mutual eternal sacred communication in the Holy Spirit... With regards to Christ ..., he is our Ancestor; more precisely, he is our Brother-Ancestor ... [and] acts ancestrally towards us in the power of the Holy Spirit. Through Jesus, ancestral kinship to us, his descendants, God the father has become our Parent-Ancestor”.

¹⁴² Cf. Toan Ánh, *Tín ngưỡng Việt Nam* [Religious beliefs in Vietnam], vol.1 (Sài Gòn: Nam Chí Tùng thư, 1965), 22- 24, 36-39, 52; *Con người Việt Nam* [The people of Vietnam] (TP Hồ Chí Minh: Nhà xuất bản TP Hồ Chí Minh, 1992), 329-330; De, *A Cultural and Theological Foundation for Ancestor Veneration*, 266; Phan, “Jesus as the Eldest Son and Ancestor,” 137-140. According to De, Vietnamese are familiar with the title of Jesus as the eldest son or brother, but are unfamiliar with the ancestorship of Jesus because there is no connection between the eldest son or brother and the ancestor in the same person.

¹⁴³ Cf. Howard Clark Kee, “Christology and Ecclesiology: Titles of Christ and Models of Community,” *Society of Biblical Literature 1982 Seminar Papers* (1982), 227-242.

¹⁴⁴ J. Peter Schineller, “Christ and Church: A Spectrum of Views,” *TS* 37 (1976), 549.

related to an inculturated ecclesiology because it is integrated to Vietnamese people and culture. In this inculturated Christology and ecclesiology the role of the Spirit is essential since the Spirit is the prime agent in the inculturation of the Christian faith.¹⁴⁵

To some extent the ecclesiology of ancestral veneration is christological ecclesiology; it has a positive and negative impact on the church as the family of God. A paternalistic leadership is often mentioned as one of its negative implications.¹⁴⁶ However, its emphasis on the paternal aspect of pastors needs to be complemented by the communal aspect of the people of God in order to promote stewardship on the one hand and the overcoming of clericalism in the church on the other. The relationship to a common ancestor implies both vertical communion with Jesus and horizontal network with other people. Indeed, Jesus as presented in the gospels was a servant leader, not a paternalistic or authoritarian one. He came to give life to people who are his brothers and sisters in the family of God. In his life and mission Jesus was also inspired by the Holy Spirit. Thus the ecclesiology of ancestral veneration will help pastors in the church to follow Jesus' servant leadership.

The ecclesiology of ancestor veneration also helps to strengthen the institution of family and marriage with foundational family values which will make a positive contribution to society because it is the ecclesiology of family or, more concretely, of familial relationships. Society has been damaged from the breakdown of marriage and the degradation of family values. One of the reasons for the increase of divorce, family abuse, adolescent criminals and other related family problems comes from the disregard of the role of family in society and the contributions of religions to the sustainability of family. Therefore the ecclesiology of ancestor veneration has been a great help to strengthen the institution of family and marriage in terms of providing the teachings or principles about responsible parenthood, the duties of children towards parents in family and about happy family and marriage in society. Indeed, the future of the world and the church passes through the family.¹⁴⁷ Family members have many things to learn from Jesus as the Eldest Son and the Ancestor who gave an example and a model of filial piety. However, the family can imply some negative implications, such as paternalistic attitudes and over-dependence, which have to be overcome.

¹⁴⁵ *EA* 21: "The same Holy Spirit who leads us into the whole truth makes possible a fruitful dialogue with the cultural and religious values of different peoples ... The Spirit's presence ensures that the dialogue unfolds in truth, honesty, humility and respect".

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Waliggo, "The Synod of Hope at a Time of Crisis in Africa," 208.

¹⁴⁷ *EIA* 80: "The family has vital and organic links with society, since it is its foundation and nourishes it continually through its role of service to life: It is from the family that citizens come to birth, and it is within the family that they find the first school of the social virtues that are the animating principles of the existence and development of society itself". See also *EIA* 85.

Ecclesiologicaly, the model of Jesus as the Eldest Son and the Ancestor is the example which clergy have to follow in order to foster the communion or the family relationship among members in the church. Jesus as the Eldest Son/Brother and the Ancestor forms a community of believers whose characteristic is communion in an ancestral family of the living, the dead and saints, and also is communion in the trinitarian family. Indeed, such a community conveys the reality of both vertical and horizontal dimensions which may provide a corrective to the individualism of Christianity in the western world.

The profound relationship between the living and the dead in the family helps people to understand better the Communion of Saints. This communion is defined in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*¹⁴⁸ and is also acknowledged in the *Constitution on the Church*, however the language of three “states” is somewhat modified as expressed in the conciliar document.¹⁴⁹

3.3.3 Communion of Saints

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* mentions that the term “Communion of Saints” has two meanings which are closely linked: communion in holy things and among holy persons. The latter consists of the communion with the saints and the dead¹⁵⁰ who are the dead members compared to the living faithful. While the first communion exercises the fraternal charity and strengthens the union of the whole church in the Spirit, the second communion raises the awareness of the communion of the whole Mystical Body of Jesus Christ and honours with great respect the memory of the dead.¹⁵¹ These devotions and practices are promoted in the church because all the faithful are sons/daughters of God. Therefore when the faithful are in communion with the saints and the dead they will form “one family in Christ” and “be faithful to the deepest vocation of the church”.¹⁵² The understanding of one church-family corresponds to that of the council on the Communion of Saints.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁸ CCC 1475: “A perennial link of charity exists between the faithful who have already reached their heavenly home, those who are expiating their sins in purgatory and those who are still pilgrims on earth”.

¹⁴⁹ Christoph Schönborn, “The ‘Communion of Saints’ as Three States of the Church: Pilgrimage, Purification, and Glory,” *Communio* 15 (1988), 170-171. Schönborn mentioned that the expression of “church militant” is toned down (LG 5), the space given to the church in the state of purification is not long (LG 50-51), and the church triumphant is identified by making use of biblical texts. Cf. LG 49.

¹⁵⁰ CCC 948; 957-958.

¹⁵¹ CCC 957-958.

¹⁵² CCC 959.

¹⁵³ Schönborn, “The Communion of Saints,” 171: “The council does not speak of three ‘churches’, but of three ways of being disciple. In this way the emphasis is put on the unity of the church in the three different ‘states’ as found in three different modes of discipleship”.

The Communion of Saints will also facilitate ecumenism and interreligious dialogue.¹⁵⁴ Wainwright mentioned the growing use of a calendar of saints in Protestant worship, such as the Protestant Churches in Australia. He also identified the possibility of ecumenical understanding between the Catholics and Protestants on the issue of indulgences when these two churches are ready to study this issue.¹⁵⁵ In a broader context, the Communion of Saints is the foundation for the Vietnamese Catholics in their dialogue with Buddhist and other local religious followers since belief in life after death or ancestral veneration is strong among the Vietnamese.¹⁵⁶ Thus the Christian ancestor veneration may also enrich that of the Vietnamese.

Overall, the understanding about Jesus as the Eldest Son/Brother and the Ancestor in the cultural context of African and Asian people promotes solidarity, mutuality and continuity among members of the church as the people and family of God. In family or clan, the brotherhood/sisterhood and the ancestorhood unite all members, uphold mutual assistance and sharing to create continuity in family and clan. In the same way, the metaphor of Jesus as the Eldest Brother and the Ancestor, which is familiar with the understanding of people, will foster the values of family, such as participation, cooperation and sharing of responsibility and in the administration of the church.

The relationship between the deceased ancestors and the living descendants through prayers and intercessions for one another helps one to understand the Communion of Saints in the church. This relationship is fostered because Jesus is the most important member in this family and is the head uniting all and communicating to all the members of the church as God's family.¹⁵⁷ In other words, it develops both vertical and horizontal relationships in the church as the family of God.

The inculturated Christology of Jesus as the Eldest Son/Brother and the Ancestor brings theology close to the local people through the work of the Holy Spirit in the church since it is a Christology from below.¹⁵⁸ This Christology based on biblical and cultural foundations satisfies the requirements of inculturation. Jesus has often been perceived

¹⁵⁴ For the Communion of Saints in other Christian churches, see "Perspective on Koinonia," in William G. Rusch and Jeffrey Gros (eds.), *Deepening Communion: International Ecumenical Documents With Roman Catholic Participation* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1998), 399-421, particularly 416-417; Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Catholicism and the Communion of Saints," *Concilium* 25 (1988), 163-168. For some agreements and disagreements between Catholics and Evangelicals on the Communion of Saints, see Harold O. J. Brown *et al.*, "Communion of Saints," *First Things* 131 (March 2003), 26-33.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. "The Faithful Departed," *Liturgy News* 33 (2003), 2.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Ánh, *Tín ngưỡng Việt Nam*, 22-52; *Con người Việt Nam*, 329-330.

¹⁵⁷ CCC 946-947.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. GS 22: "For by his incarnation the Son of God has united himself in some fashion with every man. He worked with human hands, he thought with a human mind... and acted with a human heart".

as a westernised or foreign figure to Africans and Asians.¹⁵⁹ Therefore this contextualised Christology is the foundation to develop an inculturated ecclesiology which will benefit evangelisation in the church in Africa and Asia because it is familiar with, and intelligible to, local people. The language of ancestral veneration ecclesiology is close to local people and certainly attracts them. Jesus as the Eldest Son and the Ancestor will facilitate the roles of church leaders as servants and as those who give life to other members as their brothers/sisters. It will also help to eliminate the misunderstanding of local people towards the church-banned issue of the veneration of ancestors in China as well as in Vietnam¹⁶⁰ and to purify some negative aspects of this veneration which are once seen as superstitious. Indeed, the church in Vietnam has many advantages in developing an inculturated ecclesiology of ancestral veneration since permission was granted in 1964 by Rome to apply *Plane Compertum Est* (1939) in Vietnam. From that foundation it needs to develop the ecclesiology of ancestral veneration when it promotes the church as the family of God.¹⁶¹

The relationships in the family of God are not limited to its members, but have to be extended to outsiders in social matters. This is a special task in the social mission of the church as the family of God which will be examined in the ecclesiology of liberation.

3.4 Ecclesiology of Liberation

In terms of pastoral activities the church as the family of God plays the role of building up the reign of God since the church “must bear witness to Christ also by promoting justice and peace on the continent and throughout the world”.¹⁶² As such it is a church living the spirit of solidarity, of openness to an inclusive world and of transformation of society. It is the place where every member as children of God has the task of working to transform society from cultural, socio-economic and political problems and bringing liberation to all as Jesus did in his time.¹⁶³ This social mission of the church is also the work of the Spirit since the Spirit encourages church members to reach out to others and also brings people of different races, religions, genders and classes into communion and fellowship

¹⁵⁹ EA 20: “Jesus is often perceived as foreign to Asia. It is paradoxical that most Asians tend to regard Jesus - born on Asian soil - as a Western rather than an Asian figure”.

¹⁶⁰ The Chinese rites controversy began in 1645 and was finally condemned by Pope Benedict XV's Apostolic Constitution *Ex Quo Singulari* (11th July 1742). The controversy was ended with the Instruction *Plane Compertum Est* which granted to China the veneration of Confucius and ancestors. Cf. AAS 31 (1939), 32; AAS 32 (1940), 24-26; NRT 67 (1940), 207-210.

¹⁶¹ The issue of ancestor veneration in Vietnam will be discussed in Chapters Four and Five of this thesis.

¹⁶² EIA 105.

¹⁶³ Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for Africa, MOS 28; 31.

in the family of God.¹⁶⁴ Indeed, the solidarity with other members in the family of God is one of the foundations for the ecclesiology of liberation.

The ecclesiology of liberation stemmed from and has been developed in the context of a theology of liberation. Gutiérrez defined liberation theology as a “theology of salvation” using “a critical reflection on Christian praxis in light of the word of God”.¹⁶⁵ It concerns the integral salvation of people rather than the simple study of God as in other theological disciplines. The relationship between ecclesiology and the theology of liberation is very close because theology of the church with its reality and doctrine has been one of the central issues of the theology of liberation since the 1960s in Latin America.¹⁶⁶ Thus liberation ecclesiology could be defined as an ecclesiology which “has to give priority to the fostering of relationships of solidarity among persons and peoples based on the biblical values of the rule of righteousness, the Kingdom of God”.¹⁶⁷ It is a component in ecclesiology of trinitarian communion due to the nature of communion.

The ecclesiology of liberation will be studied as a trend in which ecclesiology of the church as the family of God will be developed. It is limited to the main characteristics and the church of the poor as an illustration of a methodology which the ecclesiological concept of the family of God will follow to show its identity as the church of God’s family.

3.4.1 Characteristics of Ecclesiology of Liberation

The characteristics of ecclesiology of liberation flow from the renewed ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council¹⁶⁸ and from the social context of a definite church in order to bring about “a more just social order and a more authentic church” in that society,¹⁶⁹ which is also an “evangelising church”.¹⁷⁰ In other words, there are three characteristics of liberation ecclesiology: (1) the mutual relationship between the church and the world,

¹⁶⁴ GS 1; Anselm Kyongsuk Min, “Solidarity of Others in the Power of the Holy Spirit: Pneumatology in a Divided World,” in Hinze and Dabney (eds.), *Advents of the Spirit*, 417-443; FABC Office of Theological Concerns, *The Spirit at Work in Asia Today*, in *FAPA III*, 308. Cf. Gal 4:6; 1 Cor 12:13; Rom 8:4-17.

¹⁶⁵ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), xxxix; xxxvii.

¹⁶⁶ The relationship is so close that it is said that the book of Gutiérrez, “A Theology of Liberation” is considered as a work in ecclesiology.

¹⁶⁷ Tissa Balasuriya, *Planetary Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), 194.

¹⁶⁸ Roger Haight, *An Alternative Vision: An Interpretation of Liberation Theology* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985), 164. Haight particularly deals with liberationist ecclesiology in Chapter 9, “The Nature and Liberating Mission of the Church”, 162-185.

¹⁶⁹ T. H. Sanks and B. H. Smith, “Liberation Ecclesiology: Praxis, Theory, Praxis,” *TS* 38 (1977), 3-38.

¹⁷⁰ Ronaldo Muñoz, “Ecclesiology in Latin America,” in Sergio Torres and John Eagleson (eds.), *The Challenge of Basic Christian Communities* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1981), 150-160.

(2) the role and mission of the church in the world and (3) the ecclesial process towards the reign of God, which is the reign of justice, peace and love.¹⁷¹

The church-world mutual relationship is seen in the conciliar dogmatic and pastoral constitutions. The documents of the Second Vatican Council describe the mission of the church in terms of *ad intra* for Catholics and of *ad extra* for all people in general. The *Constitution on the Church* emphasises the communal and sacramental aspect of the church that is the nature of the church and is appropriate only for its members. The communal aspect of the Catholic Church is more concrete in the *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* which is sent to “the whole of humanity” in order to explain to everyone “the presence and activity of the church in the world today” (GS 2). In other words, the church and the world have a mutual relationship to the extent that the church “exists in the world, living and acting with it” and vice versa, when the church “is firmly convinced that she can be abundantly and variously helped by the world in the matter of preparing the ground for the gospel” (GS 40).

In particular, the *Pastoral Constitution* lays the ground for the development and understanding of liberation ecclesiology. The church has a relationship with the world because the former is a part of the latter. Both institutions, belonging to a macro extended family of humanity, need a sociological analysis of their relationship to understand each other. This analysis brings about a self-critical appraisal of the actual church and a redefinition of the needed relationship of the church with the concrete world where the church exists. This is the way liberation ecclesiology develops and becomes the theological method in ecclesiology. So the church is defined in terms of a double relationship with God and with human society or the world. In case the church fails to take into account its relationship with the world it could develop an ecclesiology which is “inadequate, one-sided and faulty”.¹⁷² Moreover, the mission of the church in the world is

¹⁷¹ Haight mentions the characteristics of liberationist ecclesiology under three principles: the church in relation to the world, the church is not the centre of the world, and the church has a role to play in the world. Sanks and Smith, based on *The Community Called Church* of Juan Luis Segundo and *A Theology of Liberation* of Gustavo Gutiérrez, summarises these characteristics in five features: the role of the church in the universal salvation, the uncentering position of the church in salvation, the church as part of humanity, the function of the church in concrete historical realities, and the use of Marxist analysis in socio-political-economic situation. Cf. Peter C. Phan, “Challenges for Asian Christianity,” in James H. Kroeger and Peter C. Phan (eds.), *The Future of Asian Churches* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2002) 80-91. Phan argues that the ecclesiology of the Synod for Asia does not centre in the church but in the Reign of God which he calls “regnocentric” theology of the church.

¹⁷² Haight, *An Alternative Vision*, 164. Cf. Juan Luis Segundo, *The Community Called Church*, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973), 131. According to Segundo, “a church which dialogues and works with the rest of mankind is a church that knows she is part of humanity; a church that knows she is the conscious portion of the deeper mystery that is being worked out in every human life, and in all of humanity taken together in its process of historical becoming. A church that dialogues is a church that knows she is, by definition, in the service of humanity”.

primarily evangelisation, but it must do it by addressing social human degradation and by reacting against dehumanisation according to the model of Jesus who came to liberate people from sin and its results in social structures.¹⁷³

The church's relationship with the world, however, must be understood in relation to God. The church is a historical phenomenon and a human institution but its nature as "a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God and of unity of all mankind" (LG 1) is to be a medium between God and the world and an instrument of the purposes of God for the world.¹⁷⁴ Like the historical view of Jesus in Christology today the church needs to be seen in its historical existence. The church was founded in human history, has had a long history and has been subjected to the human condition. This empirical view of the church in liberation ecclesiology helps to avoid a purely biblical and theological view of the church that was considered as "doctrinal reductionism".¹⁷⁵ The church as a divine and a human institution needs biblical, theological and historical views to be adequately understood and to bring God's salvation to the world. In other words, the church in its historical existence in the world has to show people the divine "ongoing salvific activity" through its practical works in the world.¹⁷⁶

In order to help the church in response to its relationship with the world, it was thought to be necessary to conduct a sociological analysis. According to liberation theologians, the Marxist analysis has been the most helpful method and class struggle has been a means in the process of liberation.¹⁷⁷ The Marxist analysis as an analytical tool provides data on which Christians can reflect on some social problems, but this ideology also contains "certain fundamental tenets which are not compatible with the Christian conception of humanity and society".¹⁷⁸ The collapse of Marxist governments in Europe in 1989 has shown Marxist analysis to be ineffective.¹⁷⁹ Apart from that, the Marxist tools of social analysis were also criticised by Asian theologians as inadequate and ineffective in the Asian context because the Marxist analysis merely emphasised the economic and

¹⁷³ Haight, *Christian Community in History*, vol. 2, 412-413.

¹⁷⁴ Haight, *An Alternative Vision*, 164.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 167.

¹⁷⁶ It is noted that Segundo included the biblical view in his presentation on the universal salvation of the church in the world when using two New Testament paragraphs (Mk 16:15-16 and Mt 25:31-46) as the foundation for his analysis in *The Community Called Church*.

¹⁷⁷ Haight, *An Alternative Vision*, 15; 38.

¹⁷⁸ Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Instruction on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation" VII. 8; cited in Haight, *An Alternative Vision*, 279.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, "Current Situation of Faith and Theology", *Address During Meeting of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith With the Presidents of the Doctrinal Commissions of the Bishops' Conferences of Latin America, Guadalajara, Mexico* (May 1996), accessed 3 September 2003; available from <http://www.cin.org/ratz0596.html>; Internet.

political aspects of society. According to Pieris, Marxism “has not appreciated fully the religious dimension that Asian cultures attribute to poverty” and therefore it found it difficult to understand “the face of Asia’s indestructible religiosity”.¹⁸⁰ He commented that the Marxist tools of social analysis “must integrate the psychological tools of introspection that our sages have discovered”.¹⁸¹

Haight argued that the church needs the historical, sociological and theological analysis.¹⁸² An ecclesiology begins with a critical analysis of historical data which leads to the formation of the church instead of being based on uncritical sources of “transcendent knowledge and authoritative statements”¹⁸³ as the only starting point of understanding the church because the church is a “this-worldly, historical and social entity or movement”.¹⁸⁴ In this framework, ecclesiology uses sociological tools to understand the genesis and the development of the church from its earliest times since the church has existed in human society. However, the church is mainly a religious institution and is related to God and transcendent matters, such as faith and religious practices. Therefore, in studying the church, one should avoid the reductionism¹⁸⁵ which defines the church as merely a human and social institution, in order to allow for the transcendent aspect of the church. Moreover, it is noted that the social sciences “can never give a complete account of the human data” and “the reality of human living is also touched by God’s grace”.¹⁸⁶

As mentioned earlier, liberation ecclesiology took its cue from the conciliar *Pastoral Constitution* in which the role and mission of the church are described as “to carry on the work of Christ under the guidance of the Holy Spirit [...], to bear witness to the truth, to save and not to judge, to serve and not to be served” (GS 3). Following this, liberation ecclesiology argues that the church is not the centre of the world, but it centres on God and God’s Spirit. The ecclesiology prior to the Second Vatican Council was

¹⁸⁰ Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), 80-81. Cf. Peter C. Phan, “Experience and Theology: An Asian Liberation Perspective,” *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 2 (1993), 107.

¹⁸¹ Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, 80-81.

¹⁸² Roger Haight, “Ecclesiology From Below: Genesis of the Church,” *Theology Digest* 48 (2001), 319-328; cf. Roger Haight, “Systematic Ecclesiology,” *Science et Esprit* 45 (1993), 253-281.

¹⁸³ Haight, “Ecclesiology From Below,” 319.

¹⁸⁴ Haight, “Systematic Ecclesiology,” 269.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. James M. Gustafson, *Treasure in Eastern Vessels: The Church as a Human Community* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961), 100-105; Haight, “Systematic Ecclesiology,” 269. According to Haight, the term “theological reductionism” in Gustafson’s book means “construals of the church that use only biblical or doctrinal language and fail to take into account the concrete human dimensions of the church”.

¹⁸⁶ Neil Ormerod, “A Dialectic Engagement with the Social Sciences in an Ecclesiological Context,” *TS* 66 (2005), 839.

ecclesiocentric which considered the church as the sole repository of the salvific truth. The church was seen as a perfect institution and society. However, religious pluralism in the contemporary world and the self-understanding of the church as always a minority, especially in Asia, have made the church change from centring on itself to focusing on the reign of God, that is from being ecclesiocentric to being regnocentric¹⁸⁷ or from a quantitative to a qualitative approach in salvation.¹⁸⁸ This change is reflected when the church acknowledges the principle of religious freedom as a human and civil right. It implies divine salvation outside the church and the recognition of values in other religions. It also affects missiological understanding in the sense that evangelisation does not only intend to increase the number of Christians or to expand the structures of the church in the world but also to direct people towards the reign of God. The latter is more important than the former since the mission of the church is to “proclaim by word and witness of life the good news of Jesus Christ, [...], the way, the truth and the life” and besides proclamation it includes “inculturation, dialogue, justice and peace”.¹⁸⁹

The “new way of being church”, as in the regnocentric church, is not only the characteristic of liberation ecclesiology but also of the ecclesiology in *Ecclesia in Africa*.¹⁹⁰ Similarly, *Ecclesia in Asia* mentions that, “empowered by the Spirit to accomplish Christ’s salvation on earth, the church is the seed of the Kingdom of God, and she looks eagerly for its final coming. Her destiny and mission are inseparable from the Kingdom of God”.¹⁹¹

Taking part in social activities however, the church does not replace other social agencies and organisations in the task of human liberation and its role must be a critical one. It has to be done in such a way as not to be totally similar to that of social organisations. It must show its relevance and criticism to the world in the sense of the Gospel’s requirements in order to justify the specific character of the church, a divine and human institution. However, the involvement of the church in social activities, such as struggling for justice or liberating people, could be misunderstood¹⁹² or could go to the extreme. Therefore it needs some clarifications.

¹⁸⁷ Phan, “Challenges for Asian Christianity,” 85.

¹⁸⁸ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 83-86.

¹⁸⁹ *EIA* 57.

¹⁹⁰ *EIA* 105.

¹⁹¹ *EA* 17.

¹⁹² Don Helder Camara makes this comment: “When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor have no food they call me a communist.” cited in Damaris K. M’mworia, “Theological Basis for Church Involvement in Social Justice,” *AFER* 40 (1998), 271-272.

Haight argued that the specific involvement of the church in social activities is neither an “exclusivist claim” of the church over secular organisations nor a negation of Christian faith as an “individual and personal affair”.¹⁹³ But it is an imperative to cooperate with other people and organisations and an assertion of social implications in daily life of Christians. This obligation of the church to be involved in society means that every action of the church and of Christians must strive to improve the quality of life of people and see this requirement as that of the gospel and of the social teachings of the church. This involvement of the church shows its horizontal dimension to people which complements its vertical one. The Synod of Bishops in 1971 affirmed the involvement of the church in defending and promoting social justice as the church’s mission and duty because that is “the mission of preaching the gospel message” which the church received from Christ.¹⁹⁴

The involvement of the church in the world makes it relevant to people. Liberation theologians like Segundo and Gutiérrez believed that salvation “is not something other-worldly”, but the universal salvific will of God which has been happening in human history and which “embraces all human reality, transforms it, and leads it to its fullness in Christ”.¹⁹⁵ In order to be meaningful to people, liberation ecclesiology must satisfy two criteria. On the one hand, it must be faithful to Christian sources, that is, a biblical understanding about the church, the doctrines on Trinity, God and church history. On the other hand, it must also respond to the problems of people today, particularly in the field of meaning of life, social justice and equality in family, church and society. Its role is not to provide principles or theories but to show solidarity with all people by proper actions.¹⁹⁶ Only in this framework does liberation ecclesiology of the church involvement become helpful and relevant to people.

The ecclesiology of liberation along with the social teachings of the church will assist in supporting basic human rights and in developing a just society. One of the goals of liberation ecclesiology has been the preferential option for the poor which also includes the promotion and defence of human dignity and an integral development. The Asian Bishops’ Conferences in the Colloquium on Church in Asia in the 21st Century (1997) define the purpose of the activity of the preferential option for the poor as “to support all programs for greater participative democracy at all levels [and] to enable people to stand

¹⁹³ Haight, *An Alternative Vision*, 165.

¹⁹⁴ Synod of Bishops, *Justice in the World* 36: “The church, indeed, is not alone responsible for justice in the world; however, she has a proper and specific responsibility which is identified with her mission of giving witness before the world of the need for love and justice contained in the gospel message, a witness to be carried out in church institutions themselves and in the lives of Christians”.

¹⁹⁵ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 85.

¹⁹⁶ Haight, *An Alternative Vision*, 169-170.

up for justice and speak up for the disadvantaged and marginalised".¹⁹⁷ These actions which express the social teachings of the church for the poor certainly eliminate injustices and facilitate the building up of a just society for all peoples in the world.

The ecclesiology of liberation makes the church become an energetic witness to justice and peace in its structures and in the relationships among its members. The church is also requested to promote justice and to defend basic human rights through commissions at different levels in the church. By carrying out this prophetic role the church proclaims the good news because "the proclamation of justice and peace is an integral part of the task of evangelisation".¹⁹⁸

3.4.2 The Church of the Poor

The ecclesiological aspect of the theology of liberation becomes more apparent in the concept of the church of the poor. The option for the poor, which originally had a Marxist influence and was also grounded in scripture, must be implemented in order to show the divine covenant with the poor and Jesus' commitment to the poor. However, there are major differences between the Marxist and biblical approaches. The former position makes sound political sense while the latter means only to take the side of the most marginalised in society as those who are loved by God.¹⁹⁹ The option for the poor defines the very essence of the church in the sense that it shapes the life and the structures of the church and is also a challenge to the missionary activities of the church in the world. Indeed, by doing justice to the marginalised, the church becomes the sign of God's presence in the world.²⁰⁰

In the Old Testament, God was seen as the liberator of his people. He liberated them from slavery in Egypt, from slavery to pagan gods and from all kinds of sin. The relationship with his people is "the God-encounter" of the poor in which God made a covenant with his poor people.²⁰¹ In the New Testament, Jesus' incarnation was seen as the highest level of his commitment to humankind. People, even the poor in their moral

¹⁹⁷ FABC Office of Human Development, *Colloquium on Church in Asia in the 21st Century*, in F-J. Eilers (ed.), *FAPA III*, 42.

¹⁹⁸ *EIA* 105-107.

¹⁹⁹ Cf. Donal Dorr, *Mission in Today's World* (Co Dublin: The Columba Press, 2000), 150-151: "To opt for the poor is not to make carefully calculated political gamble but throw oneself on the mercy of God".

²⁰⁰ John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis (SRS)* 39: "By virtue of her own evangelical duty the church feels called to take her stand beside the poor, to discern the justice of their requests, and to help satisfy them, without losing sight of the good of groups in the context of the common good"; cf. *SRS* 42; *CA* 58.

²⁰¹ Pieris, *An Asian Theology*, 123-124; John R. Donahue, "Biblical Perspectives on Justice," in John C. Haughey (ed.), *The Faith that Does Justice* (New York/ Ramsey/ Toronto: Paulist Press, 1977), 68-85. According to Donahue, the concern for the defenceless in society is "rooted in the nature of Yahweh himself who is defender of the oppressed". Cf. Ex 3:7-8; 22:21-22; Deut 14:29; 15:17; Ps 103:6.

and personal situation, are created in the image and likeness of God. The image of God was dimmed by sin, therefore Jesus was sent to reveal God's love for them. He came to serve his brothers and sisters as well as to evangelise the poor. He established solidarity with them and took up their poverty which was characteristic of his whole life from birth to death.²⁰² The development must have this biblical foundation as a base since the church professes Jesus' mission.

God cares for and loves all people equally as well as each individual without any preference or discrimination. God's option for the poor is an expression of God's option for justice and for the victims of injustice whether they are rich or poor. In other words, God's love is not motivated by race, gender and condition of life.²⁰³ Following God's example the church embraces all people. The expression "the church of or for the poor" is not an exclusive one to discriminate the rich. It implies a priority over the marginalised; it needs to be understood in the meaning of God's option for justice. Therefore the church of the poor means the church opts for all victims of injustice regardless of their status or situation. In so doing the church for the poor can fulfil the mission of the church as the family of God which extends to all people.

In order to be a genuine church of the poor, the church must place the poor "at the centre of the history of the church".²⁰⁴ The poor, according to Pieris, are not the recipients or the objects of Christian compassion, but they must be seen as those through whom God shapes the salvation history. Their poverty has not only spiritual but also material aspects. So, the church of the poor is the church in which church members must develop two tasks, that is, "the personal rejection of wealth-accumulation or mammon as anti-God and the establishment of a socially recognizable sign of that rejection".²⁰⁵

Thus the church has to come to the firm conviction that "the poor are ultimately the privileged community and agents of salvation".²⁰⁶ It is a reality because Catholics are a minority in Asia where the majority are the poor. Evangelisation in this continent must be an endeavour directed to the poor. The church "does not merely work for the poor... but with the poor, sharing their life and their aspirations, knowing their despair and their

²⁰² Cf. Eagleson and Scharper (eds.), *Puebla and Beyond*, 256; Gen 1:26-28; Mt 5:45; Lk 4:18-21; Phil 2:5-8; Jas 2:5; LG 8; EN 30.

²⁰³ Cf. José Maria Vigil, "Option for the Poor Is an Option for Justice; It Is not Preferential: A New Theological-Systematic Framework for the Option for the Poor," *EAPR* 42 (2005), 321-335.

²⁰⁴ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *The God of Life* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 104; cf. James B. Nickoloff, "Church of the Poor: The Ecclesiology of Gustavo Gutiérrez," *TS* 54 (1993), 527.

²⁰⁵ Pieris, *An Asian Theology*, 120-122.

²⁰⁶ FABC International Congress on Mission, *The Gospel, the Kingdom of God, Liberation and Development*, in G. Rosales and C. G. Arévalo (eds.), *FAPA I*, 144.

hope, walking with them in their search for authentic humanity in Christ Jesus”.²⁰⁷ In other words, the church in Asia has a double reason to become the church of the poor.

The church’s preferential love for the poor to promote human dignity is an identification of the church with the poor in following the model of Jesus. According to *Ecclesia in Asia*, the poor are migrants, indigenous and tribal peoples, women, children and those who suffer discrimination because of their culture, colour, race, caste, economic status, or because of their way of thinking.²⁰⁸ This preferential love for the poor is not only an optional lifestyle originating from the gospel but also an essential witness to the mission of the church or evangelisation.

The mission of the church for the poor has been challenged by globalisation. Globalisation makes people more aware of human solidarity, but according to Wilfred, globalisation and economic liberalisation in the 1990s brought about two alarming developments: the *amnesia of the poor* and the *eclipse of social consciousness*.²⁰⁹ People including Christians have adopted a forgetfulness of the poor as well as an exclusion of the poor from their concern. Globalisation has provided some economic development to Third World societies, but it also creates some gaps between the rich and the poor. Unfortunately, the poor become more marginalised.²¹⁰ Humanly and spiritually speaking the rich and the poor are brothers and sisters with church members, especially with those in the church called God’s family. In that context, the Vietnamese bishops promote simultaneously the church as family and the church of the poor.²¹¹ Therefore the development of the preferential option for the poor in the ecclesiology of liberation is very significant. Indeed, the ecclesiology of liberation challenges the church as family and its members to facilitate the spirit of servanthood, to foster a culture of solidarity, to create a critical awareness of the marginalised in society under globalisation, and to do something practical to achieve this mission. In other words, the church emphasises the need for “globalisation without marginalisation”.²¹²

In the era of globalisation in which social, cultural, political and environmental tensions and divisions often occur, the church needs to follow the Holy Spirit who is called “the

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ EA 34.

²⁰⁹ Felix Wilfred, “Church’s Commitment to the Poor in the Age of Globalisation,” in *Colloquium on Church in Asia in the 21st Century* (Manila: FABC, Office for Human Development, 1998), 212; T. Howland Sanks, “Globalisation and the Church’s Social Mission,” *TS* 60 (1999), 646-647.

²¹⁰ Cf. EA 39.

²¹¹ Cf. VBC, *Bản trả lời*, II, 14.

²¹² EA 39; John Paul II, *Message for the World Day of Peace* (1 January 1998), *OR* 7/14 December 1997, 3-4; Wilfred, “Church’s Commitment to the Poor in the Age of Globalisation,” 216-219.

Spirit of solidarity of Others” to respond to the challenges of globalisation.²¹³ Its response makes the trinitarian ecclesiology of the family of God more authentic to people.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the development of trinitarian, BECs, ancestral veneration, and liberation ecclesiologies as the components of the ecclesiology of the church as the family of God. Trinitarian ecclesiology is considered the foundation for the development of three other ecclesiologies of the church as the family of God.²¹⁴ The discussion in the chapter provides the opportunity and acknowledges the development of a contextualised ecclesiology which is significant to promote the model of the church as God’s family.

Generally, the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council has been considered as trinitarian ecclesiology which is affirmed by some post-conciliar documents. However, the implications of the trinitarian ecclesiology for ministry and church structures showed that there is a need for the emphasis of the Spirit in these areas. It can be concluded that the ecclesiology of the church as God’s family must include harmoniously both christological and pneumatological perspectives in order to develop trinitarian communion in church life in terms of relationship among clergy, religious and laity. In particular, the role of the Holy Spirit must be given more emphasis in the development of trinitarian ecclesiology. Such an emphasis in trinitarian ecclesiology will overcome the shortcomings of a purely christological or pneumatological ecclesiology on the one side, and on the other, will promote communion within the church and outside the church as the family of God.

The ecclesiology of BECs was found in the document of the Synod of Bishops and in papal teaching. It has also been emphasised in Latin America, Africa and Asia to develop a participatory church. This ecclesiology is relevant for the structure, leadership, and spirituality in the church as family and for its concern for socio-cultural issues in the world. Therefore the ecclesiology of the church as God’s family needs to emphasise the development of the ecclesiology of BECs so that the latter become an important means for the promotion and application of the former in the church. It provides the appropriate environment for the church as the family of God since the former foster sharing as well as the brotherhood/sisterhood among members.

²¹³ Min, “Solidarity of Others in the Power of the Holy Spirit,” 423-441.

²¹⁴ Cf. Gérard Philips, “La Saint Trinité dans la vie du Chrétien,” in *Appels* Série 5, no. 3 (1956); cited in Drilling, “The Genesis of the Trinitarian Ecclesiology of Vatican II,” 71: “The trinitarian mystery has thus a concrete and vital implication, eminently practical, for the society of human beings who have become children of God, working together as sisters and brothers in the divine Christian family, animated by one and the same Spirit, possessing only one soul, and that soul is the Holy Spirit”.

The ecclesiology of ancestral veneration could be developed particularly in African countries and in Vietnam to become an inculturated ecclesiology since it is close and relevant to their cultures. It can be concluded that the role of Jesus as the Proto-Ancestor and Eldest Brother has biblical foundations which can be explained in the cultural practices of Africans and the Vietnamese. The role of Jesus as the giver of life and as the servant showed that the ecclesiology of ancestral veneration is another way of understanding the family of God. Such roles of Jesus should be followed by all members of the family of God in order to avoid the negative characteristics of the human family.

The ecclesiology of liberation promotes the relationship between the church and society and also the concern of the church towards the world. It was shown that liberation ecclesiology benefits the church by helping it to know more about itself based on social analysis and outreach, particularly to the marginalised, because all people belong to one family. The church would become more relevant to the world and people in carrying out its mission which is to proclaim and build the reign of God in the world. Such a mission cannot be excluded in church activities if the church does not want to lose its identity. This ecclesiology therefore is an important component of the ecclesiology of the church as the family of God to show its universality in terms of membership and salvation.

The four ecclesiologies of the church as the family of God are interrelated in terms of divine and human, vertical and horizontal communion. They have strong foundations in scripture, church documents and African and Vietnamese cultures. Each ecclesiology, which has described and promoted some aspects of the church as family, has its strengths and weaknesses as what discussed in the Introduction of this thesis about the characteristics of models. Therefore it is necessary to have a harmonious development of these ecclesiologies when the church promotes the ecclesiological model of God's family. These ecclesiologies also demonstrated the emphasis on some new and necessary contents and methodologies in ecclesiology, such as the ecclesiology of ancestral veneration and the function of social sciences in ecclesiology.²¹⁵ These ecclesiological issues and methodologies, which will be able to complement the traditional and western ecclesiology, need to be further developed, particularly in terms of their implications, in the next chapters.

²¹⁵ Cf. A. Anton, "Postconciliar Ecclesiology: Expectations, Results and Prospects for the Future," in René Latourelle (ed.), *Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives: Twenty-Five Years After (1962-1987)*, vol. 1 (Mahwah, NY: Paulist Press, 1988), 412.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE FAMILY IN VIETNAM

Culture, which has common as well as specific characteristics across ethnic groups, is the background for the understanding of the concept “the church as family”.¹ It is on the foundation of the cultural values of the family that the church in Vietnam has chosen the family as an ecclesiological concept. However, the cultural factors of the family, which have positive as well as negative aspects, often call the ecclesiological concept of the church as the family of God into question.² Thus one needs to study the Vietnamese family in order to understand it and to help the appreciation of the ecclesiological concept of the church as the family of God in the Vietnamese context.

The Vietnamese family has been influenced by many socio-cultural factors, particularly indigenous as well as Confucian cultures,³ and has also changed over time. These socio-cultural influences provide advantages for, and challenges to, the formation and development of the Vietnamese family. Beside some similarities between the family of the Việt and the ethnic minority people in Vietnam,⁴ there are also some differences in terms of organisation and structure although they live in the same country.

Acknowledging the differences of the Vietnamese family in terms of ethnicity and region, this chapter will describe some common characteristics of the Vietnamese family. The study of the family will include the traditional as well as the modern family and the challenges to the Vietnamese family. The discussion of the traditional and modern Vietnamese families aims to provide a comprehensive view of the formation of the family which have similarities and continuities in terms of structure and values.

¹ The family in the scriptures showed that it was formed in Israelite and Greco-Roman cultures. In the Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* the ecclesiological concept of the family is based on African culture.

² The African and Confucian family in Asia is often questioned regarding the following negative characteristics: nepotism, hierarchy, and superiority of men over women.

³ There has been some evidence of the influence of both cultures in the formation and development of the Vietnamese family. Cf. Danièle Bélanger, “Regional Differences in Household Composition and Family Formation Patterns in Vietnam,” *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 31 (2000), 172-173.

⁴ Cf. Nguyễn Duy Thiệu, “Family Relationships of Some Ethnic Peoples in Tay Nguyen,” in Rita Liljeström and Trương Lai (eds.), *Sociological Studies on the Vietnamese Family* (Hanoi: Social Sciences Publishing House, 1991), 93; Đỗ Hữu Nghiêm, “Giáo hội và các dân tộc thiểu số,” [The church and ethnic minorities] in VBC, *Giáo hội Công giáo Việt Nam: Niên giám 2004* [The 2004 Catholic Church of Vietnam Almanac] (Hà Nội: Nhà xuất bản Tôn giáo, 2004), 454-482. Vietnam has fifty-four ethnic groups whose majority are Việt people (87%) while a small number are ethnic minority people (13%).

4.1 The Traditional Family in Vietnam

The term “Vietnamese traditional family” is flexible in terms of meanings and date.⁵ Today it refers to either a form or type of rural family or a Confucian family. In the first meaning, the Vietnamese traditional family is an institution closely connected with agricultural life and production which is still dominant in Vietnam.⁶ In the second sense, the reference to the Confucian family as the traditional one in terms of family values is less precise because many Confucian values are firmly embedded in all manifestations of Vietnamese culture. This section refers to “the traditional family” as the institution that existed up to 1954. Actually the Vietnamese family had undergone some changes at the beginning of the twentieth century when western cultures, especially French influences, started spreading in many sectors of Vietnamese society. However, after the signing of the Geneva Accords (1954), Vietnam was divided into two countries with the communist regime in the North and the republican government in the South. These two governments had their family laws which constituted some new characteristics of the Vietnamese family, such as monogamy, gender equality, and rights for women and children. That is why the date of 1954 is chosen as the landmark for the study of the traditional family. This section will study the factors in the formation of the Vietnamese family, the communality, the hierarchy as well as the roles of ancestors, the father and the eldest son in the Vietnamese family.

4.1.1 The Contributing Factors in the Formation of the Vietnamese Family

Cultural, religious, and political factors have contributed to the formation of the Vietnamese family. One can identify four main factors affecting the traditional Vietnamese family: indigenous or local culture, Confucianism, Buddhism and Christian as well as western cultures.⁷ It is noted that the Vietnamese in the northern part of the

⁵ Đỗ Thái Đông, “Modifications of the Traditional Family in the South of Vietnam,” in Liljeström and Trương Lai (eds.), *Sociological Studies on the Vietnamese Family*, 69-70; Đỗ Thị Bình *et al.*, *Gia đình Việt Nam và người phụ nữ trong gia đình thời kỳ công nghiệp hóa, hiện đại hóa đất nước* [The family and women in the family in the period of industrialisation and modernisation in Vietnam] (Hà Nội: Nhà xuất bản Khoa học xã hội, 2002), 18-19. Bình mentioned the different meanings of the term “traditional family”. It can refer to (1) a Confucian family, (2) an indigenous family, (3) a combination of Confucian and indigenous family.

⁶ Ministry of Health *et al.*, *Survey Assessment of Vietnamese Youth* (Hanoi: 2005), 14. According to this survey, more than 75% of 80.6 million of Vietnamese live in rural areas and are engaged in agricultural work.

⁷ Cf. Nguyễn Đăng Liêm, “Indochinese Cross-cultural Communication and Adjustment,” in Nguyễn Xuân Thu (ed.), *Vietnamese Studies in a Multicultural World* (Melbourne: Vietnamese Language and Culture Publications, 1994), 52; Li Tana, “An Alternative Vietnam? The Nguyen Kingdom in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,” *JSAS* 29 (1998), 118; Trần Ngọc Thêm, *Tìm về bản sắc văn hóa Việt Nam* (hereafter *Tìm về bản sắc*) [Discovering the identity of Vietnamese culture] (TP Hồ Chí Minh: Nhà xuất bản TP Hồ Chí Minh, 1997), 527-535. Taoism can also be considered a contributing factor to the Vietnamese identity and family. Taoism was brought to the Viet people by Chinese rulers as early as the first centuries of the Common Era. It deeply influenced the people as a way of life which advocated inertia and harmony

country (the Red River Delta) began expanding southward in the twelfth and seventeenth centuries.⁸ These regional and cultural factors contribute to some variations between families in different regions in Vietnam. In addition to these factors, the Code of the Vietnamese imperial court and the Marriage and Family Laws of the North and South governments have also influenced the structure of the family. The legislative influence will be further discussed in the study of the modern family.

The history of the Vietnamese people and family is deeply influenced by a foundational myth. According to the *National Annals*, it is said that from the Hồng Bàng dynasty that ruled the kingdom Xích Quỷ, Lạc Long Quân, grandson of the sea god, married Âu Cơ, a mountain goddess. The Vietnamese claimed that this couple were their first ancestors who had one hundred boys hatched from one hundred eggs in a pouch. Lạc Long Quân went down to the sea with fifty boys and Âu Cơ brought another fifty up to the mountain of Phong Châu, and then selected her eldest son as king Hùng of the Văn Lang kingdom. The former boys with the father became “kinh” people or the lowlanders (the Việt people) and the latter “thượng” people, the highlanders (or the ethnic minorities). However, the history of Vietnam only began in 213 before the Common Era (BCE) when the Việt people came and settled in the Red River Delta and rich coastal plains of North Vietnam, named Âu Lạc kingdom.⁹

Vietnam is located in Southeast Asia, one of the oldest areas to develop agriculture with the civilisation of “irrigated rice”. Theories about the regional development of agriculture and archaeological excavations since the 1920s and particularly from the 1950s to the 1970s showed that there was a developed civilisation of farming and bronze moulding in this part of Asia which could be dated back to 3000 years BCE. This evidence shows that Vietnamese culture first came from the cultural context of the Southeast Asian region rather than directly from China.¹⁰ Agricultural life has left its imprint on the Vietnamese family. The Vietnamese lived together in villages and helped one another in agricultural

with the universe, with self and with others. The influences of Taoism on the Vietnamese are: harmony with nature as well as with the universe, and detachment from material possessions, success and power.

⁸ The central and southern parts of Vietnam today had been occupied by the Cham and Khmer people of the Indianized kingdoms of Champa and Cambodia. The Cham were finally defeated by the Vietnamese in 1471 and the Khmer were forced out of the Mekong Delta in 1749.

⁹ Thêm, *Tim về bản sắc*, 89-92. See also Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis: Alexandre de Rhodes and Inculturation in Seventeenth-Century Vietnam* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 4; Nguyễn Đăng Trúc, *Văn hiến, nền tảng của minh triết* [Civilisation: the foundation of wisdom] (Reichstett, France: Định Hướng Tùng thư, 2004).

¹⁰ Trần Quốc Vương, “Truyền thống văn hóa Việt Nam trong bối cảnh Đông Nam Á và Đông Á,” in Trần Quốc Vương, *Văn hóa Việt Nam – Tim tòi và suy gẫm* [Vietnamese culture – Researches and Reflections] (Hà Nội: Nhà xuất bản Văn hóa Dân tộc, 2000), 15-16; cf. Hy Van Luong, “Brother and Uncle: An Analysis of Rules, Structural Contradictions, and Meanings in Vietnamese Kinship,” *American Anthropologist* 86 (1984), 297-309, Thêm, *Tim về bản sắc*, 82-86.

enterprises. Therefore the Vietnamese valued relationships, communality and the role of women in family as well as in community life.¹¹

After 208 BCE Triệu Đà, a Chinese general, conquered Âu Lạc kingdom of the Việt people. He changed Âu Lạc into Nam Việt and governed it up to 137 BCE. Nam Việt had to pay tribute to the Chinese emperor of the Han dynasty and had gradually come under its influence. However, it was in 111 BCE that Nam Việt came totally under Chinese domination as a province of China. This domination, although it was not permanent throughout the ten centuries,¹² lasted until 938 when Ngô Quyền regained Vietnamese independence and named his kingdom Đại Việt. During their domination the Chinese attempted to acculturate the Vietnamese in terms of monarchy and linguistic script. These two material elements of Chinese culture influenced the Vietnamese, particularly the scholars. However, it was the Vietnamese imperial court which after 1070 promoted Chinese culture through education and the establishment of Confucianism as a kind of national religion.¹³

Confucianism considers the family as a basis for looking at the world and for building an ideal society. The characteristics of Confucianism that are found in the majority of the Vietnamese are: hierarchy, authority, sense of family and patriarchal modes of authority.¹⁴ They have impacted on the people and society in the area of relationships and of the rites of entering adulthood, marriage, funeral and offering sacrifices.

¹¹ ThêM, *Tim về bản sắc*, 47; Neil L. Jamieson, "Toward a Paradigm for Paradox: Observations on the Study of Social Organization in Southeast Asia," *JSAS* 25 (1984), 324. Jamieson identified the indigenous culture as "yin" system which is "more female, indigenous, customary in basis, heterodox, informal, egalitarian, and culturally optional". Cf. Alexander Woodside, "Vietnamese History: Confucianism, Colonialism and the Struggle for Independence," *The Vietnam Forum* 11 (1988), 32-34

¹² The Chinese ruled in three non-consecutive periods: 111BCE - 39 CE., 43 - 544, 602 - 918. Cf. Van Tran Doan, "Confucianism: Vietnam," in Antonio S. Cua (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Chinese Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 173-174; Wai-Ming Ng, "Confucianism in Vietnam," in XinZhong Yao (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Confucianism*, vol. 1 (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 150-151.

¹³ Cf. ThêM, *Tim về bản sắc*, 94-102; Van Tran Doan, "Confucianism: Vietnam," 173-175. In Hanoi, in the eleventh century the Ly dynasty founded two institutions: the Confucian temple, called *văn miếu* (temple of literature), in which Confucius was venerated, and the College of national sons for the children of the royal and mandarin families. In every village, there was a *văn chỉ* (literary shrine) for the cult of Confucius. Later on, after 1225, the Tran dynasty considered Confucianism the official religion of the nation and thus another period of acculturation began through education. The monarchy organised a triennial examination system to recruit its mandarin officials based on the Confucian teachings that were taught in village schools. In addition, Confucianism was a socio-philosophical system rather than a religion in the strict sense, therefore, influencing the cultural practices and rituals of the Vietnamese who followed Chinese ways.

¹⁴ ThêM, *Tim về bản sắc*, 49; Jamieson, "Toward a Paradigm for Paradox," 324. Jamieson identified the Confucianism as "yang" system which is "predominantly male, Sinitic in origin, legal in basis, orthodox, formal, autocratic, and culturally prescribed"; Trần Đình Hượu, "Traditional Families in Vietnam and the Influence of Confucianism," in Liljeström and Trương Lai (eds.), *Sociological Studies on the Vietnamese Family*, 25-29.

Buddhism did not have official teachings on family, but it has influenced the Vietnamese family through Buddhist filial piety. Buddhism came to Vietnam from two sources and through different periods. *Theravada* Buddhism (the lesser “vehicle”) was brought to Vietnam directly through India during the period before the Common Era. Later, around the third and fourth centuries, *mahayana* (the greater “vehicle”) came to Vietnam through China and became the dominant strand of Buddhism in the country. However, Vietnamese Buddhism developed only since the tenth century. Both *theravada* and *mahayana* Buddhism made a strong impact on the majority of the Vietnamese because of its peaceful way of integration.¹⁵ The Buddhist influence was notably expressed in the value of compassion, in the respect for parents and in the performance of good deeds.¹⁶

Christianity came to Vietnam in the sixteenth century. The records of the Vietnamese imperial court mentioned the preaching of a man called I Ne Khu in North Vietnam in 1533.¹⁷ Missionaries who started arriving in Vietnam from the seventeenth century brought Christian teachings about family which have had a significant impact on the Vietnamese.¹⁸ Besides, since the beginning of the twentieth century western culture,

¹⁵ Thêrn, *Tim về bản sắc*, 99-101; Nguyễn Huy Lai, *La tradition religieuse spirituelle et social au Vietnam* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1981), 325-327; Robert Topmiller, “Vietnamese Buddhism in the 1990s,” *Cross Current* 50 (2000), 233. During the eleventh and twelfth centuries Buddhism reached its climax in the history of Vietnam through the reputation of the Buddhist clergy and the construction of many famous pagodas with the support of the Lý dynasty and the generous contributions of the people. Then, in the thirteenth century, Buddhism gradually declined and Confucianism became the national religion.

¹⁶ The essence of Buddhism is the Law of Karma, which states that man/woman is reincarnated and rewarded in the next life for his/her good deeds in this life, and punished for his/her bad ones. Cf. Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 39-44; Thích Thiện Hoa, *Phật học phổ thông* [An Introduction to Buddhism], 3 vols. (Hà Nội: Nhà xuất bản Tôn giáo, 2006); Nguyễn Tài Thư (ed.), *History of Buddhism in Vietnam* (Hanoi: Social Sciences Publishing House, 1992), Nguyễn Tài Thư “Ảnh hưởng của Phật giáo trong giáo dục gia đình và sự hình thành nhân cách con người Việt nam hiện nay,” [Buddhist influences in family education and in the formation of human identity of today’s Vietnamese] in Lê Thi (ed.), *Gia đình Việt Nam ngày nay* [The Vietnamese family today] (Hà Nội: Nhà xuất bản Khoa học Xã hội, 1996), 171-187; Mai Thành, “Aspects of Christianity in Vietnam,” *Concilium* 2 (1993), 97-98.

¹⁷ *Khâm Định Việt Sử Thông Giám*, principal part, vol. 33. An edict of 1663 of the imperial Vietnamese Annals mentions that in 1533 there had been a prohibition of the diffusion of “the false doctrine of Gia To [Jesus] preached by a man of the sea [duong nhan] by the name of I Ne Khu (possibly Ignatius) in the villages of Ninh Cuong and Quan Anh of the district of Nam Chan and in the villages of Tra Lu, of the district of Giao Thuy, in the province of Son Nam”. This *Khâm định Việt sử Thông Giám* was written in 1859 under the direction of Phan Thanh Gian and was published in 1884; cited in Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 8. The Vietnamese Bishops’ Conference officially chose the date of 1533 as the start of the evangelisation in Vietnam when the local church celebrated the 470th anniversary of evangelisation in Vietnam in 2003. See also VBC, *Giáo hội Công giáo Việt Nam*, 184-203.

¹⁸ Cf. The *Catechimus* was entitled “Phep giang tam ngay cho ke muon chiu phep Rua toi, ma vao dao thanh Duc Chua Troi” (Catechism for those who want to receive Baptism divided into eight days). It was written by Alexandre de Rhodes and was published under the auspices of *Propaganda Fidei* in 1651. For the English translation of this catechism, see Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 215-315.

mainly brought to Vietnam by French colonizers, began to influence Vietnamese society, particularly the family, in the areas of individual freedom and of equality.¹⁹

4.1.2 Communitarianism of the Vietnamese Family

The Vietnamese often live together in community. This communitarian character which becomes one of the fundamental traits of the Vietnamese traditional family is characterised by the lineage/clan or kinship system and close relationships among the living, extending even to the dead and unborn family members. These interrelated characteristics result from agrarian and Confucian influences among Vietnamese.²⁰

In general, the Vietnamese family is described as “a human community stemming from ancestors often going back to four or five generations”.²¹ The Vietnamese family was nuclear in terms of pattern, but it was extended in terms of relationships among members of the same clan (*họ/tộc*).²² The lineage or clan mainly consists of consanguine members. However, the Vietnamese extended family also often had a number of servants, maids and labourers who kept a close relationship with the family of their masters, even after marriage, and in the conduct of their individual lives. To some extent the extended family or clan might include non-blood relatives although such an inclusion was not common. The family cannot survive unless it is supported by clan or kinship which can trace ancestry to nine generations (*cửu tộc*). For the Vietnamese, the role of the lineage is more important than that of the nuclear family.²³

The Vietnamese family is traditionally understood in the sense of a clan. It is made up of five generations of the paternal clan. The father, *gia trưởng* (the head of the family), is the axis or the centre in the kinship since he is related to all those in four paternal

¹⁹ The influence of French culture was partly spread through the works/novels of a group of Vietnamese writers called *Tự lực văn đoàn* (the Self-Strength Literati Society) and of some bourgeois nationalists. In their novels they showed worries about social injustice in the colonial period, championed a western-style individualism and attacked Confucianism as well as the traditional family. Cf. Neil L. Jamieson, *Understanding Vietnam* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1993).

²⁰ Mai Huy Bích, “A Distinctive Feature of the Meaning of Reproduction in Confucian Family Tradition in the Red River Delta,” in Liljeström and Trương Lai (eds.), *Sociological Studies on the Vietnamese Family*, 49-50. Bích states that “one of the elements of the originality of the Vietnamese family is the influence of Confucianism. In this connection, one may say with Léon Vandermeersch (1980) that this influence has ‘structured’ Asian ‘communautism’. This characteristic does not only encompass the whole of social life, but truly permeates every cell of those societies: the family”. Cf. Hựu, “Traditional Families in Vietnam and the Influence of Confucianism,” 25-46; Lê Thị Quế, “The Vietnamese Family Yesterday and Today,” *Interculture* 19 (1986), 13-25.

²¹ Phạm Văn Bích, *The Vietnamese Family in Change: The Case of the Red River Delta* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1999), 19.

²² Cf. Léopold Cadière, *Croyances et pratiques religieuses des Vietnamiens*, vol. 3 (Hanoi: Imprimerie d'Extreme Orient, 1956), 34; Quế, “The Vietnamese Family Yesterday and Today,” 17-19; Neil Jamieson, “The Traditional Family in Vietnam,” *The Vietnam Forum* 8 (1986), 92.

²³ Thêm, *Tìm về bản sắc*, 203; Gerald C. Hickey, *Village in Vietnam* (London: Yale University, 1964), 82-88.

ascending, and four descending, generations. From the head of the family to preceding generations there are: *cha* (father), *ông* (grandfather), *cụ* (great-grandfather) and *cổ/kị* (great great-grandfather or forefather), and to succeeding generations there are: *con* (children), *cháu* (grandchildren), *chắt* (great-grandchildren) and *chút* (great great-grandchildren). The one-syllabled kin terminology in Vietnamese combined with a modifier identifying the lineage (patrilineal or non-patrilineal/matrilineal) demonstrates close and distinct relationships in terms of order, responsibility and affection among its members from one generation to other generations in the kinship. These kinship terms are also used as everyday language in social relations with people outside the family or the lineage which sociologically are called fictive kin. In so doing one wants to treat everyone as family members. This practice demonstrates the family dimension of the Vietnamese since for them the family is the heart of all relationships.²⁴

The collectivity of the family, which is a characteristic of the kinship system, is also found in some ethnic minority peoples in Vietnam. This characteristic is explicitly expressed among some ethnic groups, such as Ede and Jarai, who live together in “longhouses” under a female head of the clan.²⁵ It is called a longhouse because the length of this house can reach thirty metres so that it can accommodate dozens of members of different families of the clan. Each family has its own space in this longhouse with separate kitchens. In farming, these families in the clan work together and are given food from the crop according to the number of family members.²⁶

²⁴ Thê, *Tìm về bản sắc*, 203. Thê remarked that the Vietnamese kin terminology is nuclear terms or one-syllabled terms which are different from combined terms or two-syllabled terms in many other languages such as English or French. In addition, the Vietnamese kin terminology includes a modifier in order to identify the patrilineal or non-patrilineal relationship. The modifier (patrilineal or non-patrilineal) is used to differentiate between the paternal and maternal relationships. For example, there are different terms for such relationships, such as *ông nội* (a patrilineal grandfather) and *ông ngoại* (a non-patrilineal grandfather). See also Quê, “The Vietnamese Family Yesterday and Today,” 14-17; Hickey, *Village in Vietnam*, 82-85; Luong, “Brother and Uncle: An Analysis of Rules, Structural Contradictions, and Meanings in Vietnamese Kinship,” 297-309; Thành, “Aspects of Christianity in Vietnam,” 107; Merrill H. Jackson, “Vietnamese Social Relationships,” *Interculture* 20 (1987), 11: “Everyone you ever meet is one or another of these to you. And you treat that person, as has been suggested, in the same way as you do that particular relative ... the attitudes and behaviour are reciprocated, and the appropriate kin relationship is established ... We have seen so far that Vietnamese relationships are hierarchical in nature ... We have also found that intimacy is to be found only in hierarchy. Only there does one find oneself comfortable and at ease, at home, totally spontaneous. It is in one’s social ‘position’ and role that one ‘comes true’; and there, one is intimate with the other.” For Thành, the kinship terms applied to all show the sense of evangelical kinship founded on the Christian filiality towards God the Father.

²⁵ Thiệu, “Family Relationships of Some Ethnic Peoples in Tay Nguyen,” 90-93. According to Thiệu, the “complicated relations in a long house are not exceptional cases, but a universal phenomenon among various ethnic groups in Tây Nguyên belonging to the matrilineal line”.

²⁶ Thê, *Tìm về bản sắc*, 202; Oscar Salemik, *The Ethnography of Vietnam’s Central Highlanders* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 29-32. Salemik described longhouses as follows: “The archetype Montagnard (ethnic minorities in western highlands) village is a village with a series of elevated longhouses, inhabited by several households belonging to the same clan. In the middle of the village would be a high-roofed communal house, with a decorated pole in front of their ritual buffalo sacrifice” (page 32).

The Vietnamese, including ethnic minority peoples, were often village-oriented and relied on the strength of community life to the extent that village life was the essence of traditional Vietnam.²⁷ A village (*làng*) was a social and economic community where a group of Vietnamese lived together from early times. Vietnamese villages originated, on the one hand, from agricultural life in which nuclear families often needed the labour force from other families during planting and harvesting seasons, and on the other hand, from the nature of the Vietnamese who prefer to live together in families and in villages. For them, villages are their material and spiritual strength and support. Generally, villages were also their birth place of origin and people preferred to live there to keep in touch regularly with their parents and siblings and to be attached to their ancestors' land on which they felt security and stability. Insun studied the history and the nature of the Red River Delta villages during the Lê dynasty (1428-1788) and described the attachment of the Vietnamese to their own village as follow:

In pre-modern Vietnamese society, these villages, called *xã* or *làng*, were where people's entire lives took place. They were born there and, after having lived their lives in the same village, were buried there. Except in times of danger like famine and natural disasters, few people, especially those in the Red River Delta, were willing to leave their own village. Consequently, if they were ever forced to do so, in their hearts they were always ready to go back. The Vietnamese express such feelings in a proverb says, 'the leaf that falls from the tree goes back to the root' (*lá rụng về cội*).²⁸

The kinship system in Vietnam shows solidarity among members or the connection of members to a common ancestor. This solidarity is beneficial for its members in many aspects of their daily life for they share with one another material and spiritual benefits. In particular, the kinship system has some influence on the religious life of its members. It could happen, for example, that the conversion of the head of the clan might lead to the conversion of other members.²⁹ The clan becomes a spiritual support for its members.

²⁷ Toan Ánh, *Làng xóm Việt Nam* [Villages in Vietnam] (Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh: Nhà xuất bản TP Hồ Chí Minh, 1999); Văn, *Gia đình Việt Nam*, 28; Thêm, *Tìm về bản sắc*, 210-228; Gerald Cannon Hickey, "The Vietnamese Village Through Time and War," *The Vietnam Forum* 10 (1987), 1-25; Neil L. Jamieson, "The Traditional Vietnamese Village," *Interculture* 28 (1985), 2-34. According to Jamieson, "Traditional Vietnam was composed of thousands of essentially similar villages distributed throughout a vast expanse of contiguous paddylands. Even well into the twentieth century over ninety-five percent of the population lived in rural villages, pursuing a way of life little changed in essentials for hundred of years. Village life was the essence of traditional Vietnam" (page 3). Village life was characterised by the activities organised at the *đình* (the communal house) and the social organisation such as the *giáp*, literary associations, groups of military mandarins and old people's clubs. See also Gerald Cannon Hickey, *Sons of the Mountains: Ethnohistory of the Vietnamese Central Highlands to 1954* (Binghamton, NY: Vail-Ballou Press, 1982), 35-36.

²⁸ Yu Insun, "The Changing Nature of the Red River Delta Villages During the Lê Period (1428-1788)," *JSAS* 32 (2001), 170-171.

²⁹ The conversion to Christianity of all or many members of the lineage forms them into *họ đạo* (a clan of Catholics). Such a conversion sometimes still happens among the ethnic minorities in Vietnam.

However, the negative value of the solidarity or relationship among family members is nepotism.³⁰ People might take advantage of the social and religious position of a member in their clan for their own benefit or extend the relationship only to the family/lineage members. The exclusive restriction of the relationship to the family/lineage members makes universal solidarity with all people difficult.

This collectivity enhances solidarity among all the family members, but also limits the role of the individuals. This negative impact of the collectivity on one family can, however, diminish individual dynamism and creativity, leading to passivity and excessive dependence on the family or clan. The collectivity of the family, clan or village defends its members against outside attacks or difficulties, and supports them in doing good works for one another. However, the downside lies in the possibility of making a person a conformist, happy to live under the protection of a community, but a law-breaker when the sanctuary of the community is not available.

Given their long lineage, relationships become important and necessary to keep the family in harmony and order. The family relationships show interdependence among its members, among living, dead, unborn members and between generations. All members belong to a generational family of common ancestors and have responsibility for the present as well as the future of the family, for the younger and also the older generations.

The family members have the duty to help and respect one another. The relationship between siblings is called fraternal love. In that context, the uncle (the younger brother of the father) has to take care of the children of his deceased elder brother because they are also his grandchildren. The relationship between parents and children is best described as filial piety; the children have to keep this close relationship, even when their parents die, by practising ancestor veneration. In addition to the past and the present generations, people still have relationships with the future generations by having sons. It is an obligation of filial piety that the family members, particularly the male ones, have to produce male offspring to continue the veneration of ancestors and the family line. Therefore having no children is considered one of the greatest breaches of filial piety.³¹ The present generations receive benefits from the previous ones through the blessing of

³⁰ Cf. Luong, "Brother and Uncle," 299. Some Vietnamese proverbs expressing the solidarity among the clan members are: "Một người làm quan cả họ được nhờ" [when a person become a mandarin, his whole clan benefits] and "Dư bỏ vào họ, khó nhờ vào họ" [give the surplus to the clan and rely on the clan when in need].

³¹ Ánh, *Tín ngưỡng Việt Nam*, 55; Bích, "A Distinctive Feature of the Meaning of Reproduction in Confucian Family Tradition," 50-51.

ancestors and also have to do good deeds for the future generations. For that reason, people try to live responsibly *vis-à-vis* the older as well as the younger generations. Indeed, the bonds of kinship were primary and the mutual obligations in family relationships were inviolable. Therefore it can be said that “the ideology and institutions of traditional Vietnam were clearly directed towards maintaining and maximising the principle of familialism rather than the household as a socio-economic unit”.³²

The relationships among the Vietnamese are often encouraged to transcend the family/clan through an extension to other people, since all Vietnamese originate from the same womb or the same “pouch” according to the myth of the Vietnamese origin as mentioned earlier in this chapter. The Vietnamese often remind themselves of their same roots by such proverbs: “gourd and pumpkin, you should love each other. Though you are of different species you live on the same trellis”.³³ They also show their solidarity in the saying “when a horse in a stable is sick, the other horses will not eat their grass”.³⁴ However, these extended relationships are sometimes difficult to develop due to the restriction of the Confucian concept of biological family which is based exclusively on a male biological connection. The relationships in a Confucian family are determined only by whether one has a connection with a male member in the family.

Because of the web of family relationships, the family has a great authority over its members. As a collective community, the family and clan govern the whole life of its members as individuals. Personal interests of individuals or family members must be subordinated to, and must comply with, that of the family. The former have to discipline themselves and sacrifice their personal expectations to the latter. The existence of the individual is necessary to protect and to serve the benefits of the family, especially that of the older generations. Each individual member works to uphold the fame and honour of the family and to build up its property rather than confine itself to the individual. In this regard, it is the opposite of the western understanding, with its greater emphasis on the individual.³⁵ In Vietnamese culture the individual is subservient to the community. However, the negative aspect of the family influence on its members is paternalistic or hierarchical attitudes within the family or within the community. These attitudes can

³² Jamieson, “The Traditional Family in Vietnam,” 98.

³³ “Bầu ơi thương lấy bí cùng, tuy rằng khác giống nhưng chung một giàn”. Another proverb says “nhiều điều phủ lấy giá gương, người trong một nước phải thương nhau cùng”, that means “compatriots must love one another as the red crape which covers up the frame of a mirror”.

³⁴ “Một con ngựa đau cả tàu chê cỏ”.

³⁵ Bích, *The Vietnamese Family*, 18.

develop into patriarchy and nepotism which might not consider benefits of the subordinates and of those who do not belong to immediate family members.³⁶

From childhood everyone is educated in the sense of communality which considers the norms of the clan and family as the highest standards to follow in life. The family becomes the first school for value education, in which children are taught filial piety and mutual support in their clan and family through stories and proverbs.³⁷ Religious doctrines are also taught from the earliest years at home. The function of human and religious education is still valued in the Vietnamese family. In some big and well-known clans, there is the clan code (*hương ước*)³⁸ to determine relationships and behaviours among members for the purpose of upholding the collectivity. In social life, they experience communal activities and festivals. In adulthood, it is not the individual but the senior members of the family and of the clan who often would be the decisive agents in brokering marriages and deciding career-paths. Throughout life, the individual tries to conform to the standards of the community.

The communality of the Vietnamese since antiquity, is reflected in the communitarian character of the family or the ties among family members. The former directs the way of life or the organisations of the Vietnamese to the development of communitarian life and institutions of which the communality of the family is an example. This communal characteristic of the traditional Vietnamese family has been recognised through the intergenerational support among elderly in various ways, such as co-residence, material support and visits. Indeed, up to the 1990's "the family remains the most important source of social security for elderly Vietnamese".³⁹ The communality of the family, which has positive as well as negative expressions, is structured in terms of hierarchy.

³⁶ In Vietnam, there is a comparison "as strict as the husband's mother" because she is often known to be unreasonably strict with her young daughter-in-law. This is an example of nepotism in the Vietnamese family.

³⁷ Bích, *The Vietnamese Family*, 18.

³⁸ *Hương ước* is the common agreement of conventional nature or the internal rules of villages or clans. It is also the written records of regulations concerning social organisation as well as life in a village. One of its provisions is to protect the community life in terms of management of village properties, mutual support during harvests and calamities, and preservation of fine customs and practices. Cf. Insun, "The Changing Nature of the Red River Delta Villages," 162-163.

³⁹ Trương Sĩ Anh *et al.*, "Living Arrangements, Patrilineality and Sources of Support among Elderly Vietnamese," *Asia-Pacific Population Journal* 12 (1997), 86; John Knodel *et al.*, "Intergenerational Exchanges in Vietnam: Family Size, Sex Composition, and the Location of Children," *Population Studies* 54 (2000), 89-104.

4.1.3 Hierarchy in the Vietnamese Family

Hierarchy is a feature of the Vietnamese family which determines the order in a clan/family and keeps the balance or harmony in its structure. It comes from the kinship system and is characterised by the order of precedence in the clan/family and by the terms of address among its members.⁴⁰ In these contexts, hierarchy is a positive value; however it can be abused and turned into a negative characteristic.

The clan and family are structured according to the order of precedence in terms of generation, age and gender. The older or superior generations precede the younger or inferior generations in authority. Age is the criterion of precedence for people of the same generation. Men are ranked over women among the Vietnamese while women precede men among most of the ethnic minorities. In the Vietnamese family the paternal side is often more important than the maternal one although people have good relationships to both sides and the children have to show filial piety to both their father and their mother. The children are obliged to respect and obey absolutely their parents.

As has been mentioned, the head of the family among the Vietnamese is the father, and among many of the ethnic minorities it is the mother. The dominant father/mother is regarded as the breadwinner as well as the decision maker and has a higher status than the spouse. However, both father and mother take care of the formation of their children in accord with traditional values. In every tribe/clan of ethnic minorities there is a head of the tribe whose main role is to organise and officiate at rituals and also to reconcile conflicts among members of the tribe. But in the hierarchical system in tribes, it is still the men who hold the power and women are subordinate even among matrilineal tribes. Men are the tribal/village chiefs, but they have this power on behalf of their wives. The former only assume societal responsibility while living in the latter's house.⁴¹

The practice of patrilineage among the Vietnamese values male members in the family in order to continue the father's lineage. That was the background of the preference of a male over female child. The importance of the male member stems from two reasons: to practise the veneration of ancestors and to ensure the continuation of the bloodline in the structure of patrilineage which is still prevalent today.⁴² In a society influenced by Confucianism like Vietnam, the patrilineal structure was the rationale for polygamy or the

⁴⁰ Bích, *The Vietnamese Family*, 22-25; Luong, "Brother and Uncle," 297-298.

⁴¹ Salemik, *The Ethnography*, 33-34; Thiệu, "Family Relationships of Some Ethnic Peoples in Tay Nguyen," 92-101.

⁴² Bích, *The Vietnamese Family*, 220; Anh *et al.*, "Living Arrangements, Patrilineality and Sources of Support among Elderly Vietnamese," 86.

custom of having concubines, though this was banned by the Family Law of North and South governments in 1959. The reason for concubinage was that there must be a male descendant to continually develop one's family name and to carry out the veneration of ancestors. Therefore, in the case where the first wife could not give birth to a son for the husband's family, she had to accept another woman as the second rank wife or as a concubine for her husband to fulfil the custom of patrilineage.⁴³ Matrilineage, however, was the custom of many ethnic minorities, particularly those in Tây Nguyên. Generally, this practice referred to "an amalgam of matrilineal descent and inheritance, clan-based residence" and to the custom in which women take initiatives in courting and getting married instead of men as in patriarchal society.⁴⁴

In particular, among the Việt people, hierarchy in the family is often considered as a direct influence of Confucianism which was also a doctrine of social hierarchies. Actually, this Confucian doctrine was slightly contextualised for the sake of the Vietnamese.⁴⁵ This doctrine defines the social interactions and attitudes between ruler and subject, father and son, husband and wife. In these relationships the second must be subject to the first person or the first is the superior of the second. The king or imperial officials are the masters of all citizens. The father or the husband is the head of the family and he is the superior of his wife and children. In addition, a woman has to practise the three bonds/dependences (*tam tòng*), in regard to her father until she is married, to her husband after she leaves her parent's family, and to her eldest son when she is widowed. However, the three bonds should be understood in relation to the five fundamental relationships described in the *Mencius* in order to value the reciprocal nature of the relationships rather than to highlight the hierarchical structure.⁴⁶

The Vietnamese have had different terms of address to describe the order of precedence. These terms express a specific rank of a person to other family members. They also symbolise the necessary existence in relationship to others, which means, one exists in so far as one has relationship to others⁴⁷ and are used even when a family

⁴³ The preference for sons has remained strong the Vietnamese family, particularly in rural North Vietnam, which could be explained by economic, religious and social reasons. Cf. Danièle Bélanger, "Son Preference in a Rural Village in North Vietnam," *Studies in Family Planning* 33 (2002), 321-334.

⁴⁴ Salemink, *The Ethnography*, 33.

⁴⁵ Liêm, "Indochinese Cross-cultural", 51-52; Hựu, "Traditional Families in Vietnam and the Influence of Confucianism," 25-26; 39-42. It is noted that only the Việt people, not the ethnic minorities, who were influenced by Confucian culture.

⁴⁶ A. T. Nuyen, "Confucianism, Globalisation and the Idea of Universalism," *Asian Philosophy* 13 (2003), 80. The five relationships are the reciprocal relationships between friends, the young and the old, husband and wife, the children and their parents, the subjects and their sovereign.

⁴⁷ Bích, *The Vietnamese Family*, 23; Nguyễn Đăng Trúc, "Cách xưng hô trong gia đình Việt Nam," [Terms of address in the Vietnamese family], in *Tình yêu, gia đình và hội nhập* [Love, family and integration],

member is in late adulthood, or when a member of an “inferior generation” is older than the one in the “superior generation”.⁴⁸ They also show respect for the elderly which is a norm that aims at acknowledging the necessary roles and contributions of the elderly in the family and society. The kinship terms are also used to address people outside the biological family, a practice which shows that the Vietnamese consider the family as a model of relationship in any institution.

Unlike the hierarchy in Confucianism, the mutual relationship between husband and wife or male and female family members, according to Vietnamese culture, is more egalitarian and co-responsible. Husbands and wives share farming work. On rice fields, it was very often the husbands who did the ploughing while wives did the tilling. Another form of sharing of labour was that husbands did farming while their spouses took care of household work at home. Wives have been considered as “internal generals” (*nội tướng*) in the family since they look after all activities within the family. Indeed, the rights of women and daughters in the family were acknowledged and highlighted in Vietnamese custom and the legal code.⁴⁹

Hierarchy has some positive points such as bringing order in the clan and family, and showing respect for the elderly or older generations. But it also has some negative aspects such as when the head of the clan and family shows authoritarianism, paternalism or maternalism over other members and when the preference of one sex over another becomes discriminatory.⁵⁰

The hierarchy in the family demands respect by the inferior to the superior which is called filial piety. Filial piety is derived from Vietnamese culture, Buddhism, Christianity and Confucianism in varying degrees. Indeed, the practices of filial piety are sophisticated in Confucianism while they are simpler and more popular in indigenous culture and religions in Vietnam.

(Reichstett, France: Định Hướng Tùng thư, 2002), 129-137; Hoàng Đức Phương, “Cách xưng hô trong xã hội Việt,” [Terms of address in Vietnamese society], in *Tình yêu, gia đình và hội nhập*, 139-159. The Vietnamese often use the terms of address, such as cha - con (father - son/daughter), ông/bà - cháu (grandfather/mother - grandchildren) as nouns expressing the relationship between two persons in their interaction. This practice differs from many westerners who use personal pronouns, such as I - You, to address other people including family members.

⁴⁸ Bích, *The Vietnamese Family*, 22-23.

⁴⁹ Cf. Charles Hirschman and Vũ Mạnh Lợi, “Family and Household Structure in Vietnam: Some Glimpses from a Recent Survey,” *Pacific Affairs* 69 (1996), 230-231. Bélanger, “Regional Differences in Household Composition,” 172-173; David W. Haines, “Reflections of Kinship and Society under Vietnam’s Lê Dynasty,” *JSAS* 35 (1984), 307-314.

⁵⁰ Cf. FABC VIII, *The Asian Family Towards a Culture of Integral Life*, 6: “With regard to the roles of women and men in the Asian family, patriarchy remains sadly the determining factor [...], patriarchy has become a pejorative term ... As such the social attitude of patriarchy in embedded in social structures and has fundamentally determined gender inequality and the superior role of men”.

Vietnamese culture values the dedication of parents in giving birth to children and rearing them; it also highlights the duty of children in repaying such parents' goodness. It is said that the great sacrifices of parents for their children are considered as *cù lao chín chữ* (parents' nine labours), that is, birth, nursing, caresses, weaning, feeding, education, supervision, care and protection. From childhood, a child is always taught about filial piety through proverbs and folksongs. One of the most common ones is the saying: "The merits of my father are comparable to the Thai mountain, those of my mother, to a perennial Spring. With great fervour I venerate my father and my mother, in order to conduct myself as a pious son/daughter".⁵¹

Buddhism emphasises parents' care and kindness towards their children during the whole life of their children from childhood to adulthood. Therefore children have to show filial piety towards their parents, especially their mothers. Indeed, Buddha told of ten aspects of parents' kindness that children need to remember and to repay. The parents' kindness is profound and only ends when they die. This filial piety is expressed by finding ways to repay the parents' kindness when they are still alive and after their death. Indeed, *Vu lan* festival is a Buddhist ceremony which has been popularly appreciated and promoted in order to show filial piety to mothers and to save them from suffering after death.⁵²

Christian teachings about filial piety have also been inculturated into Vietnamese culture. Since the seventeenth century, Alexandre de Rhodes in his *Catechismus* (1651) described the three degrees of honouring of the father: the father/mother in the family, the father of a nation - the king, and the heavenly father. Through this teaching de Rhodes led people to the veneration of ancestors according to the local culture.⁵³ Thus

⁵¹ The Vietnamese proverb is: "Công cha như núi Thái sơn, nghĩa mẹ như nước trong nguồn chảy ra. Một lòng thờ mẹ kính cha, cho tròn chữ hiếu mới là đạo con". Other proverbs are: If a fish does not eat salt it will be rotten. If a child disobeys his parent he/she will be completely spoiled [cá không ăn muối cá ươn, con cãi cha mẹ trăm đường con hư]. When you drink from the stream remember its source [Uống nước nhớ nguồn]. Do not forget the person who plants the tree that gives you shade [Ăn quả nhớ kẻ trồng cây].

⁵² Ten aspects of the parents' kindness are: the kindness of providing protection and care while the child is in the womb, of bearing suffering during the birth, of forgetting all the pain once the child has been born, of eating the bitter herself and saving the sweet for the child, of moving the child to a dry place and lying in the wet herself, of suckling the child at her breast and nourishing and bringing up the child, of washing away the unclean, of always thinking of the child when he/she has travelled far, of deep care for and devotion to the child, of ultimate pity and sympathy towards the child. Cf. Hoa, *Phật học phổ thông*, vol.1, 140-150.

⁵³ Cf. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 211-315. "[T]here are three grades of superiors or fathers who require commensurate veneration and reverence from us. The lowest grade is composed of the father and mother who give birth to our bodies; the middle grade of the king who governs our country; lastly, the highest grade of the Lord of heaven and earth, the true Lord above all things ... We are indebted to our mothers for conceiving us, bearing us in their wombs for nine months and ten days, giving birth to us in great pains, and nursing and feeding us for three years. Sometimes a mother would take food from her mouth to feed her child; sometimes she would eat the bitter part and save the sweet portion for her child ... Sometimes he [the father] rises early, with little sleep, works at this and that job, runs here and there, looking for the

filial piety, according to Catholics, which has been valued in the Vietnamese family, leads to a particular filial piety towards God who is the creator and the father of all people.

Communality promotes relationships among members in the family and in society. On this foundation, filial piety (*hsiao*) of Confucian teaching is developed because filial piety is closely connected with humanness/love (*ren*) and propriety (*li*). “To have filial affection for parents is humanity, and to respect elders is righteousness. These feelings are universal in the world, that is all”.⁵⁴ According to Confucianism, filial piety is considered as a principal value and a way of life which is expressed by five characteristics: supporting and caring for parents, reverence and obedience, continuing the ancestral line, glorifying the family name and mourning and ancestral remembrance.⁵⁵

Filial piety is one of the most important norms observed by the Vietnamese. It outlines duties or responsibilities which children must fulfil to show their respect and gratitude towards their parents or grandparents for their sacrifices. Children are obligated to their parents throughout their whole life. They must serve their parents in their old age and venerate them after their deaths. Ancestor veneration is the extension of filial piety; it can be said that both are the two aspects of a single duty. The rites of ancestor veneration are popular in the family of the Việt people as well as the ethnic minority people although there are differences. The former officiate at ancestor veneration at home or in temples while the latter at the cemetery (*nhà mồ*).⁵⁶

In response to children’s filial piety parents must show their care and love for children in the family. In Confucianism, the model of a man is that of the man of virtue (*quân tử*) who should keep the five cardinal virtues (*ngũ thường*) and follow a path of moderation (*trung dung*) which is the avoidance of exaggeration in any direction and the cultivation of equanimity. The man of virtue is also the model for which the father in a family strives in the process of self-perfection before managing his family. The care and love of the parents for their children are explicitly described in Buddhist teachings on the ten aspects

wherewithal to support his children”. Cf. Trần Văn Toàn, “La doctrine des ‘trois pères’: un effort d’inculturation du christianisme au Vietnam,” *Mission* 9 (2002), 89-104.

⁵⁴ Mencius VIIA:15 in D. C. Lau (trans.), *Mencius* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd, 1970), 184.

⁵⁵ Chi-Ping Yu, “Filial Piety and Chinese Pastoral Care,” *Asia Journal of Theology* 4 (1990), 317-318.

⁵⁶ Hickey, *Sons of the Mountains*, 26-27. “Most of the highlanders bury their dead. [...] Usually there are ritual offerings made at the time of burial, and some groups have subsequent ceremonies several years after the burial to abandon the tomb”. Cf. Trần Sĩ Tín, *Hạt giống Kitô trong đất Jarai* [The seed of Christianity in the land of Jarai] (Pleiky: 2003), 44. It is noted that after some years offering ceremonies for the dead at the cemetery the highlanders hold *Pthi Psat* (a rite for abandoning the tomb). After this ceremony they do not come to the tomb any more because they believe that the dead already belong to another world which is separate from the world of the living. The dead ancestors become *yang* (god) who intercede for their descendants and are offered ritual offerings at home during the rite “*Nga Yang Prin Tha*” (ancestor gods).

of the parents' kindness towards the children. In other words, the parents have the responsibility for their children. This responsibility is embodied in the role of ancestors, father and eldest son.

4.1.4 The Role of Ancestors, Father and Eldest Son

The first rank in the hierarchical structure is ancestors. They have a special role towards descendants. In Vietnamese culture, ancestors are those who grant natural and spiritual life to their offspring, who take care of the needs of the descendants, and who leave behind good examples for posterity to follow. They also remain guardians of morality for the descendants. Thus, although being invisible to the living descendants, ancestors are still present among the descendants and influence them. Ancestors are informed of all family events. It is in this context that ancestors are venerated and the family members are united with one another.⁵⁷

Ancestor veneration is practised at three levels: national, provincial/city/village and family levels.⁵⁸ However, ancestor veneration at home is primary. It is performed regularly during the year. Significantly, most Vietnamese families exercise this veneration whether they are non-believers, Buddhists or Christians from whatever social status they come. They have different activities or practices for the veneration of ancestors, but all have a deep respect for, and gratitude to, their ancestors.

The family focus of ancestor veneration is an altar reserved in the best place of the house. This function is carried out at home in all families while a proper veneration of ancestors is performed at *nhà từ đường* (the ancestral home) which is situated at *đất hương hỏa* (the land for incense and fire).⁵⁹ In families, the ancestral or the family altar can be established in a separate space in the house which is considered as a sacred place. On this altar pictures of ancestors are displayed along with flowers and fruit, decorated on special remembrance days. Ancestor veneration or "worship" as it was often called, has been traditionally forbidden in the Roman Catholic Church in Asia since

⁵⁷ Ánh, *Tín ngưỡng Việt Nam*, 22-52; Ánh, *Con người Việt Nam*, 329-330.

⁵⁸ The king venerates the creator-god, and the head of the state or his/her representative venerates the kings of Hung, the founder of Vietnam. This veneration is performed once a year. On some festivals or community events, provincial or village officials pay tribute to national and local heroes, founders and benefactors at local temples.

⁵⁹ The eldest son who assumes the role of the head of the family inherits in trust land collectively owned by all adult members of the lineage. The income from this land must be spent for incense and some other materials, such as flowers and foods in ritual support of deceased family members.

the seventeenth century.⁶⁰ However, nowadays, this veneration is encouraged and guided by the instructions of the universal as well as the local church.⁶¹

Ancestor veneration identifies ancestorship which applies only after the death of a person. In Vietnamese popular religions people believe in the immortality of the soul. The soul of the deceased is in some sense present in the wooden tablet placed on the ancestral altar.⁶² Ancestorship is marked with the following qualifications: the relationships between people belonging to consanguineous and non-consanguineous kinship, the exemplarity of conduct in the earthly life of the ancestor and their supernatural or sacred status after death. This sacred status makes an ancestor the mediator between the Supreme Being and his/her descendants. The ancestor should be given offerings and, in return, might intercede for the descendants. Indeed, besides the ancestors in lineage, Vietnamese still consider the Hùng kings as the ancestors of the nation and pay tribute to them since they are the ones who give life to people.⁶³ They

⁶⁰ Cf. Peter C. Phan, "Culture and Liturgy," in Peter C. Phan, *In Our Own Tongue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), 112-116. The veneration of ancestors and Confucius is well known as the Chinese Rites controversy which was first condemned by *Propaganda Fide* on 12th September 1645 with the approval of Pope Innocent X. After many years debating the cultural/civil or religious nature of the rites, they were forbidden the second time by Pope Clement XI in the Decree *Ex Illa Die* (19th March 1715). Finally, the Chinese Rites was condemned on 11th July 1742 by Pope Benedict XIV's Decree *Ex Quo Singulari*. For the controversy, see George Minamiki, *The Chinese Rites Controversy From Its Beginning to Modern Times* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1985); Ray R. Noll (ed.), *100 Roman Documents Concerning the Chinese Rites Controversy (1645-1941)* (San Francisco: Ricci Institute for Chinese-Western Cultural History, 1992); David E. Mungello (ed.), *The Chinese Rites Controversy: Its History and Meanings* (Nettetal: Steyler Verlag, 1994).

⁶¹ Cf. AAS 32 (1940), 24-26. The Instruction *Plane Compertum Est*, issued by *Propaganda Fide* on 8th December 1939 with the approval of Pope Pius XII, ends the condemnation of the Chinese Rites and allows ancestor veneration. This Instruction states that: "Catholics are permitted to be present at ceremonies in honour of Confucius in Confucian temples or in schools; erection of image of Confucius or tablet with his name on it is permitted in Catholic schools. Catholic magistrates and students are permitted to passively attend public ceremonies which have the appearance of superstition. It is licit and unobjectionable for head inclinations and other manifestations ... before the deceased or their images. The oath on the Chinese rites, which was prescribed by Benedict XIV, is not fully in accord with recent regulations and is superfluous".

It was until 1964 that the Vietnamese Bishops' Conference was granted to apply *Plane Compertum Est* to the local church. The bishops issued the communications in 1965 and 1974 to inform the people of God some decisions and practices regarding the veneration of ancestors and national heroes in Vietnam. Cf. "Hội thảo về Phúc âm hóa: vấn đề thờ cúng tổ tiên (Nha Trang 14/11/1974)," [Seminar on evangelisation: ancestor veneration], in VBC, *Giáo hội Công giáo Việt Nam*, 490. Concerning the ancestral altar it is written as follows: "(1) An ancestral altar dedicated to the veneration of the ancestors may be placed under the altar dedicated to God, provided that nothing smacking of superstition such as 'white soul' [the white cloth representing the dead] is place there. (2) Burning incense and lighting candles on the ancestral altar, and prostrating with joined hands in front of the altar or the repository of the ancestors are gestures of filial piety and veneration, hence permissible". See Phan, "Culture and Liturgy," 124, for the whole translation of Peter C. Phan on the 1974 Communication of the Vietnamese bishops on ancestor veneration.

⁶² The Vietnamese believe that *sinh ký tử qui* or *sống gởi thác về*, meaning, life is temporary (parasite-like), and death is going home. When a person dies a piece of white cloth is folded into the form of a human body to represent the soul of the deceased and is placed near the coffin. It is called *hồn bạch* (white cloth). After the burial, the *hồn bạch* is replaced by the wooden tablet which is venerated on the ancestral altar. The name of the deceased, his/her family status and social rank are written on the one side of the tablet, and his/her dates of birth and death on the other side. Cf. Phan, "Jesus as the Eldest Son and Ancestor," 134-135; De, *A Cultural and Theological Foundations for Ancestor Veneration*, 24-50.

⁶³ Cf. Ánh, *Tín ngưỡng Việt Nam*, 22.

also value the virtues and good work of the founders and heroes of the country and of villages; they try to follow their examples in order to be blessed. In families, the living children try to model themselves on the good examples of their ancestors.

Vietnamese Catholics consider God as their ancestor,⁶⁴ and themselves as the offspring of the Martyrs of Vietnam, now venerated as their ancestors. Catholics, indeed, applied most of the above qualifications of ancestorship, particularly in the areas of intercession, to the Martyrs of Vietnam.⁶⁵ The role of ancestors is clearly described in the prayers for the Mass of the second day of the lunar New Year (*Tết*).⁶⁶

In particular, ancestor veneration is celebrated among family members on the anniversaries of the ancestors' death, on some special events of the family as well as the Vietnamese, such as the birth of a new member or the marriage of a family member, the New Year and the Wandering Souls Day on the fifteenth of July (*Tết Trung nguyên*).⁶⁷ The purpose of ancestor veneration is to pay tribute to ancestors as an expression of filial piety and to make ancestors happy in their afterlife. Descendants who do not observe the veneration are considered impious or undutiful. Members of the family gather in these celebrations to remember those who gave life to the family members and to ask them to give blessings to the descendants. In other words, there is an interdependent relationship between the dead ancestors and the living descendants.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Cf. Phan, *Missions and Catechesis*, 220.

⁶⁵ The 117 Martyrs of Vietnam were canonised in 1988. The Prayer for the Martyrs of Vietnam was prepared by the Vietnamese Bishops' Conference on 22nd May 1988. In this prayer there is a paragraph which reads as follows: "We ask you to intercede [with God] for us as your offspring so that we may follow your example of living out the gospel, or practicing the virtue of love, of being faithful to the church and of loving the country".

⁶⁶ The Vietnamese New Year is celebrated in three days of January of the lunar year. For the purpose of inculturation, the first day of the New Year is dedicated to praise God and to ask for peace and prosperity, the second day is to pray for ancestors, grandparents and parents, and the third day is to pray for the sanctification of labour. See Ủy ban Phụng tự - Hội đồng Giám mục Việt nam, *Sách lễ Rôma*, ấn bản 1992 [The Vietnamese Roman Missal, ed. 1992], 1035-1047; Phan, "Culture and Liturgy," 125-126. The opening prayer and the Preface of the second day of New Year's Mass, translated by Peter C. Phan; cited in Phan, "Culture and Liturgy," 126. "Father of mercies, you have commanded us to practise filial piety. Today, on New Year's Day, we have gathered to honour the memory of our ancestors, grandparents and parents. Deign to reward abundantly those who have brought us into this world, nurtured us, and educated us ... You have given life to our ancestors, grandparents, and parents so that they may transmit [life] to us. You have also filled them with good things so we may inherit them by knowing you, adoring you, and serving you".

⁶⁷ Other festivals for the remembrance of the dead are: *Thanh minh* (the holiday for the dead) and *Đoan ngọ* (the Summer solstice day) which are celebrated on the fifth day of March and May of the lunar year respectively. During *Thanh minh*, people pay visits to graves of deceased relatives and make offerings of food, flowers, joss sticks and votive papers, while on *Đoan ngọ* offerings are made to spirits, ghosts and the God of Death's ward off epidemics. In *Tết Trung nguyên*, people offer food and gifts in homes and pagodas for the wandering souls of the forgotten dead.

⁶⁸ Léopold Cadière, *Croyances et pratiques religieuses des Vietnamiens*, vol. 1 (Hanoi: Imprimerie d'Extreme Orient, 1944), 39; cited in Phan, "Jesus as the Eldest Son and Ancestor," 141. According to Cadière, "[T]his presence of the ancestors in the midst of the family is not a purely passive state. They act. Ordinarily their influence is exercised for the well-being of the living members of the family. When the latter

Such a relationship of the dead seems to be closer to the living than when the former were still alive. So ancestors are the principle of unity among family members because through the celebrations of ancestor veneration all family members have an opportunity to see one another even when they have their differences or squabbles.

Ancestor veneration traditionally strengthened the Vietnamese families and provided an important sense of belonging and purpose. It is harder to maintain such a traditional veneration in Vietnamese society today. However, most Vietnamese still have family altars in their homes and consider the importance of the connections to their ancestors even if they don't necessarily have the same belief and practice as people in the past.

The role of ancestors is closely related to their offspring's role, especially in regard to the father and the eldest son in the Vietnamese family. This derives from Confucian culture. The role of the father is often defined in the model of the man of virtue or the gentleman (*người quân tử*). In the Confucian view, to be a man is to fulfil four progressive steps in his life and career: self-cultivation (*tu thân*), family governance (*tề gia*), country (*trị quốc*) and world management (*bình thiên hạ*).⁶⁹ He must know how to educate and improve himself in terms of virtues, morals and behaviour. Intellectual or professional achievement is secondary to that of virtue which is considered essential for public service. The man must govern and run his own family properly. After going through the first two steps he might be able to rule the country, and finally be able to govern and bring peace to the world. However, in order to achieve these roles, a man has to practise five cardinal virtues (*ngũ thường*)⁷⁰: humanness/humanity (*nhân*), proprieties (*lễ*), righteousness (*nghĩa*), wisdom (*trí*) and fidelity (*tín*). He must be humane, kind and benevolent. The first and central virtue is a complex of moral virtues. The man of virtue must adhere to rites and ceremonies as well as observe the hierarchy in the family and society. He must help the needy, and have determination as well as strong will power. Lastly, an ideal man must show others his honesty, constancy and loyalty.

This basically Confucian teaching forms men in leadership roles. In general, men in society, and the father in the family in particular, can be described as authority figures. In the family, the father is often the breadwinner and decision-maker in most the matters. In the past, the father used to be the most powerful figure in the family. He can discipline his wife and children to help them to become good persons. In other words, the father is

fulfil their obligations of filial piety punctually, then the ancestors, furnished on ritual days with all that they need, happy, tranquil, make their presence felt by distributing all sorts of good things to their descendants".

⁶⁹ Thuy, *Getting To Know*, 22; Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 21.

⁷⁰ Cf. Nuyen, "Confucianism, Globalisation and the Idea of Universalism," 80-85.

the symbol of authority in the patriarchal family.⁷¹ However, in Vietnamese culture, a father is also pictured as a man who loves his children. His sacrifice for his children extends during the whole life of the children since the Vietnamese consider the father's kindness as a mountain peak. They also view the role of the father and the mother in a family as complementary. The father plays the role of a severe father (*ngghiêm phụ*) while the mother acts a tender mother (*từ mẫu*).

In ancestor veneration the role of the father is related to that of the eldest son. It is the duty of an eldest male member, whether he is in the position of the eldest son as either a single or a married man. Consequently, the eldest son,⁷² on behalf of his father, plays an important role in ancestor veneration by fulfilling his filial piety as the head of the family or the clan and in the governance of the family. First, as the head of the family or clan, the eldest son is the officiator in the rite of ancestor veneration. Normally, the head of the family - the father - is the main officiator at this rite. However, the role of the father can be taken over by the eldest son if the father is absent. In the father's funeral, the eldest son acts as the master of mourning (*tang chủ*) who has the duty and the right to organise his father's funeral ceremonies. He is in charge of the inherited property of his parent. While the property of the parents is often divided among all family members, the main portion belongs to the eldest son.⁷³

Traditionally, inherited property was clearly defined in the ancient Code of the imperial court⁷⁴ in which the role of the eldest son had a special place in the Vietnamese family. At present, some changes in these areas have occurred due to social and economic development. However, the role of the eldest son in the family governance and in ancestor veneration is still valued among the Vietnamese. Inherited property is often used in order to defray the expenses of the gatherings on the death anniversaries of the

⁷¹ Cf. Toan Ánh, *Phong tục Việt Nam: Từ bản thân đến gia đình* [Vietnamese customs: from individuals to family], Reprint, Los Amigos, CA: Xuân Thu, 285. In the past, according to Ánh's description, the father had the following rights: to possess and manage all the properties of the family. The wife and children have to work for the common good of the family, and no one is allowed to keep possessions for him/herself; to possess his wife and children and to force them to labour and to be sold; to decide arbitrarily the marriage of the children and even to decide on their right to live or to die.

⁷² It is noted that there is a difference in terms of title for the eldest brother/sister between people in North and South Vietnam. In the South, the eldest child is called as second, the second brother/sister (*anh/chị hai*). Based on this family order the rank is counted for subsequent children to the last in the family. The last child who takes care of his old-aged parents and worshipping ancestors receive some more inherited property than other children. However, the priority of the eldest son is still respected and people pay respect to the older persons. Cf. Đông, "Modification of the Traditional Family in the South of Vietnam," 79.

⁷³ The inherited property consists of the house of his parent, land and rice fields. This house has a place for the altar of ancestors and the profit from the land and rice fields is used for ancestor veneration. The property is often understood as all movable and immovable goods given to the eldest son in order to assist him in performing the veneration of dead parents.

⁷⁴ *Quốc Triều Hình Luật (Hình Luật Triều Lê)* [The Le Code], Articles 388-400; cited in David W. Haines, "Reflections of Kinship and Society under Vietnam's Le Dynasty," *JSAS* 15 (1984), 311.

ancestors or parents. Hence, contributions from family members are required if such events are to be properly celebrated.

The duty of the eldest son in ancestor veneration also requires him to obtain a male child through marriage in order to ensure the continuation of the ancestral line. The failure in obtaining this child means not only the cessation of ancestor veneration, but also the extinction of the ancestral line which had been considered as the greatest sin in Confucian culture. This view had been abused for the justification of concubinage in the past. It has also been used to give priority of male over female children or men over women in family as well as in society.

The eldest son can act on behalf of his father in the absence of the latter to govern the family. The eldest brother replaces the father when the father dies, but even in some situations when the leadership of the father is not available in the family, for example, due to a long absence or illness. In this role, the eldest brother can correct his younger brothers/sisters when the latter's behaviour damages the family reputation. However, an important expression of the role of the eldest brother acting on behalf of the father is to look after his younger brothers/sisters and other family members including his mother.

The eldest son is the most important family member. He is required to be present during the last moments of his father/mother, as well as at the death ceremonies of their parents.⁷⁵ He must be present to hear the last words of the dying parents, dealing with the responsibility of taking care of younger brothers/sisters, the past mistakes of the parents to be avoided and the unpaid debts to be settled. Not all deceased parents leave a will, but most dying parents, when possible, express a last wish to the children, commending the maintenance of family relationship and spirit after the parent's death. Filial piety demands that the eldest son obey this last wish of the dying parent to look after the needs of his younger brothers/sisters, even to the extent of sacrificing his own benefits. His help to other family members must be done unconditionally so that his younger brothers/sisters can approach him without any shame or hesitation. It is in this

⁷⁵ Cf. Phạm Côn Sơn, *Lễ nghi cưới hỏi, tang chế Việt Nam* [Rites of marriage and funeral in Vietnam] (Hà Nội: Nhà xuất bản Văn hoá Dân tộc, 2003), 144-164. Traditionally, there were rituals before the funeral, such as: *chiêu hồn* (soul calling), (washing and shrouding the corpse ritual), *phạn hàm* (meal ritual), *nhập quan* (ritual of putting the corpse into the coffin), *phát tang* (ritual of distributing mourning clothes), *chuyển cữu* (moving the coffin), *yết tổ* (presentation to the ancestors), *tế thanh phần* (ceremony of complete interment), *lễ phân khóc* (ritual of crying for the dead), *tế ngự* (prayer for peace). The funeral ceremonies are mainly held in the family or at home before religious rites in temples or churches. After the burial, some rituals are observed to commemorate the dead, such as the rituals on 49th and 100th days, *tiểu tường* (little good sign) on the first death anniversary, *đại tường* (great good sign) on the second anniversary and *lễ mãn tang* (ritual of termination of mourning). It is a wish of every Vietnamese to have funeral ceremonies at home with their loved ones and to be buried in their birth-place or their country because they consider their home or birth-place as father's birth-place and ancestor' land (*quê cha, đất tổ*).

context of helping other family members that the eldest son fulfils his role of acting on behalf of his father.

In modern times, the Vietnamese still recognise the role of ancestors. Jamieson mentions the role of ancestors in the daily life of their descendants, particularly in times of difficulty, in order that the living can receive spiritual support from the dead.⁷⁶ This sense of continuity remains, even in today's society. In other words, the modern family still promotes the values of the traditional one.

4.2 The Modern Family in Vietnam

The Vietnamese family after 1954 enters into its modern phase. The socio-political situation of Vietnam after the division of the country into North and South brought changes to the family. War, government policies, and various other factors had their effect on the modern Vietnamese family.

The war between North and South Vietnam (1960-1975) brought its own changes to the family. Family life was disrupted in areas where hostilities occurred and family ties were broken by deaths, separations and displacements. In the North, the roles of women in the family as well as in society underwent changes which are partially the outcome of a gender equality policy. However, women also suffered due to the effects of war.⁷⁷ In the South, some family values were damaged because of the western influences brought by America, its soldiers and allies but, in general, the traditional values in family were still preserved. The return of peace on 30th April 1975 reunited families on the one hand, but on the other, it also caused difficulties to a number of families in the South.⁷⁸ However, the years of war passed and its direct effects were not often taken into account in the

⁷⁶ Jamieson, *Understanding Vietnam*, 24: "Ancestors remain active participants in family life, sharing in joy and sorrow, admonishing wickedness, chiding deviation from propriety. They worked from the nether world to contribute to the well-being of the family, watching over and assisting their descendants. When faced with a momentous decision, some Vietnamese would talk with deceased family members, often reporting flashes of insight or clarity of thought arising from such discussions. Ancestors could assist, advise, and sometimes punish their descendants, always for the good of the family".

⁷⁷ Daniel Goodkind, "Rising Gender Inequality in Vietnam Since Reunification," *Pacific Affairs* 68 (1995), 343. Goodkind mentioned the positive changes of women in the North during the years of war. "The 1960s and early 1970s has witnessed significant gains in women's positions in the North, due to both the socialist promotion of equal access to education and the war of reunification, which suddenly swept women into positions of local power and authority". The reason for this participation of women in many fields in society was the shortage of men due to military services. Cf. Danièle Bélanger and Khuất Thu Hồng, "Too Late to Marry: Failure, Fate or Fortune? Female Singlehood in Rural North Việt Nam," in Jayne Werner and Danièle Bélanger (eds.), *Gender, Household, State: Đổi Mới in Việt Nam* (Ithaca, New York: Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2002), 89-110. The authors studied the Vietnamese female singlehood which resulted from war.

⁷⁸ Right after the return of peace in Vietnam (1975), there were some family troubles because men (fathers and sons) who worked for the South government were forced into re-education camps, and many families were forcibly resettled in new economic zones for farming. These changes caused separations and losses to families.

studies of the Vietnamese family. Both current sociological and religious resources did not discuss the effects of war on the Vietnamese family. Probably, these effects had little impact on the contemporary family compared with the influences of a long period under the Communist government. But what affected the role of the family and family values were some political campaigns and family policies promoted by the Communist government over a considerable period. Alien models of the family, such as Marxist, socialist and modern culture, have been promoted causing their own confusion to the traditional ways of family life.⁷⁹ Apart from that, globalisation has also contributed to the changes in the Vietnamese family structure and values.⁸⁰

The family law and the social changes inside the country as well as in the world have had some significant impact on the modern Vietnamese family which might be identified as an egalitarian structure and the nuclearization of the family.

4.2.1 The Egalitarian Structure of the Vietnamese Family

Traditionally, the family in Vietnam has been considered as a hierarchical and patriarchal institution due to the great influence of Confucianism particularly in the northern and central regions. However, since the middle of the twentieth century, the family structure has had some changes as recognised in the legal area as well as in daily life. Indeed, the laws on marriage and the family and recent studies indicate the promotion and the development of equality between men and women in family leadership and decision. This has been one of the most significant changes which affect family life, causing it to become an even more collaborative social structure.

It was only in 1959 that, for the first time, the governments in North and South Vietnam outlawed polygamy and concubinage. They also decreed monogamy and equality between husband and wife. The basic rights of women and children, such as freedom

⁷⁹ Bích, *The Vietnamese Family*, 47-57; Lê Ngọc Văn, *Gia đình Việt Nam với chức năng xã hội hóa* [The Vietnamese family with its socialization] (Hà Nội: Nhà xuất bản Giáo dục, 1994), 70-75. According to Bích, since 1930 the communists campaigned to destroy the existence of the family and to criticize the traditional family as a "conservative institution" against the revolutionary struggle for equality among people and for national welfare. The Marxist family model, based on the Marxist theory of the family, promotes the proletarian family. However, after 1954, there were other campaigns and policies to change the family into the so-called socialist family model instead of seeking ways to destroy it. The political organisations such as the Children's Pioneer Organisation and the Communist Youth Union were more developed to meet the government policies on family. The socialist family model (*gia đình xã hội chủ nghĩa*) emphasises among couples and family members a strict class endogamy and political loyalty to the communist Party. Then, in 1975, when the communists took over the south and reunified the country, they developed these organisations (for children and youth) throughout the country. The new cultured family model (*gia đình văn hoá mới*) aims at building and restoring harmony between couples, and raising well-educated children according to the criteria of the Communist Party in order to speed up the desired social change.

⁸⁰ Hồ Sĩ Quý, "Globalisation and Value Changes in Vietnam," *Social Sciences* 4 (2003), 7-16; Vũ Khiêu, "Vietnamese Family on the Road of Industrialisation and Modernisation," *Social Sciences* 2 (2002), 25-32.

from abuse and oppression in the home, were to be protected.⁸¹ However, it has taken a long time for all Vietnamese to accept and implement these laws, especially those regarding monogamy, equality and women's as well as children's basic rights.

Vietnam was reunified in 1976 and since then, it has been re-named the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. The social and economic changes require major reforms of family laws. The 1986 Marriage and Family Law allowed intermarriage of different ethnic or religious groups,⁸² reiterated the equality between husband and wife⁸³ and identified intergenerational responsibilities within families.⁸⁴ It explicitly defined the model of the socialist family as one in which the husband and wife are equals who love and help each other to make progress, who actively participate in building socialism and defending the fatherland and work together to raise their children to be productive citizens for society.⁸⁵

The socio-political situation changed when Vietnam started economic reforms in 1986. As a matter of fact, there was a need for changes in the family law. The 2000 Marriage and Family Law acknowledges equality between husband and wife.⁸⁶ Both husband and wife have the same rights and duties in all matters regarding their family. One of the expressions of this equality is the choice of the residence that used to be considered as an indicator of the patrilineal family. The patrilocal residence pattern is no more a

⁸¹ In north Vietnam, the Marriage and Family Law, passed by the National Assembly in 1959 and implemented in 1960, contained four major provisions: (1) abolishment of arranged marriages; and (2) polygamy; (3) equality between men and women; (4) protection of the basic rights of women and children. The law was designed to equalise the obligations and rights of both sexes within the family and to enable women to enjoy equal status in social and work-related activities. In South Vietnam, the 1959 Law of the Family, the Decree No. 15/64 in 1964 and the Code of the Family in 1972 outlawed polygamy and decreed monogamy and gender equity in the family in terms of responsibilities and of ownership of common property. In particular, the 1959 Law of Family of the Republic of Vietnam made legal separation extremely difficult and divorce almost impossible. It also supported ancestor veneration.

⁸² The 1986 Marriage and Family Law, Article 1: "Marriage between Vietnamese citizens from different ethnic groups or religions, or between believers and non-believers, shall be respected and protected". The law of family of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam was passed by the National Assembly on 29th December 1986. It consists of ten chapters and fifty-seven articles. Cf. Steven K. Wisensale, "Marriage and Family Law in a Changing Vietnam," *Journal of Family Issues* 20 (1999), 602-616; "Family Policy in a Changing Vietnam," *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 31 (2000), 80. Wisensale reviewed the Vietnamese family in the Constitution of the Democratic of Vietnam in 1946, in the Law on Marriage and the Family of 1959 and of 1986, and in the 1992 and 1994 documents related to the marriage and family law in Vietnam.

⁸³ The 1986 Marriage and Family Law, Article 10: "Husband and wife shall have equal rights and duties with respect to all aspects of family".

⁸⁴ Cf. The 1986 Marriage and Family Law, Article 27: "Grandparents shall be bound to support and educate under-age grandchildren if they become orphans. Vice versa, grandchildren who have grown-up shall have a duty to support their grandparents, if the latter have no surviving children. Brothers and sisters whose parents have died shall be obliged to assist one another".

⁸⁵ Cf. The 1986 Marriage and Family Law, Chapter VII. The code also included a chapter on divorce.

⁸⁶ The National Assembly of Vietnam adopted the 2000 Marriage and Family Law (*Luật hôn nhân và gia đình*) on 9th June 2000. The third law of family consists of thirteen chapters and 110 articles. Cf. *Luật hôn nhân và gia đình* (Hà Nội: Nhà xuất bản Chính trị Quốc gia, 2001).

practice required by customs, but it is the choice of the couple.⁸⁷ Traditionally, the couple were required to stay in the husband's house or to choose their residence in the same location with that of the husband's father. This practice could be justified by reasons such as mutual support from family members of the husband as well as villagers.⁸⁸ However, it can also lead to favouring males over females in the family. Another novelty of the 2000 Marriage and Family Law is the provisions on the women's rights to equality in property relationships concerning common/personal and inheritance properties. The women's interests have been better protected by law.⁸⁹

The Vietnamese family as decreed in the current law on marriage and the family is no longer the patriarchal family in which the husband or the male members have priority over the wife and the female members. It is a model of family with equality between husband and wife and between sons and daughters. Indeed, the relationships between parents and children as well as the relations between paternal/maternal grandparents and grandchildren, among siblings and family members, are detailed in the family law for the purpose of equality and solidarity among family members.⁹⁰ In addition to the government laws and policies for gender equality in society, women's empowerment has been achieved thanks to the influence of foreign government and non-government organisations in Vietnam.⁹¹

Recent studies on the Vietnamese family also showed some changes in the roles of the husband and the wife that indicated co-responsibility in the family.⁹² Nowadays, most

⁸⁷ The 2000 Marriage and Family Law, Article 19: "Husband and wife are equal to each other, having equal obligations and rights in all aspects of their family"; and Article 20: "The domicile of husband and wife is selected by themselves without being bound by customs, practices and/or administrative boundaries"; The 1992 Constitution, Article 63, states "Male and female citizens have equal rights in all fields – political, economic, cultural, social and the family".

⁸⁸ The patrilocal residence pattern is an indicator of the communality among the Vietnamese. People want to live in their native place partly because as insider members of a community (village) they have more support and privilege from other villagers. The village insider status was given only to a family and its members after the settlement of the family in the village for several generations.

⁸⁹ In the past, the division of big property such as land and houses was unequal since such property had been usually owned by the husband in the family.

⁹⁰ The 2000 Marriage and Family Law, Chapter Four and Five. Cf. Trần Thị Quế, "Gender Issues in Vietnam's Development" in I. Norlund *et al.* (eds.), *Vietnam in a Changing World* (Surrey: Curzon, 1996), 187-206; John Knodel *et al.*, "Gender Roles in the Family: Change and Stability in Vietnam," University of Michigan, PSC Research Report No. 04-559, May 2004, 3: "The legal and political programs initiated to promote gender equality include: (1) legislating gender equality, (2) promoting women's participation in production, (3) attempts to reduce women's domestic responsibilities, (4) introducing new ideologies of equality, (5) organizing women to advance their interests".

⁹¹ Cf. Knodel *et al.*, "Gender Roles in the Family," 12. Some organisations working for gender equality or empowerment are: the Swedish International Development Agency, the United Nations Development Fund and the United Nations Fund for Women.

⁹² Hòa, *Hôn nhân gia đình*, 49-54; Đỗ Thị Bình *et al.*, *Gia đình Việt Nam và người phụ nữ trong gia đình thời kỳ công nghiệp hoá, hiện đại hóa đất nước* (Hà Nội: Nhà xuất bản Khoa học Xã hội, 2002); Knodel *et al.*, "Gender Roles in the Family," University of Michigan, PSC Research Report No. 04-559, May 2004;

husbands and wives have to go out to work. Both are breadwinners, although husbands can get more income than wives. The husband as the head of the family is still popularly recognised due to traditional custom or due to his financial ability as well as his higher social status.⁹³ However, this position of the husband is practical and symbolic rather than authoritarian. The husband and the wife often discuss issues before making decisions on important issues, such as the number of the children in the family, the choice of schools or the career for their children and the family budget. Both contribute to educating their children at home and to solving financial difficulties in the family. Besides, the wife is still the person who keeps the money in the family.⁹⁴ Such a role or position of a wife/woman makes leadership in the family more balanced. Indeed, egalitarian relationship between husbands and wives are emphasised rather than the dominion of husbands over wives. As a matter of fact, leadership in the family comes from both husbands and wives and the role of women in family has been highlighted.

Women are more active in participating in social and communal activities. They are present in the capacity as the masters or the representatives of the family to attend weddings and funerals, to communicate with the authorities and mass organisations and to entertain guests. These types of activities have often been regarded as belonging to men who are the masters of the family. So “the presence of women at these communal activities is a giant stride of progress in social life. It is really an active role of integration and a change of position for women in the present social life”.⁹⁵

The changes in family are also seen in terms of relationships between parents and children, particularly in the role of the parents in their children’s marriage. In the past children often followed their parents’ choice of a spouse. Nowadays, children make their decision in choosing their spouse and parents pay more attention to children’s choices regarding their future spouse.

Nguyễn Linh Khiêu, “Fundamental Investigation into Vietnamese Families and Women’s Role in the Family,” *Social Sciences* 3 (2003), 50-51: “Although family relations are still governed by traditional patriarchal bonds, the ties between men and women in general and between husband and wife in particular have undergone a change in the more and more democratic and equal trend. The integration of the two sexes, their co-participation in all fundamental operations of the family, the share between husband and wife in the work of production and business, in family affairs, in the care for children and in communal activities are prominent in these relations”.

⁹³ Hòa, *Hôn nhân gia đình*, 53-54.

⁹⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 50-51. Hoà mentioned a study from 600 couple of mixed aged and 300 young couple households. According to his study, the co-responsibility of the husband and wife is characterised in some areas as follows: the choice of the school for the children (61.34% of the husband’s respondents and 59.67% of the wife’s respondents) and the expenses of big amounts (57.8% and 60.67%) are the decisions of both the husband and wife. See also Nguyễn Linh Khiêu, “Tương quan giới trong phân công lao động gia đình ở Hà Nội,” [Gender relationship in the workforce in the family in Hanoi] in Lê Thi (ed.), *Gia đình Việt Nam ngày nay*, 210-223.

In addition to the changes made by the family law, social organisations have also contributed to the changing situation of the status of women which certainly affects the family. In particular, the influence of the Vietnam Women's Union has made some changes in women's status in society and in the family. It has organised campaigns and activities in raising the awareness of gender equality which resulted in a fairer division of labour between men and women in families and in society and in the decline of customs and practices based on belief in women's inferiority.⁹⁶ Nowadays, Vietnamese women have the same access to education as men. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the 2000 literacy rate was 95 percent for Vietnamese adult males and 91 percent for females. Indeed, the literacy rate has increased in recent decades.⁹⁷ Consequently, education which has helped more women join social as well as religious organisations and activities encourages equality of the sexes.

Theoretically, equality between men and women and among people regardless of age is promoted and developed in many places in Vietnam, but practically speaking, little change has occurred. Gender inequality has persisted in some areas such as women's role in the control of development resources, segregation at work and gender preferences regarding children.⁹⁸ Preference for a male child, which has been strong in rural areas in North Vietnam,⁹⁹ might be an indicator of gender inequality. Therefore it is rare for women to be assigned leadership positions in many social and religious

⁹⁵ Khiêu, "Fundamental Investigations into Vietnamese Families," 56.

⁹⁶ The Vietnam Women's Union, established in 1946, is the largest mass organisation in Vietnam. Its campaigns and activities might cause some negative impact on women and the family, but generally it has contributed to the promotion of gender equality and to human and social development.

⁹⁷ UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 2005* (New York: UNICEF House, 2004) 125. In 1990, the adult literacy rate was 94% for males and 87% for females. Cf. Ministry of Health *et al.*, *Survey Assessment of Vietnamese Youth*, 27. According to the youth survey, 92.2% of the interviewed young people had attended school at some time in their lives. The survey also found similar primary school enrolment figures for boys (97%) and girls (95.4%). However, these figures vary by region and ethnicity.

⁹⁸ Goodkind, "Rising Gender Inequality in Vietnam Since Reunification," 358-359. Beside studying and analysing the gender inequality since 1975 the author also mentioned some gains for women such as income levels and access to certain forms of health care. Relying on the data of the 1979 and 1989 Vietnamese Censuses and the 1992-1993 Vietnam Living Standards Survey he concludes "the worsening of women's disadvantages in the post-reunification era may soon be ending". Indeed, some later surveys showed progress in gender equality. Cf. Thanh-Dam Truong, *Uncertain Horizons: The Women's Question in Vietnam Revisited* (The Hague, the Netherlands: Institute of Social Studies, 1996), 8. The author writes "once the national objective of reunification was achieved, patriarchal culture re-emerged through the trade-off between gender equality and economic efficiency". Knodel *et al.*, "Gender Roles in the Family," 13. The report of these researchers showed that there was little change in gender roles in families in the Red River Delta. However, they agreed with the comment that the gender agenda of the Vietnamese government has been principally framed in terms of societal rather than family level goals with efforts directed at the workplace or educational institutions. In these spheres, "Vietnam can be credited with considerable success".

⁹⁹ Bélanger, "Son Preference in a Rural Village in North Vietnam," 321-334.

organisations. Women are still disadvantaged in working places.¹⁰⁰ Sometimes younger people, women in particular, are not welcomed in leadership roles because of the viewpoint that older people must be placed first in the hierarchical order of social and religious institutions. Women do not have equal opportunity as do men to approach, control and manage the development of resources, especially property, land and capital. Their role in these activities is still undervalued which limits their full potential in developing the family economy as well as in establishing their proper position in society.¹⁰¹ One reason for little change in this matter is the continuing Confucian influence on people's lives.¹⁰² However, young people have more awareness of gender issues and are supportive of attitudes reflecting gender equality.

4.2.2 The Nuclearization of the Vietnamese Family

The modern Vietnamese family is also characterized by the nuclearization of family household.¹⁰³ This family structure is not totally new.¹⁰⁴ However, this family structure has become common in Vietnamese society. According to the Vietnam Living Standards Surveys (VLSS) conducted in 1992-1993 and 1997-1998, the majority of the Vietnamese family households are nuclear, a finding confirmed by over 70 percent of the total respondents.¹⁰⁵ The figures for nuclear households vary slightly in different areas.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁰ Trần Ngọc Angie, "Gender Expectations of Vietnamese Garment Workers: Việt Nam's Re-Integration into the World Economy," in Werner and Bélanger (eds.), *Gender, Household, State*, 49-71.

¹⁰¹ Khiêu, "Fundamental Investigations into Vietnamese Families," 55-56.

¹⁰² Knodel *et al.*, "Gender Roles in the Family," 12-13.

¹⁰³ In Vietnam, there is a distinction between family and household. A family is defined as an institution of persons related by marriage or descent while a household as that of one or more persons living together in a house/housing unit and usually sharing some common expenses or activities. So there are households including only family members, households made up of family and unrelated members, and households of entirely non-family (unrelated) members. In terms of legal administration, the government control people through household policy. Each household has to register one person as the head of the household (chủ hộ) who represents the household in dealing with government agencies, such as filling out bureaucratic forms and paying required taxes and fees. Regional and national surveys have conducted sociological studies based on household samples. The term "family household" is used in that social and legal context.

¹⁰⁴ Yu Insun, *Law and Family in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Vietnam* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan, 1978), 135, 141-143; John K. Whitmore, "Social Organization and Confucian Thought in Vietnam," *JSAS* 25 (1984), 209; Đông, "Modification of the Traditional Family in the South of Vietnam," 73. The structure of the nuclear family was found in society since the seventeenth century due to a certain degree of autonomy of individuals.

¹⁰⁵ Jaikishan Desai, *Vietnam through the Lens of Gender: An Empirical Analysis Using Household Survey Data* (Hanoi: 1995), 35; *Vietnam through the Lens of Gender: Five Years Later. Results from the Second Vietnam Living Standards Survey* (Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, 2001), 5-7; FAO and UNDP Viet Nam, *Gender Differences in the Transitional Economy of Vietnam* (Ha Noi: FAO and UNDP, 2002), 3. According to Desai, the percentage of nuclear households was 72.4 in the 1992-93 VLSS and 71.2 in the 1997-98 VLSS. A nuclear household often consists of the head of the household, his/her spouse, and 2 to 3 of their children. It is noted that the sample of the households of the first survey is 4800 households while that of the second one is 6000 households which is not a true random sample of Vietnamese households. Households interviewed in the 1997-98 are either those that were interviewed in the 1992-93 (78.5%) or those that were interviewed in the

The reasons for a high percentage of nuclear family households vary. These could be political, legal, cultural and demographic. The 1959 Law on Marriage and the Family was aimed at eradicating some aspects of the traditional family such as arranged and child marriages and wife abuse in order to develop a new family model. In addition to the law, the government propaganda campaigns and policies have encouraged the fusion of extended and multiple families and therefore have promoted a simple and nuclear family. The government has had policies for allocating house and land. As a consequence, people in urban areas cannot afford big houses for more than two-generation families. In rural areas, they split into small unit households (nuclear families) in order to capitalise on the cooperative policy and to develop their new production-infrastructure according to the renovation policy of 1986.¹⁰⁷ In addition to this, the different percentages of nuclear family household between the North and the South of Vietnam might be further explained by cultural and demographic reasons.

Nuclear households consist of male-headed and female-headed households. The former make up 74 percent while the latter 26 percent of the total households.¹⁰⁸ Most of households headed by women are due to widowedhood, but there are also female-headed households with the male spouse as one of their members. For whatever reason, the presence or the absence of the male spouse in the female-headed household, the identification of a woman as the household's head in almost one-fourth households in the above surveys is significant in a patriarchal society such as in Vietnam. It might be a deviation from the norm. However, a woman as the head of the household with the presence of the male spouse in that household somehow reflects the egalitarian aspect of headship of the modern Vietnamese family.

The nuclearization of the modern Vietnamese family has both positive and negative impact on the family in terms of social relationships and benefits. However, it does not

Multi Purpose Household Survey in 1995 (21.5%). Therefore some caution is warranted, especially when interpreting changes between the first and the second surveys.

¹⁰⁶ Bélanger, "Regional Differences in Household Composition," 176; cf. Đỗ Thị Bình, "Cơ cấu gia đình Việt Nam trong thời kỳ công nghiệp hóa, hiện đại hóa," in Bình *et al.*, *Gia đình Việt Nam*, 54.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Phi Văn Ba, "How Do the Peasant Families in the Red River Delta Adapt to the New Economic Conditions?" in Liljeström and Trương Lai (eds.), *Sociological Studies on the Vietnamese Family*, 133-134.

¹⁰⁸ Desai, *Vietnam through the Lens of Gender: Five Years Later*, 5; cf. Desai, *Vietnam through the Lens of Gender: An Empirical Analysis Using Household Survey Data*, 2-3. In the 1992-93 VLSS, 73% of households are headed by men and 27% by women. There are households headed by women whose male spouse is either present or absent. The reason for this pattern is either the imbalanced sex ratio due to the excess male mortality resulting from war times which is often the primary cause or the male spouse is present in the household, but he does not want to be the head of the household because he wants to be free of the complexity of the household administration of the government. For the detailed reasons of and the decision-making in female-headed households, see Desai, *Vietnam through the Lens of Gender: Five Years Later*, 37-41.

destroy the communality of the traditional family.¹⁰⁹ The intergenerational support between the elderly, i.e., those over 60 years old, and the families of their children is still very strong in terms of mutual support. According to the surveys of the elderly in the northern delta in 1996 and in Hồ Chí Minh City and environs in 1997, the percentage of the co-residence of elderly with a married child is 54.6 percent and 59.6 percent respectively.¹¹⁰ The elderly often live with their child (son/daughter) because of the limited financial state support to some elderly relatives.¹¹¹ Besides, children still visit and provide financial and material supports such as food, clothes and other goods for their parents. Such a love for parents, even in modern nuclear families, is very significant, because “deep sentiment in the small family eventually leads to great love for the large-size family: relatives in the family line, neighbours, the locality where one inhabits, and the fatherland. That sentiment is the firm basis of all ethical relations between men, and should be ceaselessly consolidated and enhanced by each family member”.¹¹²

In summary, the Vietnamese modern family has undergone some positive changes compared to the traditional patterns. The present family structure is theoretically no longer that of inequality between men and women or superiority of men over women, but it reflects the mutual relationship and co-responsibility between members in the family and in society. It still keeps and promotes the Vietnamese values of communality. But there is also a negative impact in the socio-cultural influences that affect the family.

4.3 The Challenges to the Family in Vietnam

The impact of Confucian philosophy and culture and of the renovation policy of the Vietnamese government on the family are the main challenges to the Vietnamese family. Such challenges are studied in relation to the concept of family in general and the church as the family of God in particular.

¹⁰⁹ Asian Development Bank, *Women in Vietnam* (Manila: Regional and Sustainable Development Department and Mekong Department, ADB, 2002), 6: “Although 71% of families reside as nuclear families, these families often live adjacent to their parents and households of siblings, and still functions as an extended family”.

¹¹⁰ John Knodel *et al.*, “Intergenerational Exchanges in Vietnam,” 92. It is noted that the respondents of the two surveys covered only the elderly over 60 years old, and did not include younger respondents. So the majority of the Vietnamese family are nuclear but among the households of the elderly, more than half of their households are extended family, i.e., three-generation family (the elderly parents and the family of a child).

¹¹¹ Daniel Goodkind *et al.*, “Reforming the Old-Age Security System in Vietnam,” *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science* 27 (1999), 140-143.

¹¹² Khiêu, “Vietnamese Family on the Road of Industrialisation and Modernisation,” 32.

4.3.1 The Impact of Confucianism

In general, the negative aspects of the family characteristics and the roles of the family members, are often recognised as Confucian origin and do not escape criticism. These are: (1) hierarchical relationship based on gender, age and social status, (2) nepotism, favouritism and provincialism, (3) lack of individuality. However, authors have different point of views on these criticisms.¹¹³

The communality of the Vietnamese family requires good relationships among family members. People are supported by other members in the family or in community. This characteristic is also significant for the church as a community of believers. But such relationships, often influenced by Confucianism, might cause problems because they are hierarchical, according to gender, age and social status. In other words, these relationships bring benefits only to a person who is either a male family member (a brother, a son, a father), a senior member in age, or of a high-ranking status in the family or community. On the contrary, a person who is either a female, a junior member or of no special status will be often excluded or discriminated against in the family or community. As a consequence, women, children and less privileged people are not supported or welcomed in the activities of the family or community.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Nam-Soon Kang, "Confucian Familism and Its Social/Religious Embodiment in Christianity: Reconsidering The Family Discourse from a Feminist Perspective," *Asia Journal of Theology* 18 (2004), 177-182; W. Theodore de Barry, *The Trouble with Confucianism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991); Walter H. Slote, "Psychocultural Dynamics within the Confucian Family," in W. H. Slote and G. A. de Vos (eds.), *Confucianism and Family* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 37-51; A. T. Nuyen, "Confucianism and the Idea of Equality," *Asian Philosophy* 11 (2001), 61-71; "Confucianism, Globalisation and the idea of Universalism," 75-86; Yong Huan, "Confucian Love and Global Ethics: How the Cheng Brothers Would help Respond to Christian Criticisms," *Asian Philosophy* 15 (2005), 35-60. Cf. Thêm, *Tim về bản sắc*, 213-222; Hựu, "Traditional Families in Vietnam," 28-29. Thêm identified two common characteristics of Vietnamese: communality and autonomy, which have positive and negative aspects. Some negative characters among Vietnamese are: *óc gia trưởng* (authoritarianism/paternalism), *óc bè phái, địa phương* (regionalism), and *dựa dẫm vào tập thể* (communitarianism). Hựu emphasised that the traditional family in Vietnam, which came under the deep influence of Confucianism, is conditioned by the context of authority and order between the superior and the inferior in accordance with status.

¹¹⁴ Cf. Kang, "Confucian Familism," 183. She cited an example of a gender imbalance in the faculty members of theological institutions in Korea: "There are only two women faculty members in systematic theology out of 75 [men], eight in biblical studies out of 124 [...], none in Christian ethics out of 19, none in historical theology out of 51, and none in practical theology out of 51"; Yong Chen Fah, "The Spirituality of Chinese Social Obligations," *Transformation* 19 (2002), 34: "Confucius did not allow women an equal opportunity in the field of education and politics. He had no female students. Marriage was arranged by the parents to carry on the family line The Confucian ideal of five relationships based on Jen or benevolence produced a culture of rigidly observed social obligations based on the family ... But Confucian spirituality result in cold relationships". Similarly to the situation in Korea, there are no female lecturers in the list of faculty staff in six major seminaries of the Catholic Church in Vietnam. This could be seen as an indicator of the gender imbalance in staffing due to the hierarchical and patriarchal attitude. For the faculty members in the Vietnamese seminaries, see VBC, *Giáo hội Công giáo Việt Nam*, 288-304. For the patriarchy in the Confucian family, see Hựu, "Traditional Families in Vietnam," 39. Hựu states that "Confucianism advocated that a family should have a head and that the head should be a man".

This discrimination is a violation of human rights and a practice against the concept of the family of God which includes all people and relativises all human as well as social differences. The communality of the family of God according to the gospels does not support an extreme male-centeredness, a total subordination of women and children to men as in Confucian culture, but it promotes an equality and complementarity of all members in God's family. In other words, the theological principle of the family of God "does not deny the biological and sociological families, but puts all other relationships in the service of a community that exists for the purpose of enabling and enhancing each person's relationship to God".¹¹⁵

There is a downside to these family relationships found in the nepotism which has been commonly acknowledged as the Confucian influence on the family. The Confucian overemphasis on family rather than on the value of the individual might result in nepotism, favouritism and provincialism which mean that relationships are based on one's family or one's hometown relationships. Confucian tradition has not challenged these negative attitudes. Thus a lack of the sense of common justice and fairness will prevail in relating with others because it results in favouring someone based on personal or familial ties and relations. In that context, injustice, inequality and discrimination easily develop in social and religious spheres. For example, Confucian familism which emphasises the homogeneity of family blood-ties might lead to a denominational homogeneity among Christians, resulting in a lack of ecumenical spirit and even in hostility towards other denominations. In Vietnam, many Catholics still have a very limited knowledge of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council on ecumenism or religious dialogue. As a result, a denominational homogeneity can prevail in the church as family so as to keep people thinking of other religions as "paganism" or "idolatry" according to past prejudices wherein "there is no salvation outside the church".¹¹⁶

The counterpart of the emphasis on family-centredness in Confucianism is the lack of the concept of individuality or the lack of a sense of ethical individualism. In the Confucian family, communitarianism is appreciated while individualism is rejected. Individualism is often criticised as destructive because it ignores the social, communal and interdependent characters of people living in community or society. However, an ethical individualism has some positive aspects, such as "self-actualization, freedom of choice,

¹¹⁵ Kang, "Confucian Familism," 176; cf. Fah, "The Spirituality of Chinese Obligations," 36: "Where the Chinese extended family is restricted to blood relationship, the Christian extended family does not depend on blood relationship but on Christ. The Christian relationship among brothers and sisters in the church, and at home, is characterised by the word *koinonia* or fellowship, which is based on the relationship with God".

¹¹⁶ Nguyễn Như Thề, "Grassroots Exchange Will Lead to Useful Dialogue," *Asia Focus* 7 June 2002, 3.

personal responsibility, and universality, which involves respect for the well-being and rights of others".¹¹⁷ Kang argued that people, particularly women, need such a concept of ethical individualism in order to realise their responsibility, freedom as well as autonomy for the benefit of their own lives and their contributions in the family and community.¹¹⁸ She also stated that Christianity has a strong sense of ethical individualism in its understanding of the human being on which the criteria of human rights are built.¹¹⁹ According to Christian teachings, each and every person is created in God's image. Therefore they have the same respect and reverence as God's children, regardless of their race, gender or class. Indeed, in the family of God, the familial relationship is not evaluated by a biological relationship but by deeds in accordance with God's will.

However, some scholars try to counteract some of the above criticisms by arguing the evidence of globalisation, universalism as well as equality and the feminine perspective in Confucianism. According to Nuyen, Confucianism is committed to a movement towards universalism which starts from the individual. A gentleman is encouraged to bring about a virtuous and just world. Therefore it can be said that the Confucian vision envisages the very idea of global justice.¹²⁰ It is true that the modern Chinese term for equality could not be found in the *Analects* of the *Mencius*, but equivalent terms such as 'sameness' were used in many texts.¹²¹ For Wee, "Mencius inhabits the 'feminine' perspective in so far as his morality is grounded in care and responsibility".¹²²

The different points of view expressed about some of the above issues in Confucianism occur because of the distinction between Confucian philosophy/theory/texts and its practices which is called the high and the vulgar versions of Confucianism or philosophical and political Confucianism. Some Confucian classics were popularised and used for political and social reasons. Later, many criticisms were made mainly based on

¹¹⁷ Kang, "Confucian Familism," 180; cf. A. S. Waterman, *The Psychology of Individualism* (New York: Praeger, 1984).

¹¹⁸ Kang, "Confucian Familism," 180.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ Nuyen, "Confucianism, Globalisation and the idea of Universalism," 81.

¹²¹ Nuyen, "Confucianism and the idea of Equality," 61-68: "[I]n advocating meritocracy, Confucianism does not abandon the idea of equality. Indeed, invoking Aristotle's account of equality in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, it can be argued that the unequal distribution of rights and benefits reflects one aspect of equality, namely the vertical aspect, or the unequal treatment of unequals". Besides, according to Nuyen, "as a philosophy, Confucianism is not alone in its bad treatment of women. Western philosophy is no better on this score ... It is possible that Confucianism was embedded in this patriarchy rather than being responsible for it ... that gender inequality is not due to anything inherent in Confucianism, even though there is widespread inequality in practice, as critics have pointed out". Some usages of 'sameness' are found in the *Mencius*, such as: "Mencius said, How should I be different from others? Yao and Shun were the same as other men" (*Mencius* 4B:32), and "The sage and I are the same in kind (*Mencius* 6A:7)".

¹²² Cecilia Wee, "Mencius, the Feminine Perspective and Impartiality," *Asian Philosophy* 13 (2003), 3.

these Confucian practices in society rather than on its philosophy.¹²³ Apart from that, different interpretations or views of a certain idea in Confucianism are also the possible reasons for various understandings. For example, Confucian love could be explained as either a unique contribution to, or a discrimination against, the global ethics.¹²⁴

In Vietnam, the negative impact of Confucianism in Vietnam could be described as follows. The high level of communality among Vietnamese causes a low self-awareness or individuality and this latter could be attributed to a Confucian emphasis on family-centredness. Such awareness affects social life and challenges the development of the concept of the family of God in Vietnam. Vietnamese women are often quite pleased with their current unequal status compared to men. They often do not see the urgent need for fighting for a more equal relationship in the family, the church and society as western women have. This is due to a lack of knowledge but also because of their undeveloped sense of individuality. The influence of tradition, particularly Confucianism, has prevented Vietnamese women from fighting for equality. In spite of the Communist government's efforts to promote equality since 1945, the meagre successes in the drive for equality are clear evidence of Vietnamese women's lack of a sense of individuality.

The impact of Confucianism on society is strengthened because of the Confucian renaissance in Vietnam. The dominant role of Marxism and the anti-Confucian movement carried on by Maoists in the Cultural Revolution in China (1966-1976) oppressed Confucianism. This directly affected Vietnamese intellectuals in North Vietnam.¹²⁵ However, Confucianism has been revived because of socio-economic reforms since 1986. The Confucian revival has been justified through the identification of Confucian culture with traditional culture or values. For some people, including government officials, Confucian values are necessary to fill the void due to the decreasing moral values or to harness the commitment of people to the renovation process.¹²⁶ For Catholics, Confucianism can serve as *preambula fidei* and as a bridge

¹²³ Nuyen, "Confucianism, Globalisation and the Idea of Universalism," 80.

¹²⁴ Huang, "Confucian Love and Global Ethics," 35-60. Cf. Antonio L. Rappa and Sor-Hoon Tan, "Political Implications of Confucian Familism," *Asian Philosophy* 13 (2003), 87-102. According to Rappa and Tan, 'the family could be mobilised as a political resource for economic 'development' ... We argued that authoritarian Confucian familism ... is possible to construct a different model of the ideal Confucian family which will be compatible with such an economy: a family ideal that emphasises internal strengths of relationships rather than building barriers to keep out 'undesirable influences', that advocates a respect for authority that is authoritative rather than authoritarian'.

¹²⁵ Van Doan, "Confucianism: Vietnam," 176.

¹²⁶ Stephanie Fahey, "Vietnam's Women in the Renovation Era," in Krishna Sen and Maila Stivens (eds.), *Gender and Power in Affluent Asia* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 233-234. Fahey argued that the 'four virtues' of Confucian culture have been recast or reformulated in order to encourage the women's commitment for the purpose of the renovation process. She writes that "[M]ore recently, the director of the Centre for Women's Studies, Le Thi, argued for the reformulation of the four virtues (personal

reconciling faith and patriotism; it can therefore accelerate the process of assimilation in Vietnam.¹²⁷ The revival of Confucian values will raise some challenges for the family because of the negative values of Confucianism or abuses in its practice.¹²⁸

Among ethnic minority peoples in Vietnam some social and cultural practices, which might be associated with some negative values of Confucian culture, could challenge the concept of family. According to Vạn, a well-known Vietnamese ethnologist,¹²⁹ some outdated marriage-practices such as intermarriage between grandparents and grand children, levirate and sororate, marriage in groups and conventual marriage are determined by casting a horoscope, and still persist among some minorities. Besides, concubinage and polygamy tend to reappear in some places after their temporary disappearance. Some other inhumane customs are the banishment of unmarried mothers from the community, the murder of one of the infant-twins, and the massacre of the whole family of any person being accused of black magic.¹³⁰ Such abuses may possibly increase when the Vietnamese church promotes the model of the church as family if this ecclesial model is misunderstood.

4.3.2 The Impact of the Renovation Period

In 1986 the Vietnamese government adopted economic reforms and integrated the country into the western global system which have often been referred to as the policy of renovation (*đổi mới*) and open door (*mở cửa*).¹³¹ This policy has resulted in an extensive opening to the outside world, particularly to the non-communist one, and has exposed Vietnamese society to the forces of economic and cultural globalisation. In other words, Vietnam changed from a bureaucratic centralised economy to a market economy in

communication, December 1994): if women are to work hard they need training and skills development; if they are to remain beautiful, they should have sufficient rest and fewer children; in speech they should be assertive and they should behave with dignity obtained through equality and democracy”.

¹²⁷ Van Doan, “Confucianism: Vietnam,” 176.

¹²⁸ Knodel *et al.*, “Gender Roles in the Family,” 12-13. The authors argued that the issue of gender inequality came from the relaxation of government control over some social practices. One impact of that relaxation is the reversal back to customs and traditions, such as the use of horoscopes and fortune teller in determining the appropriateness of a potential bride/groom, a resurgence in ancestor veneration, and a return to Confucian principles of women’s subordinate role within the household.

¹²⁹ Đặng Nghiêm Vạn, “Changing Family Patterns among Minority People,” in Liljeström and Tường Lai (eds.), *Sociological Studies on the Vietnamese Family*, 114.

¹³⁰ A black magic that is reported to cause the death or illness of someone, or the failure of crops in a village. The person accused of witchcraft must be killed together with his/her relatives.

¹³¹ The 6th Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam, held in December 1986, decided to “shift the economy from the bureaucratic centralized planning pattern based on the system of public ownership essentially consisting of two ownership forms, the State and the collective, to the multi-sector commodity economy operating according to the socialist oriented market mechanism under the State management”. The government decided to adopt a State-controlled market economy. This was necessitated because of

which the process of industrialisation, modernisation and globalisation takes place. In the renovation era, the state developed its economy based on the privatisation of factories or companies and also on the development of the family economy or the household sector. This process differs from that of the socialist state in wartime and in the revolutionary conditions which encouraged centralized and collective economy. The changes have had an impact on the entire society. They have brought about considerable economic improvement in the lives of Vietnamese but also some social problems or malpractices as often being noticed by the government and its agencies.¹³²

The renovation process has had significant impact on the family and its members. The family becomes the core institution responsible for the economic survival of its members and has primary responsibility for labour allocation. However, families do not receive any more financial support for their members from the government such as free education or free admission to hospitals as they did during the state-controlled era. Consequently, many families including women and children are more marginalised or disadvantaged in the matters of health care and education because they lack finance to pay fees in hospitals and schools. Besides, the family has served as both a metaphor and a goal for the government renovation agenda. Accordingly, the modern family is associated with government reproductive policies and development goals, and these promote family planning and limiting births. In other words, Vietnamese families will achieve 'happiness' by following the government reproductive policy. Such a policy has not been without some negative influences for families.¹³³

Economic and cultural globalisation has certainly contributed to the changes in family. Positive and negative aspects of the above changes have fundamentally influenced the structure and the values of the Vietnamese family. Modern nuclear families and more

the socio-economic crises which caused by years of war, by the dwindling of the Soviet aid and by the American-led embargo in the post war period.

¹³² The Vietnamese government issued Decree no. 87-CP in 1995 in order to combat the social evils, such as drug use, prostitution, gambling and pornography. These are considered to be associated with foreign social and cultural influences and to be "contrary to the moral traditions, good morals and good customs of the people". Việt Nam Youth Union, "Recommendation on Strengthening Adolescent Reproductive Health Education in Vietnam," in *Workshop for Adolescent Reproductive Health (1997)*, 109; cited in Tine Gammeltoft, "The Irony of Sexual Agency: Premarital Sex in Urban Northern Việt Nam," in Werner and Bélanger (eds.), *Gender, Household, State*, 115. Gammeltoft reported some social problems in the era of the market economy as follows: "Drug use, crime, and sexual promiscuity are some of the social practices which are most often associated with foreign and 'toxic' influences. As the Việt Nam Youth Union phrases it, "the market economy, social evils, and harmful and poisonous literature smuggled into our country have attacked our young people".

¹³³ Jayne Werner, "Gender, Household, and State: Renovation (*Đổi Mới*) as Social Process in Việt Nam," in Werner and Bélanger (eds.), *Gender, Household, State*, 40.

liberal attitudes towards love, marriage and cohabitation¹³⁴ are more prevalent in big cities and urban areas. According to the Pastoral Letter in 2002 of VBC, the process of industrialisation and urbanisation is bringing society many benefits such as material comfort and a civilised way of life. However, it also causes much confusion in family life and affects the good tradition as well as the values of the family. The Vietnamese family has been challenged by the increasing number of divorces, a widespread consumerist and self-indulgent mentality.¹³⁵ This downside of cultural globalisation is also confirmed by the statement of the Eighth Plenary Assembly of FABC (2004):

Its spirit [of cultural globalisation], informed by neo-liberalism, secularism, materialism, hedonism and consumerism, is alien to the religious-oriented cultures of Asia. Relational, interconnected and interdependent lifestyle of Asian peoples are also undermined...A growing techno-mindset is weakening marital and familial relations of intimacy and love.¹³⁶

The rate of divorce is on the rise, particularly in cities. Divorce is not a new phenomenon in the country since it was legally allowed under the 1986 Marriage and Family Law. However, it has become a social problem in Vietnam today because of its significant rise. Actually, the divorce rate in Vietnam is not high compared to other countries in the region, but it has doubled from 1991 to 1998 and continues to rise.¹³⁷ There is high incidence among young couples, especially between the ages of 24 and 34, due to domestic violence, intermarriage with foreigners and adultery. Consequently, divorce causes damages to family members, women and children in particular, and to family values and ties.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ The phenomenon of cohabitation, which was illegal under the 1986 Marriage and Family Law, is implicitly accepted according to the 2000 Marriage and Family Law although such living arrangements are not recognised as equal to marriage between a husband and wife. See also Gammeltoft, "Irony of Sexual Agency," in Werner and Bélanger (eds.), *Gender, Household, State*, 111-128.

¹³⁵ VBC, *Thư mục vụ năm 2002*, no.15; Văn, *Gia đình Việt Nam*, 83-98.

¹³⁶ FABC VIII, *The Asian Family Towards a Culture of Integral Life*, 23.

¹³⁷ Phi Yến, "Separation Pain" *Vietnam Economic Times* no. 136, 1 June 2005. The author reported the rise of divorce as follows: the cases of divorce doubled in the country, i.e., from 1990 (22,000 cases) to 1998 (44,000 cases), and also in Hồ Chí Minh City, the percentage of marriages ended in divorce was 20% (1998) and 40% (2004). A report from the People's Supreme Court indicates that numbers rose from 51,361 cases of divorce (2000) to 59,551 cases (2004). Cf. Michael Epprecht and Andreas Heinemann (eds.), *Socioeconomic Atlas of Vietnam. A Depiction of the 1999 Populations and Housing Census* (Berne: Swiss National Centre of Competence Research -University of Berne, 2004), 68. According to the results of the 1999 Census, the national percentage of the legally divorced population aged 13 and over is 0.7%

¹³⁸ Domestic violence as the reason for divorce in Vietnam was between 40 and 80 percent, according to the World Bank research in 1999. In recent years, marriages between Vietnamese women and Taiwanese men have become increasingly common, especially women from southern provinces. However, many weddings ended in divorce. The 15 – 20% divorce rate among this group is also expected to go upwards.

Premarital and extramarital sex in the renovation era is another area of concern that challenges the family. The changing economic and social climate in which contacts with western culture become easier might “contribute to a rise in sexual contacts, both premarital and otherwise”.¹³⁹ The Adolescents and Social Change in Vietnam (VASC) survey in 1999 reported that only ten percent of male and five percent of female respondents had premarital sex.¹⁴⁰ However, the high abortion rate in Vietnam could include a number of unreported adolescent cases of those who had premarital sex.¹⁴¹ According to Goodkind, abortion among Vietnamese adolescents is underreported because of the social taboo on premarital sex in the traditional Vietnamese society. Young unmarried women who terminate pregnancies might misreport their age and marital status when they undergo the procedure.¹⁴²

The responses of the Vietnamese government, church and family to some negative impact of globalisation become more challenging because of urbanization in the country. According to the United Nations Statistics, the average annual growth rate of the urban population in Vietnam was 2.7 percent and 3.4 percent in the periods of 1970-1990 and 1990-2003 respectively.¹⁴³ The percentage of urbanized Vietnamese population is not

¹³⁹ Daniel M. Goodkind, “Abortion in Vietnam: Measurements, Puzzles, and Concerns,” *Studies in Family Planning* 25 (1994), 350; Daniel M. Goodkind and Phan Thuc Anh, “Reasons for Rising Condom Use in Vietnam,” *International Family Planning Perspectives* 23 (1997), 173-178; Sharon Ghuman *et al.*, “Continuity and Change in Premarital sex Behaviour in Vietnam,” University of Michigan, Institute for Social Research, Report 05-585, December 2005. According to this report, among those married between 1992 and 2000, the percentage of those who had premarital sex is 31 in men living in Red River Delta and Hồ Chí Minh City and environs, and is 12 and 8 in women living in the Red River Delta and HCMC and environs respectively.

¹⁴⁰ Barbara S. Mensch *et al.*, “Premarital Sex in Vietnam: Is the Current Concern with Adolescent Reproductive Health Warranted?” *Policy Research Division Working Papers* 163 (2002), 10. The VASC survey was undertaken by the Institute of Sociology in Hanoi in 1999. Interviews were mainly conducted with 2,126 young people aged 13-22, of which 1497 (764 males and 733 females) are unmarried ones, in six of Vietnam’s 61 provinces, but it is a national survey. Cf. Ministry of Health *et al.*, *Survey Assessment of Vietnamese Youth*, 39. According to this survey, sexual activity is rare among young people aged 14-17. Among people aged 18-25, single young people reported having premarital sex was 15.4% in males and 2.3% in females. The figure for this group was 33.4% in urban males (26% in rural males) and 3.7 in urban females (3.3% in rural females).

¹⁴¹ UNDP/UNFPA/WHO/World Bank, *Abortion in Vietnam: An Assessment of Policy, Programme and Research Issues* (Geneva: WHO, 1999), 11-12; The United Nations Population Division, *Abortion Policies: A Global Review*, vol. 3 (New York: UN Population Division, 2002), 179-180. “Abortion rose six-fold between 1982 and 1994 in Vietnam. The country had an estimated abortion of 83.3 abortions per 1,000 women in 1996 [...]. The National Committee for Population and Family Planning reported 1.5 million abortions in 1998. These figures do not include a growing number of private-sector abortions, estimated at 500,000 or more additional abortions per year”. Cf. Đặng Thị Nghĩa and Nguyễn Duy Khê, *Vietnam Abortion Situations* (South Africa: Paper for the Conference “Expanding Access; Midlevel Providers in Menstrual Regulation and Elective Abortion Care”, 3-6 December 2001), 4.

¹⁴² Goodkind, “Abortion in Vietnam,” 342-353; Danièle Bélanger and Khuất Thu Hồng, “Single Women’s Experiences of Sexual Relationships and Abortion in Hanoi, Vietnam,” *Reproductive Health Matters* 7 (1999), 71-82.

¹⁴³ UNICEF, *The State of the World’s Children 2005*, 129. The percentage of urbanized Vietnamese population was 20% and 26% in 1997 and 2003 respectively.

high compared to other countries in the region.¹⁴⁴ However, urbanization which occurred in the renovation era, after many years without contact with the outside world, certainly has had considerable impact on the Vietnamese family. Indeed, besides the positive impact, the emerging market-oriented economy is also “the basis for the consumer society and its attendant greed, selfishness, and egotism which disrupts many fine attributes of the traditional Vietnamese culture, urban lifestyle and civilisation”.¹⁴⁵ As a consequence, the family may be endangered by such negative impact. Accordingly, the model of the church as family is challenged by the negative impact of Confucianism and the renovation policy on the family. One of the responses of the local church to the challenge of urbanization is the development of family ministry which is one of the main tasks of the church as the family of God.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter examined the traditional and modern Vietnamese family in order to identify the advantages and the disadvantages of the family in relation to the model of the church as the family of God. The characteristics of the traditional family were identified as communality and hierarchy which showed the horizontal as well as the vertical relationships in the family. They were characterised in the roles of ancestors, father and eldest son. These two characteristics of the Vietnamese family correspond to the nature of the church as community and hierarchy. However, these characteristics also have some negative impact on the family. Therefore it can be concluded that when the church promotes the model of the church as the family of God, only the positive aspects of these characteristics need to be developed in order to prove the meaningfulness of the model of the church as family.

The roles of ancestors, father and eldest son, were seen as very important in the Vietnamese family. These roles have formed the perception of the Vietnamese family as male and authoritarian oriented. This perception is changing, but it still affects the behaviour of male members in the family and society. It can thus be concluded that the church as family needs to critically analyse the roles of the male family members in order to limit its negative impact on the church on the one hand, and on the other, to develop its positive values, such as responsibility in the family and care for other family members. Indeed, the church as the family of God highlights and is built on these family values.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 128. In the period of 1990-2003, the percentage of urbanized population was 3.8% in The Philippines, 4.5% in Indonesia, and 2.9% in Myanmar.

¹⁴⁵ Trinh Duy Luan *et al.*, “The Socioeconomic Impact of Renovation on Urban Housing in Vietnam,” in Peter Boothroyd and Phan Xuan Nam (eds.), *Socioeconomic Renovation in Vietnam: The Origin, Evolution and Impact* (Ottawa: The International Development Research Centre, 2000), 60-61.

The study of the Vietnamese family also showed that an emerging model of family, the modern family, has developed which reflects some characteristics of the structure of the traditional family as well as of the values of the modern family. Equality, co-responsibility and participation are some indicators of the Vietnamese modern family. These characteristics, it is concluded, should prevail in the church as family because the ecclesiological concept of the church as the family of God promotes a model of relationship regardless of race, gender and status.

The Vietnamese family has been influenced by local and Confucian cultures. While Vietnamese culture promoted harmony between men and women Confucian influence, often known as patriarchal and authoritarian, showed some barriers to the promotion of the family of God. Besides, the family is also challenged by some negative impact of the renovation policy in Vietnam. In that context, it can be concluded that when the concept of the church as family is promoted it needs a critical re-evaluation of its cultural characteristics so that its positive values will be maximised and its negatives be minimised. The negative impact of the family on the church as family will be analysed in Chapter Six and Seven of this thesis.

The negative impact of the socio-cultural influences has challenged the family and the model of the church as family. However, the majority of Vietnamese still value the role of the family and have strong connection with their families, particularly young Vietnamese people.¹⁴⁶ Therefore the challenges should not be seen as discouraging factors to the model of the church as family. Contrarily, the church has more reasons for promoting this model in order to save the family from the negative impact of cultural globalisation. It can be concluded that in order to counteract such challenges the Vietnamese church needs to develop significantly the family ministry. The pastoral efforts of the church in this area will help to limit the negative impact of globalisation on the one hand, and on the other, to promote a better understanding of some aspects of the model of the church as the family of God.

The description of the Vietnamese family helps to understand the development of the concept of the church as God's family which will be discussed in the next chapter.

¹⁴⁶ Ministry of Health *et al.*, *Survey Assessment of Vietnamese Youth*, 86-87.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MODEL OF THE CHURCH AS THE FAMILY OF GOD IN VIETNAM

The concept of the church as the family of God emerged some decades ago in the church in Vietnam, but it has had a long history of development. During the 40th general congregations of the second session (3rd October 1963) of the Second Vatican Council Bishop Simon Hoà Nguyễn Văn Hiến of Vietnam made a significant intervention on the theme of the church as the family of God.¹ The same concept was emphasised another time in the documents of the Vietnamese Bishops' Conference for the Asian Synod, "The Responses to the *Lineamenta*" and "The Contribution to the Elaboration of the *Instrumentum laboris*".²

The biblical and ecclesiological concept of the church as the family of God resonates with the Vietnamese. It helps explain the development of three organisations in which the family is notably appreciated as the foundation of all institutions, and thereby indicates the path of further contextualisation as these organisations either followed the structure and the spirit of the Vietnamese family or aimed at promoting the well-being of the family.

This chapter will study the model of the church as family as developed in Vietnam since the seventeenth century with reference to three kinds of organisation, namely, the *house of the Lord of heaven* (hereafter the *house of the Lord*), the organisation of *lay leaders and associations in parishes* and the *Congregation of the Lovers of the Holy Cross* (hereafter *Congregation of LHC*).³ It also describes the development of the concept "the church as the family of God" as found in some relevant documents of the Vietnamese church since the establishment of the hierarchy of Vietnam in 1960. By exploring the concept of the church as the family of God in Vietnam since its evangelisation, this study will be providing both the background and focus required for the last two chapters of the thesis. The lessons drawn from past history have relevance for the pastoral situation of the present and its movement towards the future.

¹ *Acta Synodalia*, vol. 2, pars II, 42-45; vol.1, pars IV, 514-515. Cf. Dabiré, "Eglise-Famille de Dieu," 98; Soạn, *Les institutions familiales*, 223-224. These two authors agreed that the intervention of Bishop Nguyễn Văn Hiến had a theological significance for the image of the church as family.

² VBC, *Bản trả lời* and *Bản Góp ý*, 10-19.

³ In Vietnamese, these organisations are called: *Nhà Đức Chúa Trời*, *Ban hành giáo*, and *Dòng Mến Thánh Giá*.

5.1 The Implication of the Model of the Church as Family in Vietnam

The model of the church as family influenced three church organisations, which conveyed the spirit of the Vietnamese family, from the beginning of evangelisation in Vietnam in the seventeenth century. These organisations were conditioned by a number of historical factors affecting both the history of Vietnam and the local church. Therefore a review of the initial periods of evangelisation in Vietnam is necessary to understand the reasons for the foundations of these three church organisations.

5.1.1 The Context of the Initial Periods of Evangelisation in Vietnam

Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism had each a special social influence when missionaries, particularly the Jesuits, came to Vietnam in the seventeenth century. In particular, Vietnamese society and the family were organised according to the Confucian stratification as well as Vietnamese culture. The Vietnamese family formed a major element in society; however, this basic institution was not completely structured in the Chinese manner.

The stratification of Vietnamese society in the seventeenth century was made up of the majority of lower class people who were peasants and the minority of upper class people who were the aristocracy including the royal family, the military and the civil officials in the regional administrative system. Indeed, society in those days consisted almost entirely of villages (*xã/làng*) with a small percentage of population living in urban areas. Since the tenth century or even earlier *xã* was the smallest local community within the Vietnamese social system. It has for a long time so retained its important and particular character in society that the study of the *xã* is indispensable for understanding the nature of Vietnamese family and society.⁴

The privileges given to the civil officials led to the re-establishment of Confucian scholars among the élite of society since the second half of the seventeenth century. Chinese remained the learned and official language of Vietnam until the beginning of the twentieth century. It lost its status with the abolition of the literary examinations in 1915 in the north

⁴ Insun, *Law and Family in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Vietnam*, 186-189; "The Changing Nature of the Red River Delta Villages," 153-155; John K. Whitmore, "Social Organisation and Confucian Thought in Vietnam," *JSAS* 15 (1984), 301; Jamieson, "The Traditional Vietnamese Village," 2-34. Insun reviewed the evolution of *xã* (village) in the history of Vietnam. In early fifteenth century, a large *xã* had 100 adult males or more and a small one more than ten. In later periods, a large *xã* consisted of 500 households and a small one was 100 household or more. Whitmore mentioned that in the maps issued in 1491, Vietnam had some 8900 lowland villages (*xã*), some 1200 communities (small villages) in the mountains, and 65 *phường* (small towns) of which 36 were located in the capital of Thăng Long. Cf. Buu Cam *et al.*, *Hồng Đức Bản đồ* (Sài Gòn: Viện khảo cổ, 1962), 6-49. For the history of Tonkin in 17th - 18th centuries, see Alain Forest, *Les missionnaires français au Tonkin et au Siam (XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles)*, vol. 2 (Paris: Éditions L'Harmattan, 1998), 27-122.

and in 1918 in the central areas of Vietnam.⁵ Apart from the Confucian learning for these examinations, traditional primary education for ordinary young students was very simple. Its purpose was to instil morality and motivation to learn rather than to teach grammar or vocabulary or to impart any special knowledge.⁶ Education was not available to all; only a very small number of people could study with local Confucian scholars in order to take exams to become officials.

In the above social context the stratification resulted in a patron-client relationship and in a situation of subordination to those in authority. Students were subject to teachers. Peasants and servants were subordinate to landlords or wealthy people. Commoners and free people (*dân đinh*) were subject to various taxes, corvée labour and military service; they were also dependent on local authorities of the administrative system of the imperial court.⁷ Such a stratification and social dependence made society unified socially and politically. However, the life of ordinary people was difficult because of the poverty, natural calamities and the lack of social services.

Members of a family related to one another in the kinship system, though with some independence. Although the structure of the family was patrilineal, women and wives had some legal hold on their own properties as well as on their husbands' estate as mentioned in the Lê Code.⁸ Children at the age of fifteen could be independent because of personal inherited property, and through legal recognition of their status.⁹ This family structure was prevalent when missionaries came to Vietnam in the seventeenth century, and was made use of in the evangelisation of the Vietnamese.

⁵ For the literary examinations, see Nola Cooke, "Nineteenth-Century Vietnamese Confucianization in Historical Perspective: Evidence from the Palace Examinations (1463-1883)." *JSAS* 25 (1994), 270-313; Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 22-24.

⁶ Jamieson, "The Traditional Vietnamese Village," 29-32.

⁷ Whitmore, "Social Organisation," 301-302.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 300. Whitmore summarises the independence of Vietnamese women and children as follows: "Females had much more of a separate identity, and the Lê Code recognised it, granting them legal status (articles 308-309, 321-322, 333, 401, 507). The wife brought her own property to the marriage, had a say in its disposal, took it and her equal share of the joint property in the marriage from it when she left (by widowhood or divorce), and legally administered part of her deceased husband's share as well as that of minor children (articles 374-377, 401, 481)". Cf. Insun, "Law and Family in the Seventeenth," 93, 104-105, 107-115, 136, 153-154, 163; Tạ Văn Tài, "The Status of Women in Traditional Vietnam: A Comparison of the Code of the Lê dynasty (1428-1788) with the Chinese Codes," *Journal of Asian History* 15 (1981), 111-112, 118-121, 125-136.

⁹ Whitmore, "Social Organisation," 229-230: "Children when grown (fifteen or older) had the option of leaving the family unit and taking their own personal property with them. The availability of a share of communal land undoubtedly helped such separation. Once the children had left their parents' house, the parents were no longer held responsible for their acts (articles 313, 457)". Cf. Insun, "Law and Family in the Seventeenth," 66, 76-77, 124, 133-135, 138, 141, 147, 151-152, 162-164, 171-172; Tài, "The Status of Women," 100-101.

Christianity was brought to Vietnam in the sixteenth century through the efforts of religious missionaries. The records of the Vietnamese imperial court mentioned the Christian preaching of a man called I Ne Khu in North Vietnam in 1533.¹⁰ The Vietnamese Bishops' Conference chose that year as the start of evangelisation in Vietnam. It probably happened after the arrival in Southeast Asia of the Portuguese who took Malacca in 1511 and then sent their envoys to Siam (Thailand). That was the period of the penetration of missionaries into Indochina (Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam). According to the missionary history of the Portuguese Dominicans, Gaspar de Santa Cruz came to Cambodia in 1550 and he possibly stopped at Hà Tiên.¹¹

Fifty years after the first visit of a missionary to Vietnam in 1533, a group of Dominicans came to evangelise this country. In 1583, some Spanish Franciscans from Manila (Philippines) arrived at Đà Nẵng, but they left after fifteen days because of the language barrier. Although some of them came back with more enthusiasm, they had to end their mission in 1586 upon the decision of their superior general. Some years later, on 24th June 1596, the Dominican Province of the Holy Rosary of the Philippines sent two Spanish Dominicans to Đà Nẵng where they were allowed to work, but only for the Japanese and Portuguese Christians in Hội An. It is also recorded that the Dominicans had been preceded by two Augustinians engaged in missionary work.¹²

Evangelisation finally flourished with the mission of the Jesuits to Vietnam in the seventeenth century. The first Jesuits came to Central Vietnam called Cochinchina in 1615, and in 1626 to Tonkin in the North. However, the missionary activities of the Jesuits had not been fruitful until the arrival of Alexandre de Rhodes, a young Jesuit missionary, who came to Cochinchina in 1624 and left in 1645.¹³ His contributions to evangelisation in terms of method and pastoral concern were so great that he is called the "founder of Vietnamese Christianity".¹⁴

¹⁰ For the history of the church in Vietnam, see VBC, *Giáo hội Công giáo Việt Nam*, 184-239. The church in Vietnam celebrated the 470th anniversary of evangelisation in Vietnam in 2003. Cf. Phan Phát Huồn, *Việt Nam Giáo sử* [The history of Christianity in Vietnam], 2 vols. (Sài Gòn: Cứu Thế Tùng thư, 1962-1965).

¹¹ VBC, *Giáo hội Công giáo Việt Nam*, 187, 204; Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 9. According to Phan, there is no historical evidence that Gaspar de Santa Cruz did missionary work at Hà Tiên in 1550.

¹² Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 9

¹³ Alexandre de Rhodes was deported from Tonkin in May 1630 and he stayed in Macao from 1630 to 1640. He returned to Cochinchina in February 1640. For the history of de Rhodes' evangelisation in Vietnam, see Alexandre de Rhodes, *Histoire du Royaume de Tunquin* (Lyon: Jean Baptiste Devenet, 1651), and *Divers voyages et missions* (Paris: Cramoisy, 1653); Phan, *Missions and Catechesis*, 45-68.

¹⁴ Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 38-68. The first Jesuits arrived at Cửa Hàn, central area of Vietnam, on 15 January 1615. Then, between 1616 and 1632, there were seven more Jesuits arriving and carrying out missionary work in Hội An, Nước Mặn and Thành Chiêm. These three locations were parts of the central area of Vietnam. De Rhodes was one of the seven Jesuits who left Macao in December 1624 and arrived at Cửa Hàn after nineteen days of voyages. Some of de Rhodes' works which made him the founder of

The church in Vietnam, however, was officially established in 1659. With the increasing number of Vietnamese Catholics, de Rhodes submitted his report on the situation of the local church to the Sacred Congregation of *Propaganda Fide* in 1650 and to Pope Innocent X in 1652; he also proposed the establishment of a hierarchy in Vietnam. His proposal became reality when *Propaganda Fide* with the confirmation of Pope Alexander VII, on 9th September 1659, decreed the establishment of two apostolic vicariates in Vietnam with two French bishops. François Pallu was appointed Apostolic Vicar for Tonkin and Pierre Lambert de la Motte for Cochinchina. However, due to the unfriendly policies of the Vietnam imperial court towards foreigners and missionaries, it was not until 1670 that Bishop de la Motte arrived in Cochinchina.

The ecclesiastical division of two apostolic vicariates in 1659 respected areas then governed by two different rulers at the beginning of the seventeenth century when Vietnam was known to the West as An Nam. The northern part of Vietnam was called Đàng Ngoài or Tonkin. The southern part was called Đàng Trong or Cochinchina. Theoretically, the whole country was officially under the Lê kings. However, in practice, the real power belonged either to Lord (*chúa*) Trịnh who ruled Tonkin or to Lord Nguyễn of Cochinchina. The king was merely the ruler of the dynasty in name only. The two were opposed as rival rulers and tensions between them seriously affected the evangelisation of the local church in Vietnam.

Despite these problems, the evangelisation of Vietnam proceeded, as shown in the 1650 report of de Rhodes to *Propaganda Fide*.¹⁵ The reason for such success lies in the fact that missionaries made Christianity less alien to local people, particularly through the establishment of three organisations patterned on the Vietnamese family, which will now be treated, beginning with the *house of the Lord*.

5.1.2 The Organisation of the *house of the Lord*

In the seventeenth century, one of the challenges for missionaries in Vietnam was the contrast between the small number of missionaries and the needs of vast missions in Vietnam.¹⁶ Missionaries usually faced difficulties of language, expulsions and persecutions from the previously mentioned two Lords Trịnh and Nguyễn, and oppositions from leaders as well as believers of other religions. In order to overcome

Vietnamese Christianity were: the foundation of the institution of Vietnamese catechists, the publication of the *Catechismus* in Latin and Vietnamese, the proposal for the establishment of a Vietnamese hierarchy.

¹⁵ Ibid., 66. According to Phan, de Rhodes reported that “there were 300,000 Christians in Vietnam, with an average annual increase of 15,000”.

¹⁶ Ibid., 100. Phan mentioned that in 1625 there were only fifteen missionaries in Cochinchina consisting of eleven priests and four brothers.

these challenges, the church saw that the long-term pastoral solution lay in the localization of the clergy. The preparation for the local clergy was carried out by the establishment of the institution of catechists whose members later became the key players in developing the *house of the Lord*, a pastoral, educational and administrative organisation modelled on the structure of the Vietnamese family.

Alexandre de Rhodes arrived in Cochinchina in 1624 and three years later he came to Thăng Long, the capital of Tonkin. Right after his arrival in the capital on 2nd July 1627, he made it his special concern to convert educated and influential people in order to help him in evangelisation. Among these converts, he chose and trained some men to be catechists. That was the foundation of the *institution of catechists* whose members would live with missionaries and share their mission as their companions. The first group of the institution of catechists accompanied de Rhodes in missionary works as his faithful collaborators.¹⁷ They consisted of three catechists who were directly involved in teaching catechism and a member called “coadjutor” (*bō*), who was in charge of temporal affairs so that missionaries and catechists could spend all their time and efforts on their mission.¹⁸ Before his expulsion from Tonkin in May 1630, de Rhodes gathered these catechists to form the *institution of catechists*; however, only three catechists took the three vows of chastity, poverty and obedience.¹⁹ He also formed another group of ten catechists who formed a vowed community of catechists in Cochinchina on 31st July 1643.²⁰ Thus the first Vietnamese catechists lived as members of a quasi-religious community. They lived and worked together with missionaries in a community which was

¹⁷ Cf. De Rhodes, *Divers voyages*, 102-103; translated by and cited in Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 102. De Rhodes writes about his catechists with these words: “[W]hat helped me wonderfully in the cultivation of this fine vineyard and propagating our holy faith was the assistance of the catechists who, to tell the truth, accomplished everything under God in the great strides made by this church. Given the fact that I was the only priest who could preach, because the priest who was working with me did not know the language, I decided to keep some Christians with me who were not married and who were filled with zeal and piety, to help me in the conversion of souls. Many offered me their services, but I chose those I thought most capable and started a seminary, which was so successful that we might say it was what kept us going”.

¹⁸ The names of the catechists often mentioned are: François, André and Ignace, and one member in charge of temporary affairs was Antoine. Cf. De Rhodes, *Divers voyages*, 102-103.

¹⁹ Đỗ Quang Chính, *La Mission au Viet - Nam 1624 - 1630 et 1640 - 1645 d'Alexandre de Rhodes* (Paris: 1969), 345.

²⁰ Francesco Buzomi, a Jesuit in Cochinchina, who had trained a group of catechists, recommended them to de Rhodes during the third sojourn of the latter. De Rhodes came to Cochinchina twice: 1624 -1626 and 1640 - 1645. His second missionary period in Cochinchina was divided into four sojourns: February - September 1640, December 1640 - July 1641, January 1642 - July 1643, and March 1644 - July 1645. Cf. De Rhodes, *Divers voyages*, 71-78; 116-169; Phan, *Missions and Catechesis*, 45-48; 60-66; Chính, *La Mission au Viet - Nam*, 345.

the foundation of a future organisation called *the house of the Lord*.²¹ Indeed, missionaries and catechists lived and worked together as in a Vietnamese family.

In particular, the communal and missionary characteristics of the *institute of catechists* were recognised in the profession of vows of the catechists. In general, the three vows of the first Vietnamese catechists were similar to those of members of religious congregations, particularly the Jesuits. However, the symbolic meanings of the vows of the Vietnamese catechists and the ceremony for taking the vows are significant. The vow of chastity²² to be kept by lay people was very challenging in the context of polygamy in Vietnam in the seventeenth century. In fact, in 1630, the catechists of the first community in Tonkin only professed a temporary vow of chastity because it seems that de Rhodes thought that a permanent vow of chastity was very risky for the catechists.²³ The vows of poverty and obedience²⁴ reflected a total denial of oneself for the service of the church. They vowed not to keep “any money or possession as one’s own but to place in common all the alms which the Christians could give” and to obey their community leaders as well as missionaries, although some of the catechists were former mandarins or officers of the Vietnamese imperial court.²⁵ The ceremony of the profession of the vows of the first catechists was held right after communion during Mass in the presence of de Rhodes and the community.²⁶ This practice emphasised the communal and apostolic characters of the profession. While catechists devoted their mission to serve Christians, in return, the latter had solidarity with the former and the responsibility to address their needs.²⁷

Later, the *institution of catechists* had some changes in terms of status or membership. According to the documents of Marini,²⁸ about 1665, catechists were divided into three ranks: novice, scholastic (*scholari*) or catechist of the second rank and master (*magister legis*) or catechist of the first rank. The first rank catechists or principal catechists, known in Latin as *catechista principalis*, were the permanent professed catechists after a long

²¹ Cf. Phạm Quốc Sửu, *La “Maison de Dieu”, une organisation des catéchistes au Vietnam* (Diss. Pontificia Universitas Urbaniana: Rome, 1975), 69-72; Chính, *La Mission au Viet - Nam*, 375.

²² Alexandre de Rhodes, *Histoire du Royaume de Tunquin* (Lyon: Jean Baptist Devenet, 1651), 256.

²³ Chính, *La Mission au Viet - Nam*, 346. It is noted that it was not until 1960 that the law of the Vietnamese governments banned polygamy.

²⁴ De Rhodes, *Histoire du royaume*, 256.

²⁵ Chính, *La Mission au Viet - Nam*, 334.

²⁶ De Rhodes, *Histoire du Royaume*, 255-256; *Divers voyages*, 160-161.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Cf. Giovanni Filippo Marini, *Delle missioni dei Padri della Compagnia di Giesù nella provincia del Giappone e particolarmente de quelle di Tunkino* (Roma, 1663), 183-186; cited in Sửu, *La “Maison de Dieu”*, 115; Alain Forest, *Les missionnaires français au Tonkin et au Siam (XVIIe – XVIIIe siècles)*, vol. 3 (Paris: Editions L’Harmattan, 1998), 128; Chính, *La Mission au Viet - Nam*, 366-370.

period of training and service and were called *thầy giảng* (literally, preaching master). Those who would be chosen to become priests belonged to this rank. The second rank catechists, in Latin, *catechista secundi ordinis*, were the temporary professed catechists who were in the formation period and also called *kẻ giảng* (literally, the person who preaches).²⁹ Both the first and the second rank catechists went with missionaries to communities and taught catechism or prepared the faithful to receive sacraments. These three ranks in the institution of catechists during Jesuits' missionary time were still in existence when the missionaries of the *Missions Étrangères de Paris* (MEP or Society of Foreign Missions of Paris, founded in 1663) came to Vietnam.

There is no exact date for when the *institution of catechists* became the *house of the Lord*. However, the meaning of the house is clear: it was first a presbytery where the parish priests lived with catechists during their training as well as their apostolate. The above-mentioned three ranks of catechists in Marini's documents implied a process of training. Usually, a child was accepted into the service of mission in the *house of the Lord* in his adolescence or a younger age and was helped in his vocation discernment and training to become a future catechist. He was called a novice (aspirant/candidate) or a member of the third rank. There were also members, called "coadjutors" (*bõ*), who belonged to the same rank. Coadjutors were members who joined the *house of the Lord* in their old age or those who lacked intellectual capacity to be trained as catechists. They were in charge of manual works or services in the house, such as cooking, doing household works, rowing the boat and carrying utilities for sacramental/liturgical celebrations during visits to Christian communities.³⁰ A novice would become a catechist of the first and the second ranks after a period of training and service.

From 1659 the church of Vietnam was under the pastoral care of two vicars apostolic, but it was not until 1666 that Deydier, the first missionary sent by them, arrived in Tonkin. He contacted catechists, who had been trained by the Jesuits, and organised their formation as well as their apostolate. Then, catechists lived and worked with the first Vietnamese priests as in a family.³¹ In 1670 Bishop Lambert de la Motte came to Tonkin and called for the synod of Tonkin on 14th February 1670. From that synod it was noted that the organisation of the *house of the Lord* started developing in parishes and vicariates. In fact, the articles of the synod of Tonkin did not explicitly mention the

²⁹ Chính, *La Mission au Viet - Nam*, 365.

³⁰ "Journal de la mission, 1686," in Andrien Launay, *Histoire de la mission du Tonkin. Documents historiques*, vol.1 (Paris: Librairie orientale et américaine/Maisonnieuve, 1927), 271-272; Forest, *Les missionnaires français*, vol. 3, 132; Sữ, *La "Maison de Dieu"*, 115-119.

³¹ Forest, *Les missionnaires français*, vol. 2, 136-138; 144-146.

institution of catechists and the *house of the Lord*, but these articles identified the requirement for the recruitment of personnel for the missionary work as well as emphasised the need of a common budget for personnel formation and of the community life for catechists. They also stated the preparation of young people at parishes before they enter seminaries.³² The decisions of the synod of Tonkin were approved by Pope Clement X in his *Apostolatus Officium* on 23rd December 1673.³³ This fact did not imply the canonical status of the *house of the Lord*, but it could be interpreted as an indication that this organisation was appreciated and popular in the local church.

From the end of the seventeenth century onward, except during the persecutions, missionaries could live permanently in presbyteries when they came to Vietnam. The local church developed and the missionary conditions were more stable. Presbyteries became the residences of Vietnamese priests or missionaries and catechists including novices or candidates. To some extent they lived together as in a family in which priests were considered as fathers and catechists as elder brothers of young candidates just like the structure in Vietnamese families.³⁴ Members living at a presbytery assisted one another in their mission; catechists became close collaborators of priests. Catechists taught catechism to neophytes, visited the sick, and sometimes governed a missionary area since there were not enough priests for all parishes or communities. As leaders in communities without a residential priest, catechists could lead the gathering in churches or chapels, proclaim the word of God and read the homily prepared by priests. They could also preside at funeral services and other functions appropriate for lay leaders in the community. In other situations, catechists were the mediators between priests and people including lay leaders of the community. As assistants to priests, catechists also

³² Launay, *Histoire de la mission du Tonkin*, vol.1, 94-95. Article 5 of the synod of Tonkin stated that nobody would be accepted in the institution of catechists unless he had been examined and approved by the bishop or the general vicar. Article 10 rules that: "Following the example of the early church, all properties, incomes and donations will be put together in a common budget for the living and for the needs of those who work for the service of the church, for seminarians and for the poor". Article 16 mentions: "Each administrator will have particular care to raise young people in piety. He is also responsible for choosing and sending those who are appropriate for the priesthood formation in seminaries so that they will be trained in accordance with the regulations made for this subject in the Synod in Siam". Own translation from French. From the above articles and the similar ones it is often noted that this synod institutionalised the institution of catechists and the *house of the Lord*. Cf. Forest, *Les missionnaires français*, vol. 2, 136-138, 144-148; vol. 3, 104-107.

³³ Cf. *Iuris Pontificii de Propaganda Fidei*, pars I, vol. 1, 429-433; cited in Sùr, *La "Maison de Dieu"*, 79 ; Launay, *Histoire de la mission du Tonkin*, vol.1, 92.

³⁴ Forest, *Les missionnaires français*, vol. 3, 105; 124. Cf. "M. Bélot à Pocquet, 1697," Launay, *Histoire de la mission du Tonkin*, vol.1, 456; Nola Cooke, "Early Nineteenth-Century Vietnamese Catholics and Others in the Pages of the *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi*," *JSAS* 35 (2004), 284: "All mission personnel lived communally, with resources pooled and distributed according to need. In the parishes, clerics presided over quasi-extended families lodged in 'houses of God' (*maisons de Dieu*), where they raised and educated promising Catholic youths, often over many years, and established close relationships based on normative Vietnamese values like the venerations of fathers and teachers".

accompanied priests to parishes or communities and assisted priests in preparing the faithful to receive the sacraments of baptism, penance and the eucharist. Later, from the middle of the eighteenth century with the arrival of more missionaries, a *house of the Lord* accommodated missionaries, local priests, catechists, seminarian and catechist candidates and coadjutors or servants. With the exception of priests, members of the house, who were catechists, candidates and coadjutors, shared some common jobs like cooking and doing domestic work.

The *house of the Lord* was also a house of studies and formation for catechists and seminary candidates.³⁵ During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it was very often parish priests who recruited candidates to become catechists and seminarians to be trained at the *house of the Lord*. The candidates were often first introduced by their parents to priests because it was an honour for families to have some of their members educated at presbyteries. Young boys came to live and study with their pastors to be prepared for their future formation in seminaries. This is understandable because of the scarcity of schools or formal education in those days. During the persecution periods in the eighteenth century the *house of the Lord* at parishes became a kind of seminary where priests taught Latin and morals to seminarians. Major seminarians, during summer holidays came to live at the house to help priests in pastoral work and also to enjoy an environment conducive to their prayer life.

Chính³⁶ described a *house of the Lord* in the parish of Hải Giáp which belonged to the Apostolic Vicariate of Bùi Chu in North Vietnam during the 1940's as a presbytery or a religious community whose head was a parish priest. The house consisted of some thirty people living together. Catechists, seminarians and candidates were in charge of various activities in the parish and were also trained before being sent for formal training in schools for catechists or seminaries.

The *house of the Lord* was also an administrative organisation at diocesan level. In vicariates or dioceses, mainly in dioceses in North Vietnam, a diocesan mission or a

³⁵ Cf. Forest, *Les missionnaires français*, vol. 2, 160-161; 190-193.

³⁶ Chính, *La Mission au Viet - Nam*, 375-376. "A *house of the Lord* was a presbytery in each parish where some thirty people lived together. The house members consisted of the parish and the assistant priests, a parochial catechist, catechists in charge of some twenty catechists and seminary candidates, of parochial school students, of religious and liturgical activities, of the sacristy, and some people called "coadjutors" who took care of manual jobs. They were: porters, cooks, gardeners, warehouse keepers and farmers who worked for the parish ... It was a kind of religious community in which all people lived under the direction of the parish priest. In this house, candidates were trained in a few years before they were sent to either schools for catechists or seminaries, based on their ability and age, in order to become catechists or to follow the first period of the seminary formation to the priesthood". Own translation from French.

house of the Lord was established since the end of the eighteenth century.³⁷ According to the Decrees of the first regional Synod of Kẻ Sặt (1900) and New Rules of the *house of the Lord* issued in 1935, the *house of the Lord* at the diocesan level was a community made up of a bishop, missionary and local priests, great seminarians and catechists including coadjutors or servants and candidates for catechists.³⁸ The number of catechists and coadjutors could be some dozens of people in a *house of the Lord* at the diocesan level in which the bishop was considered a father in a large family.³⁹

According to Forest,⁴⁰ the term “house of the Lord” or exactly “people belonging to the *house of the Lord*” appeared for the first time in a missionary letter of Roux, a MEP priest, written probably in 1746.⁴¹ This term was used for those working in manual jobs at the missions of the vicariate. The meaning behind this term reflects a distinction between lay people working in the vicariate mission as servants and priests as representatives of God. Such a distinction led to clericalism which began to develop in the *house of the Lord* during that period and onward.

Thus the *house of the Lord* was a special and typical organisation of the church in Vietnam in which members lived a community life and carried out missionary work as members in a Vietnamese family. This familial character was clearly expressed through their relationships. Bishops and priests were considered as fathers and other members as children in families. Both worked together for the benefit of the local church although some distinctions of privilege occurred among clerical and lay members. This organisation developed so significantly that the term of the *house of the Lord* was also used for the administrative structure of a diocese.

³⁷ *Archives de la société des Missions Étrangères de Paris* (AME) 692 fo 356; Forest, *Les missionnaires français*, vol. 3, 106-107.

³⁸ Cf. Sủ, *La “Maison de Dieu”*, 107-108.

³⁹ Henri Bernard-Maître, “Le Père de Rhodes et les missions d’Indochine (1615-1645),” in *Histoire universelles des missions Catholiques*, tome II, ouvrage dirigé par Mgr. de la Croix (Cannes: 1957), 53-59; cited in Sủ, *La “Maison de Dieu”*, 73. “Missionaries and Vietnamese priests, catechists of the first and the second ranks including coadjutors, major and minor seminarians, both live as family members in the “*house of the Lord*” whose head is the bishop. Each member is responsible for the property of the community, but nobody wants to retrieve any benefit from it. This organisation is emphasised in the missionary areas of Tonkin with some variations until the last years ... The organisation was the beginning of a quasi-religious life whose development shows instantly how much this organisation is adapted to the Vietnamese civilisation. The life of celibacy and living by oneself is inconceivable. The Vietnamese do not know individualism; they are concerned with their family origin, therefore people have to look for a group in order to become its members and to replace their own families”. Own translation from French.

⁴⁰ Forest, *Les missionnaires français*, vol. 3, 105-107.

⁴¹ Cf. M. Croux à de Combe, 7-5-1746, AME 687 fo 498; cited in Forest *Les missionnaires français*, vol. 3, 106. M. Croux writes that “I still have more than 40 servants, i.e., people belonging to the *house of the Lord*”. Own translation from French which reads “J’ai encore plus de quarante domestiques, c’est à dire gens de la maison de Dieu”.

5.1.3 The Organisation of Lay Leaders and Associations in Parishes

In Vietnam, the organisation of a Christian community or a parish included lay leaders and different associations of the faithful. This parochial organisation, which started at the beginning of the evangelisation in Vietnam and has continued to develop up to the present, was modelled on the structure and hierarchy of the Vietnamese village and family,⁴² particularly in the areas of community life and division of gender and labour. The following will describe the establishment of the organisation of lay leaders and the family character of this organisation as well as a typical parish in Vietnam.

The establishment of lay leaders in Christian communities was one of the concerns of missionaries in Vietnam in the seventeenth century in order to respond to the increasing number of converts. It was de Rhodes who was interested in organising lay leaders in the communities where he came to evangelise. Lay leaders were chosen among the most devout Christians who were also educated and respected people.⁴³ They could be considered as “pastors” and “ordinary ministers” of Christian communities. As pastors, they led the assembly in prayer and worship on Sundays. They could teach and preach catechism to catechumens and other Christians in order to strengthen their faith. When the priests were absent, they were allowed to administer baptism. Their contributions to evangelisation were so great that they deserve the title “cofounders of Vietnamese Christianity”.⁴⁴ Indeed, de Rhodes appreciated the work of Paul, one of the lay leaders at Chợ Mới, because he was the heart and soul of that whole church.⁴⁵

De Rhodes’ approach in organising Christian communities was continued by French missionaries who grouped lay leaders into an organisation similar to what is today called pastoral committees or councils. In 1668, Deydier formed pastoral committees in the communities at Thăng Long.⁴⁶ Later, the synods of Tonkin (1670) and of Faifo (1672) emphasised the need for an organisation of lay leaders whose functions were to organise prayers for dedicated days, to take care of other Christians and to prepare

⁴² Soạn, *Les institutions familiales*, 208.

⁴³ Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 100. Phan writes that “[e]verywhere he went, de Rhodes immediately formed a nucleus of lay leaders, made up of former Buddhist monks, mandarins, doctors, *licenciés*, persons of noble birth, and commoners, not only men but also women”. Cf. De Rhodes, *Divers voyages*, 95-97.

⁴⁴ Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 100-101.

⁴⁵ De Rhodes, *Divers voyages*, 134-135; cited in Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 101: “Every Sunday and holy day, he gathered together Christians in a chapel he had in the enclosure of his house. There he instructed them, preached, and took care to help them in every way necessary to keep them in the faith they had received. His zeal extended to the pagans, and he disposed many for baptism”.

⁴⁶ Launay, *Histoire de la mission du Tonkin*, 53; Forest, *Les missionnaires français*, vol. 3, 157. Father Deydier instituted a council of six members in five ecclesial communities in Thăng Long.

candidates for catechists.⁴⁷ It was the official recognition of the organisation of lay leaders in parishes since the decisions of these local synods were approved by Rome.⁴⁸

There were some differences in the organisation of parishes in the dioceses of North, Central and South Vietnam, such as the titles for parish council members or the names of associations.⁴⁹ However, overall the structure was generally uniform. In order to give some insight into a parochial organisation, what follows will describe the organisation of a typical parish in the dioceses of central Vietnam during the period of the French missionaries in the first half of the twentieth century.

The organisation of a parish was structured on the model of the family and the traditional village.⁵⁰ The parochial organisation was made up of the parish priest as the head of a family-parish, lay leaders called *chức việc* (dignitaries), and parishioners of three categories: *hạng lão* (the order of aged men), *ba hạng* (the three orders) and *họ đồng* as well as *họ ven* (the associations of male and female young adults). The three categories of parishioners were classified by their age. The order of aged men was for those from 60 years old and above. The three orders were for men from 20 to 60 years old. The associations were for male and female young adult from 15 to 20 years old.⁵¹ Women did not belong to these three categories in the organisation of a parish, although they

⁴⁷ The Synod of Tonkin, Article 7; cited in Launay, *Histoire de la mission du Tonkin*, vol.1, 94; Forest, *Les missionnaires français*, vol. 3, 146. This article states that "In each church (parish/community) where there is a large number of faithful, some of the most pious ones will be chosen to be responsible for leading daily prayers, for supervision of celebrations of the feasts and of fasting, and to look after others in the parish/community". Own translation from French. Cf. Articles 4-5, "Réunion de Faifo en 1672," in Adrien Launay, *Histoire de la mission de Cochinchine. Documents historiques*, vol. 1, 107-108.

⁴⁸ Cf. Launay, *Histoire de la mission de Cochinchine*, vol.1, 111-112. See also footnote 34.

⁴⁹ Some of the titles for pastoral parish council are: *Ban hành giáo* (Committee on parish administration), *Hội đồng Giáo xứ* (Parish council), *Ban chức việc Xứ* (Board of parish dignitaries), *Ban Câu Trùm* (Board of parish leaders).

⁵⁰ Forest, *Les missionnaires français*, vol. 3, 157; Léopold Cadière, "Organisation et fonctionnement d'une chrétienté vietnamienne," *Bulletin de la société des Missions Etrangères de Paris* 28 (1955), 305-318, 723-737, 916-969, 1051-1062. Cf. *Directoire du Vicariat Apostolique de Qui Nhon* (Qui Nhon: Imprimerie de Qui Nhon, 1942), 51-59.

⁵¹ The order of aged men, the three orders, and the association of male young adults followed the *giáp* which is a rural organisation based on masculinity. *Giáp* literally means the male line in a village. In a *giáp* there were three sectors: *ti ấu* (children up to 18 years old men), *đinh* (free men from 18 to 59 years old), and *lão* (men from 60 years old and above). Freemen are official members of this male organisation. They are inscribed on the village roles for their taxes, corvée, and military service; in return of these services they are given a piece of public rice field. The leader of a *giáp* is called *ông Giáp* (the chief of *giáp*) which was also the term used for a member in a parish board of dignitaries. Cf. Thêm, *Tim về bản sắc*, 206-210; Jamieson, "The Traditional Vietnamese Village," 25-28; Hickey, "The Vietnamese Village," 6-9. In a traditional and typical village, the upper strata of village society were known as the *Ban kỳ mục* (Council of Notables) or *Hội Tư vấn* (Assembly of literari). A less illustrious designation was *quan viên* (officials). Directly beneath the notables in status were the village elders, those males above 50 years of age. Upon reaching the age of 60, village elders moved into a higher status, *lão nhiều*. Above them was a still higher status which was itself divided into four more levels determined by relative ages. Beneath the elders came full village members between the ages of 18 and 50 or 55. The lowest level was that of the male youths of the village ranging from six or seven to 18 or so years of age.

unofficially formed an association called *mụ lão* (association of aged women) which worked beside the associations of young female adults. The lack of women members in the order of aged men and the three orders in the parish structure was due to the influence of patriarchy in society and in the local church.

In this parochial organisation, parish priests were considered heads or leaders. Their leadership was expressed in spiritual as well as in other socially related areas. While the former was expressed in sacramental life, the latter was in social life. The relationship between the religious and social life made the roles of priests more influential regarding their faithful. Priests were consulted to solve conflicts at the family, clan, community or parish levels. They also had some influence on government officials.

Lay leaders formed a Board of dignitaries which consisted of some dozen members of four ranks: *ông Trùm* (the leader or chief of the Board), *ông Câu* (the assistant to the leader), *ông Biện* (the scribe) and *ông Giáp* (the chief of a community).⁵² These titles which came from the administration of villages in Vietnamese society were adapted to the organisation of Christian communities.⁵³ Generally, there was one leader, one or two assistants to the leader, some scribes and community chiefs depending on the number of Catholics in a parish. These dignitaries were nominated by parish priests after due consideration of necessary qualities of the candidates. Because their role was that of a collaborator with parish priests and a representative of parishioners they were to be good Christians, particularly in moral standing, and of a mature age, respected by the people in the community.

The roles and functions of dignitaries were stated in a constitution of the board of dignitaries. They voluntarily exercised their roles in and outside the church for the welfare of community as well as of individuals. They presided over prayers before Mass and evening prayers or devotions, particularly seasonal devotions, such as the Stations of the Cross in Lent, the rosary in May and October, the devotions to Saint Joseph in March or to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in June. They took important roles in presiding over Sunday celebrations without the presence of priests. They also took care of the teaching of the catechism to children, of preparing people for sacraments, such as baptism, marriage

⁵² Cadière, "Organisation et fonctionnement d'une chrétienté vietnamienne," 305-318, 723-737, 916-969, 1051-1062.

⁵³ Cf. Ánh, *Làng xã Việt Nam*, 57-75; Insun, "The Changing Nature of the Red River Delta Villages," 156. Villages in Vietnam often had the following organisations: *Hội đồng kỳ mục* (the council of village notables) and *Hội đồng lý dịch* (the council of village officials). The first council was a self-management body in villages which had power to decide on affairs such as taxation, corvees, construction/renovation of temples or pagodas and organisation of festivals. The second organisation was a village executive and a State representative apparatus. The head of this council was *lý trưởng* (village chief) who was assisted by *phó lý* (deputy village chief). Both were elected by the council or villagers and were recognised by the State.

and anointing the sick. Every year, they helped parish priests write reports on the sacramental life of the parish. In their activities outside the church, they formed a tribunal to resolve scandals or conflicts and to promote the Christian as well as moral life among parishioners. They also looked after the parish property or farming since parishes usually had some land for rice growing, the main income of rural parishes. In other words, they took care of the needs of the parish/community as well as of people and performed these tasks as in the family.

The roles of members of the three orders and of the associations for young adults were recognised in religious celebrations or services. Members of the three orders and sometimes of the order of the aged contributed their labour and money to carry out parish activities or to build parish structures, such as churches, chapels and schools. Young adults formed parish choirs or actively participated in liturgical and para-liturgical celebrations. They were divided into different groups to take part in prayers and devotions in the parish.

In addition, the physical arrangements in a church reflected the division of different sectors in the organisation of a parish. The space in a church was usually allocated separately to men and women; men on the left side and women on the right. They sat either on mats or on benches. The first ranks were given to children and young adults, then, benches in the middle were for parishioners of the three orders, and the last benches were for the aged people. Members of the Board of dignitaries occupied either one or two last benches or some reserved seats in the church. This arrangement of space or seats in a church aimed at keeping order in the church rather than being discriminatory. The order of space for children, young adults, adults and aged people were located one after the other so that the older could look after the younger ones. In other words, this arrangement followed the order in families: grandparents or parents, adults, young adults and children.

The familial character of the parish was also expressed in the terms used for Catholic communities and in the patterns of address among members of the people of God. In terms of catholic community, a community or a parish could be called *họ đạo*,⁵⁴ which

⁵⁴ The term “*họ đạo*” has been used popularly for parishes in South Vietnam. It could be also used for a sub-parish. For parishes in North and Central Vietnam, the term “*xứ đạo*” which was appropriate for a parish in terms of number of parishioners since a “*xứ đạo*” (parish) was founded from many *họ đạo* (sub-parishes). Cf. Forest, *Les missionnaires français*, vol. 3, 315-317 ; Nguyễn Hồng Dương, “*Tìm hiểu tổ chức xứ, họ đạo của Công giáo Nam bộ*,” [Understanding the organisation of a Catholic parish in South Vietnam] *Nghiên cứu Tôn giáo* 3 (2002), 34-43, and “*Tìm hiểu tổ chức xứ, họ đạo của Công giáo ở miền bắc từ đầu thế kỷ XVII đến đầu thế kỷ*,” [Understanding the organisation of a Catholic parish in North Vietnam from 17th century to 20th century] *Nghiên cứu Tôn giáo* 4 (2002), 8; 30-37; Hass and Cong, *Vietnam: The Other Conflict*, 11-13.

literally meant a clan of people belonging to the same religion. The term “họ đạo” came from the approach used to form a Christian community during missionary periods in Vietnam. Baptism was often conferred on members of one family or on one extended family or a clan, thanks to the close relationships among its members. A big number of people in an extended family or a clan were baptised and therefore became a “họ đạo”. It also happened that during persecution periods, Catholics came to live together and were organised into a village/community to protect themselves. That structure was continued after persecution. In terms of patterns of address, the Vietnamese Catholics called local priests *cha* (father), missionary or foreign priests *ông cố* (great grandfather) and women religious *dì* or *dì phước* (aunt/blessed aunt). When they addressed religious, priests and bishops, they also considered themselves as *con*, which could mean either son or daughter depending on the gender of the lay people. The terms “cha - con” (father - children) are also used to address religious and clergy. Often younger religious and priests considered themselves as *con* (son/daughter) and addressed older priests as *cha* (father). Religious and priests also called their bishops, *đức cha*,⁵⁵ and in return, bishops addressed all including lay, religious and clergy as *con*. These terms reflect the familial relationships among laity, religious and clergy and have been used up to the present.

In a word, the organisation of a parish was structured after that of a family and, in terms of administration, was similar to that of a village. Lay leaders, including heads of associations, looked after community members, properties, and needs with concerns as in the family. All people in the parish, even children, contributed their efforts voluntarily to the benefit of the parish as they did for their family. The spirit of community and family has strengthened the activities of parishes; however, it also needs to be renewed for a more participatory structure in the local church. Moreover, the ministry of priests and the Christian life of parishioners should be appropriately changed in order to respond adequately to the various needs of, and changes, in the church and society today.

5.1.4 The Congregation of the Lovers of the Holy Cross

The first local women’s congregation founded in Vietnam was the *Congregation of LHC* whose members have been called *dì* or *dì phước*. In Vietnam, this term has been applied particularly to religious of local congregations since a nun belonging to foreign orders has often been called “soeur” (sister).⁵⁶ Indeed, the term of address *dì*, is very familial

⁵⁵ The term “đức cha” (bishop) is combined by a title of respect *đức* and the word *cha*. The main word in this term is *cha* (father).

⁵⁶ The French word “soeur” rather than the English one, “sister”, was used for women religious because of French influence in Vietnam.

language.⁵⁷ The relation of the congregation to the model of the church as the family can be seen not only in the title or the name used for women religious but also in the activities of the congregation which were directed to the welfare of Vietnamese families.

The *Congregation of LHC* was established in 1670 in Tonkin and 1671 in Cochinchina. However, the origin of this congregation can be dated to some 30 years earlier. According to Ravier,⁵⁸ during the persecution of the Lord Trịnh, probably in 1640, there were three catholic women from the West of Thăng Long who went to Kẻ Chợ to become martyred witnesses to Jesus, but the persecution was over when they arrived there. Nevertheless, they wanted to live together in order to follow the call to perfection rather than to separate and go back to their own place. Their way of life attracted many other women who came and shared their community life. They possibly received spiritual direction from the Jesuits to help them in their life of chastity and poverty. However, the missionaries did not think of establishing a women's congregation because of the difficult situation in Vietnam during times of persecution. This women's community numbered some thirty members in 1666 when Deydier came to Tonkin. In 1667, he sent a report about this women's community to Bishop Pallu, Vicar Apostolic of Tonkin, and also expressed his concern to have a rule for their community life.⁵⁹ However, it was not Bishop Pallu but Bishop Lambert de la Motte who would become the founder of a congregation for those women although Bishop Pallu was first consulted.

Bishop Pallu was assigned to Tonkin, but, since he could not go there to look after his flock, he asked Bishop de la Motte to visit Tonkin on his behalf. On the pastoral visit of Bishop de la Motte to Tonkin in August 1669, he was presented by Father Deydier with a women's group who had assisted him since his arrival in Tonkin. The bishop studied this group carefully and then founded a congregation called *Les Amantes de la croix* (*the Lovers of the Holy Cross*). He also gave them the rules of the congregation and accepted the vows of the first two members, Sisters Agnes and Paula. A ceremony was held at Phố Hiến on 19th February 1670 and became the foundation day of the congregation. Sister Agnes was assigned as superior of the community at Bái Vàng (Hà Nội) and Sister Paula as superior at Kiên Lao (Nam Định). The process of foundation of the Congregation only took a short time since it followed the rules the bishop had written for

⁵⁷ *Di* is the mother's younger sister who will always replace the role of the dead mother to look after a child as a Vietnamese proverb says that the baby will nurse his/her aunt if his/her mother dies (*sây mẹ bú di*).

⁵⁸ H. Ravier Khanh, *Sử ký Hội thánh, III* [The history of the church, III] (Ninh Phú Đường: 1894), 159-160; cited in *Tiểu sử Đức cha Phêrô-Maria Lambert de la Motte* [The biography of Bishop Pierre-Marie Lambert de la Motte] (TP Hồ Chí Minh: Nhóm nghiên cứu linh đạo Miền Thánh Giá, 1998), 29.

⁵⁹ Forest, *Les missionnaires français*, vol. 2, 147.

a similar group called the *institution of the Lovers of the Holy Cross* when he was at Juthia in Thailand (1667).⁶⁰

In Cochinchina, the establishment of the *Congregation of LHC* followed the same process as occurred in Tonkin. In 1671, Bishop de la Motte made his first pastoral visit to Cochinchina. He arrived at Nha Trang on 1st September 1671 and in December he left for Quảng Ngãi where he met a group of some ten women. These had sent a letter to Bishop de la Motte when he was in Thailand to present their request to become the candidates of a religious congregation. After considering their sincere intention and the need of the local church, Bishop de la Motte established another community of the *Congregation of LHC* at An Chĩ (Quảng Ngãi) during the Christmas of 1671. He gave the same rule made for the congregation in Tonkin to this community in Cochinchina.

The mission of the *Congregation of LHC* covered these areas: to practise penitence, to meditate and pray regularly, to educate young Christian women and teenagers as well as people other than Christians, to baptise children in case of emergency and to help fallen women return to a dignified life.⁶¹ In relation to the local church their mission was to assist the clergy particularly in their apostolate with families and to sanctify the faithful. Thus besides the adoration of the cross through mediation as described by the name of the congregation, the mission of *religious of LHC* was devoted particularly to the well-being of the Vietnamese families in terms of education of children and women. Indeed, the Regulations in 1869 showed that the congregation had a family structure led by *chị cả* (the eldest sister) and *bà mối* (the intermediary sister). The sisters of the congregation lived in concert with women and widows as members of alternative families. Thus the structure of the community implied that it was free of class conflict.⁶²

Being aware of the congregational mission for the welfare of women and family, the daily works of *religious of LHC* were related directly to family issues. They were midwives in rural areas; this task earned them another popular title, *mụ* (midwife). This job was significant and beneficial to the physical and spiritual welfare of Vietnamese women. They looked after orphans and widows, and taught weaving, sewing and embroidery to

⁶⁰ The synod of 1664 in Ayutthaya (Thailand), which consisted of two bishops, de la Motte and Pallu, five priests and one lay assistant, planned to institute an apostolic congregation composed of three orders, and this congregation would be named the Congregation of "*Les Amantes de la Croix de Jesus Christ*" (The Lovers of the Holy Cross). Cf. For the history of the *Congregation of LHC*, see Launay, *Histoire de la mission du Tonkin*, vol. 1, 96-97; 106-108

⁶¹ Cf. Launay, *Histoire de la mission du Tonkin*, vol.1, 102-104; *Histoire de la mission de Cochinchine*, 97-99; Forest, *Les missionnaires français*, vol. 2, 146-147 ; vol. 3, 143-145.

⁶² Nhung Tuyet Tran, "*Les Amantes de la Croix: an Early Modern Vietnamese Sisterhood*," in G. Bousquet and N. Taylor (eds.), *Le Vietnam au féminin* (Paris: Les Indes Savants, 2005), 59-60; cf. *Phép Chị Em Mến Cầu Rút Đức Chúa Chi Thu* (Nôm Regulations 1869, 3.2), cited in Nhung, "*Les Amantes de la Croix*," 59.

women as mothers did in the family. They also taught catechism to children in parishes and helped people in writing and reading Vietnamese which was invented in the seventeenth century. These jobs and the similar ones assisted them to become well integrated in society. In particular, their social and charitable activities attracted the attention of people and led to the conversion of many Vietnamese.⁶³ Indeed, their original habit, particularly in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, was similar to that of ordinary women so that they could mingle with other women in their apostolate. However, those humble jobs of the *religious of LHC* have gradually been lost with the times due to either changes in the social situation of the country or a change in the awareness of the religious of the congregation had about their mission.⁶⁴

The apostolate of the *religious of LHC* required of their members a certain level of formal education or training including religious formation. Unfortunately, there are no accurate records of such matters available over the first three hundred years of the congregation. Presumably, the formal or academic education, including religious knowledge, of the members of the congregation in those years was not of a high standard, due to the scarcity of education during that time, the discrimination against women in the Confucian society of Vietnam, and the lack of formation of religious women in the church in Vietnam before the Second Vatican Council. The level of education, including theological and pastoral formation, of the members of the congregation has been upgraded since the 1990s, but the quality of this formation or training still needs to be improved to meet church requirements and the needs of contemporary society.⁶⁵

In 2003, the *Congregation of LHC* had 23 independent congregations in the dioceses in Vietnam with some 4500 final and temporary professed members who make up the majority of women religious in the country.⁶⁶ They have contributed to building up the local church in many areas, but they have also been challenged by the needs of the church and society today.

⁶³ Cf. Cooke, "Early Nineteenth-Century Vietnamese Catholics," 281-282.

⁶⁴ Cf. "M. Guisain aux DSME, 1/12/1718," AME 655 fo 139; "Mgr Reydellet à Bertin, 22/6/1772", AME 700 fo 829; Forest, *Les missionnaires français*, vol. 3, 145; Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn, *Người mục tử cộng đồng hướng về tương lai* [The pastor of the community towards the future] (TP Hồ Chí Minh: Nhà xuất bản TP Hồ Chí Minh, 1996), 152-154; VBC, *Giáo hội Công giáo Việt Nam*, 394. The number of 20 houses/convents of the LHC in Tonkin which was unchanged during some seventy years in the eighteenth century (1701-1770). Forest considered this stability of the convents as the institutionalisation of the LHC since, to some extent, the original mission or charism was changed. According to the 2003 statistics, there were 1338 sisters teaching in nurseries and kindergartens, but there were 326 sisters involving in other social apostolate. In social apostolate a small number of sisters work in centres for fallen women.

⁶⁵ Sơn, *Người mục tử cộng đồng*, 131-179.

⁶⁶ VBC, *Giáo hội Công giáo Việt Nam*, 391-394.

5.1.5 Ecclesiological Aspects and Critiques of the Three Contextualised Organisations

From an ecclesiological viewpoint one can recognise the missionary importance of the three institutions as described above for the development of the church as the family of God in Vietnam. The organisation of *the house of the Lord* and of *lay leaders and associations in parishes* reflect the contribution of lay catechists to the mission of the church as well as the appreciation of the role of the laity in the church. The *Congregation of LHC* shows the contribution of women religious in the church and society and the complementary apostolates of clergy and women religious. These institutions also highlight the successful efforts of missionaries at integrating into the Vietnamese family structure and customs. To some extent the French missionaries who continued the pastoral approach of the pioneer Jesuits followed the instruction of the Sacred Congregation of *Propaganda Fidei* given to vicars apostolic of foreign missions in Tonkin and Cochinchina in the area of inculturation.⁶⁷ The success of the three institutions substantiates this comment. Indeed, one of the activities of these institutions was the charitable works carried out by the Vietnamese church in the nineteenth century which were praised by people and officials.⁶⁸ However, to a large extent, these institutions belong to a Tridentine model of the church, that is, a hierarchical one, which could be seen as an obstacle for the church in Vietnam in developing the model of the church as the family of God in the present time and into the future.

⁶⁷ Before the bishops' departure for the missions in Tonkin and Cochinchina they received specific guidelines for their missionary work which needs to observe the four following principles: (1) to form a local clergy, (2) to preserve a close union with Rome, (3) to keep away from national politics, (4) to respect local cultures and customs and to adapt to them with prudence. In Chapter Three, Article 1, the Instruction of 1659 "to Vicars Apostolic departing for the Chinese kingdoms of Tonkin and Cochinchina" writes "the main reason which induced the Sacred Congregation to send you as bishops to these regions is that with all possible ways and means you so form the youth as to make them capable of receiving the priesthood ... Do not in any way attempt and do not on any pretext persuade these peoples to change their rites, customs, and mores unless these are clearly contrary to religion and good morals ... Nothing causes more hatred and alienation than changing the customs of a country, especially those by which the memory of their ancestors is preserved". This English translation is by Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 193-194. With regards to the communication with the Sacred Congregation, the Instruction states "you have to put all your care, your ardour and your study to organise the in-and-out- correspondence [with the Sacred Congregation] in the best conditions of security". Cf. The text of these guidelines is found in *Collectanea Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fidei* (Roma, 1907), vol. 1, 42-43; Henri Chappoulie, *Aux origines d'une Eglise: Rome et les missions d'Indochine au XVIIe siècle*, vol. 1 (Paris: Bloud et Gay, 1943), 400.

⁶⁸ Cf. Retord, April 1852, *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi* (APF) 25 (1853), 94-95: "They [the Catholics] feed the hungry, they give clothing to the cold, they help the unfortunate, they console the afflicted; they gather together to give their dead honourable funerals ... they regard everyone as members of a single and same body ... How would they consent to abandon their Religion to follow ours? Is it not rather to be feared that, on the contrary, seduced by the attraction of charity their followers will not become daily more numerous?" cited in Cooke, "Early Nineteenth-Century Vietnamese Catholics," 282.

The organisation of catechists and the *house of the Lord* are structures unique to the church in Vietnam which provided many Vietnamese priests and catechists.⁶⁹ The *house of the Lord* was structured as a community as well as a family in order to carry out many tasks in the mission of the local church. It was a community of foreign missionaries, Vietnamese priests, catechists, seminarians and helpers, but the majority of its members were catechists and its candidates; all community members functioned as those in one family. They did not have private property since they lived on the common budget of the vicariate or the parish. Catechists, seminarians and helpers considered priests and bishops as their spiritual fathers who allocated jobs to them and looked after their material, intellectual and spiritual needs. In return, they obeyed their clerical superiors and showed respect through the use of special titles and so forth. All members carried out their different liturgical and pastoral tasks in the parish in a complementary way. Priests could perform their priestly ministry thanks to the assistance of catechists in teaching catechism and in preparing the faithful to receive the sacraments. Catechists could devote themselves full-time to their apostolate because they were assisted by “coadjutors” or helpers who spent their time in manual works. The *house of the Lord* could be an expression of a collaborative model of the church (involving missionaries, local priests and catechists) in which a clear division of tasks was defined according to the vocation or ministry of each member. The communal character of the church was clearly emphasised in this organisation.

Catechists were given considerable support and were trained at the *house of the Lord*. The ministry of catechists was developed because there was a budget to help their activities and to look after them.⁷⁰ Thanks to this support catechists could devote themselves totally to their ministry. Catechists were primarily trained at the *house of the Lord*, then at schools for catechists. After their formation they returned to the *house of the Lord* to perform various tasks of the teaching ministry, but at the same time they were still trained by priests living in the house. The financial support and a permanent formation in the house were significant since it provided the local church with many vocations to the priesthood and a great number of catechists. That kind of support and formation is still needed for the preparation of seminary candidates and for catechists to carry out their mission in today’s church.⁷¹

⁶⁹ For the first Vietnamese priests from the *house of the Lord*, see Forest, *Les missionnaires français*, vol. 2, 144-146.

⁷⁰ Launay, *Histoire de la mission du Tonkin*, vol.1, 95-6; cf. Article 10 of the Synod of Tonkin.

⁷¹ Cf. Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis* 51.

However, the institution of catechists and the *house of the Lord* were hierarchical and patriarchal in organisation.⁷² The duties of the lower ranks or members were subject to the higher ones as younger to older brothers or children to parents in the family. Such a structure reflected the hierarchy among their members, particularly between the clergy and laity members, and the hierarchical nature of society at large. Forest commented on the gradual loss of the family character in the *house of the Lord*.⁷³ The practice of a budget common to foreign missionaries, Vietnamese priests and catechists as described in the synod of Tonkin disappeared little by little; family-style meals in common were replaced by separate tables. The hierarchical distinction inevitably led to clericalism. Though there was a division of tasks or ministries, there was not yet a structure of co-responsibility among the various ministries in a participatory church. They are the areas which the local church needs to give more attention in order to overcome clericalism.

The *house of the Lord* as an institution that had developed particularly in parishes in North Vietnam was discontinued after 1954 because of historical and ecclesial changes.⁷⁴ Since 1954, under the communist government, the Catholics in the north suffered because of a lack of personnel and of the government control of church activities.⁷⁵ Members of the *house of the Lord* could not work in the north, while those who moved to the south had to adapt to the new situation. Some who wanted to live in community had to be integrated into new dioceses. As members of a religious community they had to follow the instructions of the Second Vatican Council on consecrated or apostolate life. So the original institution of the *house of the Lord* could not develop and it had to be adapted to the new situation. Indeed, there are some secular institutes following the spirit of the *house of the Lord* which is expressed through

⁷² Forest, *Les missionnaires français*, vol. 3, 106 ; 141-143. Cf. Cooke, "Early Nineteenth-Century Vietnamese Catholics," 285: "In the *maisons de Dieu* and the mission generally, hierarchical distinctions rested on age, learning, moral authority or spiritual qualities, not on wealth or inherited status. By the mid-nineteenth century these Catholic institutions may have arguably been closer in practice to certain Confucian social virtues (deference to age, learning, moral qualities and the disinterestedness of the upright man) and the defensive ideals of traditional peasant society (mutual support, fair sharing of resources, disinterested justice, fraternal feeling among fellow villagers) than most other villages and organisation in Tonkin at the time".

⁷³ Forest, *Les missionnaires français*, vol. 3, 106.

⁷⁴ Cf. VBC, *Giáo hội Công giáo Việt Nam*, 347; 352; 529-530 ; Louis A. Wiesner, "Vietnam - Exodus from the North and Movement to the North 1954-55," *The Vietnam Forum* 11 (1988), 236. It is noted that the Geneva Accords (1954) divided Vietnam into North and South Vietnam with different political regimes: communist in the north and nationalist in the south. In South Vietnam, some institutes following the spirit of the *house of the Lord* developed after 1954 are: Tu hội Nhà Chúa Thánh Gioan Tiên sứ, Tu Đoàn Tông đồ Giáo sĩ Nhà Chúa, and Anh em Nhà Chúa. These institutes inherit the spirit of the *house of the Lord* and combine it with the conciliar renewal on the consecrated life. Members of these institutes consist of priests and professed members whose apostolates are to help parish priests and to work for family apostolate.

⁷⁵ Cf. Hass and Cong, *Vietnam: The Other Conflict*, 20-24. The Catholics suffered because of the control of the communist government of church activities and lack of personnel. Among one million refugees to the South, who fled the communist regime, there were some 800,000 Catholics including two bishops and hundreds of priests and religious.

ministries for the family. However, the role of catechists in Vietnam is still important in the local church. They have contributed to evangelisation, but have faced some challenges in carrying out their vocation, such as the local church's lack of concern for their financial support and structures for their formation.⁷⁶ The need for formation and co-responsibility still provides a major challenge in promoting the role of catechists in the church in Vietnam today.

The organisation of a parish, particularly that of lay leaders, showed that the laity were appreciated in the local church. The establishment of lay leaders in communities or parishes as officially recognised in the documents of the first synod of Tonkin is a significant recognition of the participation of the laity in the church in Vietnam. In a hierarchical church and society of the seventeenth century, the promotion of a leadership from below is a surprising and remarkable effort.⁷⁷ The Board of dignitaries of Vietnamese parishes had been established almost 300 years before parish pastoral councils in the style of the Vatican II. This indicated something of the vision of church leaders in the seventeenth century in Vietnam for the development of a local church and the promotion of the laity which would become the major emphasis in the church today.

However, there were some limitations in the organisation of a parish with its emphasis on internal activities. It also showed the lack of women's participation in the leadership of the board of dignitaries or pastoral councils. Liturgical and sacramental activities were primary, while social responsibilities were not stressed enough. Women did not have an equal role with men. The limitations needed to be addressed seriously in order to develop the social mission of the church and the active participation of women in the church's structures.

The great contribution of the *Congregation of LHC* to the church in Vietnam was its advancement of the role of women religious as collaborators of the clergy and as pastoral workers in society. Bishop de la Motte⁷⁸ envisioned priests as soldiers in battles and women religious as people of prayer and charitable services. This twofold mission or service in the church was complementary. The synod of Tonkin required that priests

⁷⁶ Cf. VBC, *Bản trả lời*, I, 12. In their responses, the Vietnamese bishops acknowledge that "...among the agents of evangelisation there is a very limited intellectual and doctrinal level, a level of doctrinal formation which leaves much to be desired. This state of affairs or situation is seen not only at the level of non specialized catechists in the parishes but also in some seminaries and novices". See also Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn, "Báo cáo tổng kết về tình hình 25 giáo phận trong năm qua," [The final report on the activities of the 25 dioceses], *Hiệp Thông* 20-21 (2003), 75-76. According to this report, there were 51,156 catechists in 2003.

⁷⁷ Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 101.

⁷⁸ E. M. Durand, "Les Amantes de la Croix en Indochine," *Les Missions Catholiques* (1931), 428; cited in Nhóm nghiên cứu, *Tiểu sử Đức cha Phêrô-Maria Lambert de la Motte*, 12.

must have a special care for women living the consecrated life.⁷⁹ On their part, women religious of the *Congregation of LHC* have contributed much to the missionary work of the local church. Their apostolate as mentioned in the rules of the congregation since its foundation was to baptise children at home but later on other pastoral works, such as teaching catechism, organising associations and choirs in parishes were included in their mission. Theoretically, it was a form of co-responsibility between priests and women religious in the mission of the church and the apostolate of the family. These women religious were appropriately called agents of the apostolate of the family.⁸⁰ The clergy need to support the charisms and the contribution of these women religious in order to avoid clericalism. However, in order to fulfil the above apostolate the formation of the congregation needed further development to meet church requirements and to the needs of the local church in contemporary society.

Women religious of the *Congregation of LHC* have been involved in the social apostolate since its foundation in 1670. It was a significant initiative of Bishop Lambert de la Motte, the founder of the congregation, in the historical context of the seventeenth century.⁸¹ This apostolate was one of the pioneering initiatives in the universal church and has been much appreciated in Vietnamese society. Yet this needs to be further strengthened and contextualised in order to show to people that the church is a family for all.

The implications of the model of the church as family were successful, but its implications were still in the area of internal structures or organisations of the local church rather than in the solidarity with people other than Christians and with society at large. In other words, the ecclesiology of this model was ecclesiocentric. The three institutions, modelled as they were on the structure and the spirit of the Vietnamese family, were often more concerned with the needs of their own members rather than with the larger church and society.

⁷⁹ Cf. Article 18 of the Synod of Tonkin; cited in Launay, *Histoire de la mission du Tonkin*, 96.

⁸⁰ Cf. FC 74. FC considers religious as agents of the pastoral care of the family by saying that "Hence the possibility for men and women religious [...], to develop their service to families, with particular solicitude for children, especially if they are abandoned, unwanted, orphaned, poor or handicapped. They can also visit families and look after the sick".

⁸¹ It is noted that the Ursulines, founded by St Angela Merici in 1535 and the Visitation Sisters, by St Jane Frances de Chantal and St Francis de Sales in 1650, were among the pioneers in promoting women religious to work outside the cloister. But Rome halted these efforts and reimposed the cloister. It was St Vincent de Paul (1581-1660), founder of the Daughters of Charity, who insisted that the sisters would have no convent but the hospital and no chapel but the parish church. The Daughters of Charity started the mission of aiding the poorest of the poor since 1633. However, it was Pope Leo XIII who recognised congregations committed to the active apostolate as true religious. In the case of the Vietnamese congregation of the Lovers of the Holy Cross, probably because the congregation was a local one, it was not much affected by the decisions of Rome concerning the issue of social apostolate.

In general, the model of the *institution of catechists*, of the *house of the Lord* and of *parish organisation* was mainly the pyramidal or top-down in structure, typical of pre-conciliar ecclesiology. Though lay people, including women in parishes, helpers in the *house of the Lord*, were the majority in the church or in these organisations, they were at the bottom of the pyramidal model and were dependent on the minority of clergy. Such a model, although it can be defended by saying that it reflected an ecclesiology of that period in the post-Tridentine tradition,⁸² did indeed also reflect a positive aspect: it acknowledged the contribution of the laity in the Vietnamese church at that time.

The church in Vietnam has benefited from having utilised the family as the ecclesiological model as instanced in these three institutions. Catechists and lay leaders contributed significantly to the development of the local church through their various functions while *religious of LHC* have been the collaborators with priests and lay people in carrying out these functions in parishes as well as in society. The structure of the *house of the Lord* no longer exists, but the spirit of family and community of this organisation still remains in the organisations at diocesan and parish levels.⁸³ *Familiaris Consortio* still encourages bishops to act as fathers and pastors in order “to make diocese ever more truly a ‘diocesan family’, a model and source of hope for the many families that belong to it”.⁸⁴ The organisation of the parish pastoral council and lay associations has been strengthened by the active participation of the laity in the church and society. Indeed, in Vietnam, pastoral councils at parish level have been developed at diocesan level since the renewal of the Second Vatican Council. The *Congregation of LHC* continues to develop its missions for the service of the local church.

The three institutions have got much interest from the people of God in Vietnam and entered into their consciousness since they are really necessary for the church and society. The number of catechists, seminarians, religious and parish council members has been increasing through the structure of organising parishes as family, even in difficult times. However, the quality of the formation and the competence of these people need to be given more attention so that they can respond adequately to the need of the

⁸² The post-Tridentine ecclesiology could be seen in the decrees of the Council of Trent (1545-1547, 1551-1552, 1561-1563) and in the ecclesiology of the *Catechism of the Council of Trent* (1566). The organisational structure of the Roman Church was hierarchical consisting in offices and functions which are also sacred orders. Church activities, particularly prayer and worship, revolved around the celebration of the eucharist and the sacraments in the parish church. The relation of the church to the world was not emphasized in the decrees and the Catechism. Cf. Roger Haight, *Christian Community in History*, vol. 2, 270-275. For the Tridentine ecclesiology, see Rigal, *Le mystère de l'Eglise*, 29-54.

⁸³ Some bishop's houses are popularly known as *nhà chung* which literally means the common house for all the faithful, for example, Nhà chung Hà Nội and Nhà chung Phú Cường.

⁸⁴ FC 73; cf. LG 26.

church and society.⁸⁵ In addition, the model of the church as the family of God also presents certain challenges: Can the negative aspects of the three institutions be overcome? Can this model be implemented in the new context of the church built on conciliar ecclesiology? And can it meet the needs of today's society?

5.2 The Concept of the Church as the Family of God in the Documents of the Vietnamese Church⁸⁶

Pope John XXIII issued the Decree *Venerabilium Nostrorum* to establish the hierarchy of Vietnam on 24th November 1960. The Vietnamese church then was made up of three ecclesiastical provinces consisting of three archdioceses and seventeen dioceses.⁸⁷ Thanks to that establishment of the Vietnamese church, some bishops attended the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and could present their own vision of the church during the council.

5.2.1 The Church as the Family of God in the Conciliar Interventions of Bishop Nguyễn Văn Hiền

Bishop Simon Hoà Nguyễn Văn Hiền of Đà Lạt (Vietnam), during the second session of the Second Vatican Council, made an intervention on the theme of the church as the family of God.⁸⁸ His arguments are mainly founded on biblical and anthropological foundations. He also argued that such an ecclesiological would provide many advantages for all people and for the religious life of the church.

According to Bishop Nguyễn Văn Hiền, the biblical foundation of the concept of the church as the family of God could be found particularly in the New Testament. In fact,

⁸⁵ Cf. VBC, *Bản trả lời*, I, 10-13; VBC, *Thư chung của Hội đồng Giám mục Việt nam gửi cộng đồng dân Chúa dịp Hội nghị thường niên 1998 (Thư chung năm 1998)* [The 1998 Episcopal Letter of VBC to the people of God], no. 8.

⁸⁶ Cf. VBC, *Giáo hội Công giáo Việt Nam*, 197-203; 218-225. The historical development of the church in Vietnam in the twentieth century could be divided into three periods (1933-1954, 1954-1975, 1975- now) based on historical events. Each period has had significant events, religious and historical, which have contributed to the development of the local church. The first period is mentioned here for the purpose of understanding of the following periods. It covered the time from the start of the twentieth century to 1954 in which the most important event was the consecration of the first Vietnamese bishops after some 400 years of evangelisation in Vietnam. In 1933, Pope Pius IX nominated the first Vietnamese bishop for the apostolic diocese of Phát Diệm, Bishop John Baptist Nguyễn Bá Tông. The statistics of the local church showed an increase in clergy, religious and laity in 1933 compared with the record at the end of the previous century. The signing of the Geneva Accords in 1954 and the war afterwards had an impact on the structure and the activities of the church in North Vietnam.

⁸⁷ Cf. VBC, *Giáo hội Công giáo Việt Nam*, 235-239. At the present (2005), there are three archdioceses and twenty-three dioceses in Vietnam.

⁸⁸ Bishop Nguyễn Văn Hiền made his intervention and also submitted some observations supporting his intervention. See *Acta Synodalia*, vol. 2, pars II, 42-45 for the intervention, and vol. 1, pars IV, 513-516; vol. 2, pars I, 548-550 for the observations; cf. Xavier Rynne, *Vatican Council II* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 172; Floyd Anderson, ed., *Council Day Book, Vatican II*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1965), 160.

this concept, which was already foreshadowed in the Old Testament, became explicit in the gospels. Jesus revealed God to us as his Father and our Father (cf. Jn 20:7; Mt 6:9). As God's son, he taught that we are the children of God as well as brothers/sisters to one another (cf. Mt 23:8-18; Jn 1:12). Jesus often spoke of the reign of God in family language (Mt 24:25; 28:10).⁸⁹ Thus the church as the family of God refers to "the nature of the church and the relationship of the faithful to Christ and with each other".⁹⁰ These biblical references are clear statements on the church as the family of God because "where are father, child, brothers to be found if not in the family?"⁹¹ In a human family the union of its members is affected by blood relationship. Similarly, when people are called to be, and are, the children of God, it is Christ who has united them to himself bodily and in blood, by giving them "his flesh to eat and blood to drink" (Jn 6:57-59). The bishop further explained the participation in the divine family as follows:

By this participation with the body and blood of Christ, the human being may own a share in the divine nature and become a member of the divine family, not, indeed, naturally, as does the only-begotten Son, but by adoption, not merely through some contract, but by communion of divine blood, what is said in mystery taking place physically and morally.⁹²

The church as the family of God is in communion with the Trinity in its earthly life and will be led to its heavenly life. Indeed, the bishop emphasised and explained the trinitarian foundation of the concept:

The church of God, to which all people without exception are invited, is a divine-human family in which the members, under a common heavenly Father, through the merits of Christ our Saviour, impelled by the Spirit of love, become as the Son-adopted children of God - at first now on earth under the care of the apostles, led by Peter, and finally in heaven in the home of our Father, where there are [many] mansions.⁹³

⁸⁹ *Acta Synodalia*, vol. 1, pars IV, 514; vol. 2, pars II, 42. The bishop argues that "such a view of God's family, already foreshadowed in the Old Testament and almost everywhere indicated in the New Testament and the whole stream of tradition ... in a realistic way distributed and present everywhere, at once evident for all to recognise readily, and so familiar that they hardly remark specifically upon it".

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pars II, 43.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pars IV, 514.

⁹² *Ibid.* Cf. *Acta Synodalia*, vol. 2, pars II, 43. "Finally, may I recall how much of this reality of a divine family, [...], may be the best response to the chief foundations of revealed doctrine, for example, concerning the effect of justification in Christ, or of the sonship into which we are adopted; of baptism by which the faithful are not only incorporated as members of the church, but at the same time are reborn and introduced into it as children 'in the Son' ..., associated in a brotherly sharing into a fraternal activity".

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 515; cf. *Acta Synodalia*, vol. 2, pars II, 44. "The church can be designated as a family of the children of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit, [a family] which already begins here on earth under the pastoral ministry of the successors to the apostles, led by the Vicar of Christ, [a family] to which Christ does not cease to call all prodigal children and separated brethren, and finally which will come to perfection in our Father's house in which there are many mansions".

The family character of the church is explicit as the family of God is centred on Christ as the eldest brother. In that role Jesus “has revealed the Father to us, founded his church on Peter and committed its care to the apostles, not only in doctrinal teaching but also in sanctification, so that through the church we may draw near to him and be presented by him to the Father”.⁹⁴ In the family church, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of love among the family members.⁹⁵ Since it is embedded in the language of Jesus himself, understanding the church as the family of God is appropriate.⁹⁶

Besides the theological foundation, the concept of the church as family is accessible to the people. A theological anthropology expressed in family terms assists in communicating the mystery of the church to the country’s people, in a way that is close to their own experience. This biblical concept has, therefore, numerous advantages.⁹⁷

Inculturation was one of the reasons for the promotion of the concept of the church as the family of God. The bishop argued that, although the image of the body of Christ as described in Paul’s theology of the church was a profound metaphor, it needs to be complemented by the image of the church as family for the sake of contemporary people, particularly for those in Asian countries.⁹⁸

In the spiritual/liturgical life, the concept of the church as family helps the faithful to know the different kinds of worship or devotion. In any human family, reverence and love towards parents, brothers/sisters and other relatives are expressed in different degrees. Similarly, reverence and devotion should be shown accordingly to Christ, Mary and the saints in external and public signs since they have a relationship with God. “Towards

⁹⁴ *Acta Synodalia*, vol. 1, pars IV, 514.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* “In this family there pervades among its members a family sense which is the Spirit of love. For the Holy Spirit himself, in all things guiding the Son of Man in his mortal life, firstborn among many brothers, ruler of all creation, our brother, was promised so that the Spirit of truth would speak for them”.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* “This concept of the church as divine family seems to me to conform completely with Christ’s teaching, when he compared the church to a family, not merely figuratively”. Cf. *Acta Synodalia*, vol. 2, pars II, 42. “Christ often revealed and described his kingdom on earth: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a man who is head of his household’. Likewise, he more and more frequently presented the reality and special specific characteristics of the new dispensation in the same familial perspective”.

⁹⁷ *Acta Synodalia*, vol. 1, pars IV, 514-515: “The church as the family of God is an idea very close to man. The presentation of the mystery of the church in words connected to the family is very familiar and easy for everyone to understand. To present the church as the family of God helps Christians to come back to the gospel, to the very simple pedagogy of Jesus himself who often used family images; thanks to this, one can understand the gospel and can more easily penetrate it”.

⁹⁸ *Acta Synodalia*, vol. 1, pars IV, 513. “The apostle to the Gentiles presented [the teaching about the church] in the figure of ‘body’ of Christ, of which we are members – well known indeed – one with which Greeks and Romans were very familiar ... Now the twentieth century successors of Peter and the apostles have the duty of expressing the same doctrine to all peoples by means of this sacred council, even to those who are neither Greek nor Roman, for our duty is to ‘Greek and foreigner’... Our duty is to tell everyone about Christ and his church ... the notion of family without difficulty at once pervades the mind and moves the heart, for its clear reality is accessible to everyone”; cf. *Acta Synodalia*, vol. 2, pars I, 548; vol. 2, pars II, 44.

Christ, supreme worship [*latria*] because he is God-man, best honour [*hyperdulia*] towards the Blessed Virgin Mary, because she is Christ's mother and ours, towards the saints, honour [*dulia*] because they are the friends of God, towards superiors, obedience, towards lesser people, condescension and friendship".⁹⁹ In addition, the church as the family of God appeared frequently in liturgical prayers and in the canon of the mass.¹⁰⁰

In the moral life of the faithful the anthropological aspect of the concept of the church as family helps people to develop family values. Indeed, the anthropological foundation of the concept helps to present a doctrinal and theological concept to children, young and old people, learned and illiterate, Christians and people regardless of their faith, colour, age and nationality.¹⁰¹ "The notion of family without difficulty at once pervades the mind and moves the heart, for its clear reality is accessible to everyone".¹⁰² The church as a divine-human family promotes family values. This helps pastoral activities designed to restore the family and its values to its place of honour in the world where some family values have been declining.¹⁰³ In addition, the church as the family of God also has an ecumenical implication because "we ought to all ask our almighty Father so that at some future time brothers until now separated may return to the same father's house".¹⁰⁴

According to the bishop, it is not only Jesus but also his apostles who used the image of family or the family language when they described the church.¹⁰⁵ John called the faithful the children of God or brothers (Jn 11:52; 14:2-3; 1 Jn 3:1; 2:24; 4:49). Paul used the term "children and heirs of God", "co-heirs with Christ" and brothers (Rom 8:17, 1 Cor 3:1; 6:6) for the Christians in his communities. James considered people as brothers and sisters (Jas 2:15-16). Church Fathers and pastors in the church have continued the practice of addressing Christians or members in the church as brethren.¹⁰⁶ This implies

⁹⁹ *Acta Synodalia*, vol. 1, pars IV, 515; cf. *Acta Synodalia*, vol. 2, pars II, 44.

¹⁰⁰ *Acta Synodalia*, vol. 2, pars II, 43. "The sacred liturgy speaks in the same way, whether in prayers: Lord, look, we beg you, on this family of yours' and in the canon of the mass: therefore, [look on] this offering of our service, but also of your whole family".

¹⁰¹ *Acta Synodalia*, vol. 2, pars II, 44.

¹⁰² *Acta Synodalia*, vol. 1, pars IV, 514.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Acta Synodalia*, vol. 2, pars II, 43. The ecumenical implication of the concept of the [Roman Catholic] Church as the family of God in Vietnam was mentioned in the Introduction of this thesis.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 42: "Christ often revealed and described his kingdom on earth: 'The kingdom of Heaven is like a man who is head of his household'. Likewise, he more and more frequently presented the reality and specific characteristics of the new dispensation in the same familial perspective. So firstly, before his passion: 'You have one Father' (Mt 23:9); 'and thus you will pray: our Father' (Mt 6:9), 'you are all brothers' (Mt 23:8). After his passion: those familial terms, now redemption had been accomplished, took on their full meaning: 'Go to my brothers and say to them that I am ascending to my Fathers and yours' (Jn 20:17)".

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 43: "[I]n our holy preaching and even in this sacred gathering, every address is made with the words: 'Beloved and venerable brethren', never as 'dear members'. Cf. *Acta Synodalia*, vol. 1, pars IV, 514:

that the concept of the church as the family of God is commonly expressed in the language of daily life even to the present time.

During the sessions of the Second Vatican Council there were some other interventions about the concept of the church as the family of God, such as those of Archbishop Joseph d'Avack¹⁰⁷ and Bishop André Charue.¹⁰⁸ However, the intervention of Bishop Nguyễn Văn Hiền remains a significant theological contribution to the notion of the church as the family of God.¹⁰⁹

It is appropriate to acknowledge the mutual influence of the Instruction *Plane Compertum Est* and the conciliar intervention of Bishop Nguyễn Văn Hiền regarding the concept of the church as the family of God. Issued on 8th December 1939 *Plane Compertum Est* allowed the veneration of Confucius and ancestors in China and “other kingdoms and provinces bordering or adjacent to it [China]”.¹¹⁰ In other words, the Instruction issued by the Sacred Congregation of *Propaganda Fidei* acknowledges the contributions and the values of local cultures in the church. The permission expressed in the Instruction must also be extended to Vietnam since it has been one of the countries surrounding China. However, the reason for delaying the application of the Instruction in Vietnam was not clear. In fact, during the time prior to 1939, bishops in Vietnam published the guidelines or catechism in order to help Catholics in ancestor veneration.¹¹¹ Therefore, although the Instruction of 1939 was not yet applied in Vietnam, it still influenced the bishop's conciliar intervention which was officially acknowledged by other Vietnamese council fathers.¹¹² Indeed, other Vietnamese bishops at the council agreed with the concept of the church

“Christ is not ashamed to call them brothers...so that mercy might eventuate (Heb 2:11; 17), so that having brought redemption he might make us children of God (St Augustine) and indeed children in the Son (St John Chrysostom)”.

¹⁰⁷ *Acta Synodalia*, vol. 1, pars IV, 148-149.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 433.

¹⁰⁹ Dabiré, “Eglise-Famille de Dieu,” 98 ; Soạn, *Les institutions familiales*, 223-224.

¹¹⁰ AAS 32 (1940), 24-25. Cf. Minamiki, *The Chinese Rites Controversy*, 197.

¹¹¹ During the long period between the Bull *Ex Quo Singulari* (1742) and the Instruction *Plane Compertum Est* (1939) the vicars apostolic (bishops) of Tonkin (Vietnam), through some local synods, gave the instructions concerning the honour of Confucius and the veneration of ancestors to Vietnamese Catholics, such as the synod of Gò Thj (1841), the first synod of Kê Sắt (1900), and the second synod of Kê Sờ (1912). Bishops also published some catechetical books, such as *Chơn đạo dẫn giải* (the true religion explained) and *Hiếu kính cha mẹ* (filiality and respect of parents). Both were printed in 1912 and 1923 respectively. For Vietnamese Catholics in the context of the Chinese rites controversy during that long period, see De, *A Cultural and Theological Foundation for Ancestor Veneration*, 160-222.

¹¹² *Acta Synodalia*, vol. 2, pars II, 45. Bishop Hiền mentioned the agreement of other six Vietnamese bishops about his intervention on the church as family. “The Most Reverend Doctors concur with this opinion [the church as family]: Thaddeus Tu, Joseph Dai, Dominic Doan, Michael Ngu, Anthony Thien, Philip Dien”.

as family presented by Bishop Nguyễn Văn Hiền, and later unanimously worked for the implementation of this concept.

Three months after the conciliar intervention of Bishop Nguyễn Văn Hiền, on 22nd January 1964, the Vietnamese hierarchy in the south sent a letter to *Propaganda Fidei* applying for an extension of the Instruction *Plane Compertum Est* to Vietnam. The application was approved on 2nd October 1964.¹¹³ Accordingly, on 14th June 1965, the Vietnamese bishops issued a statement entitled *Thông cáo của Hội đồng Giám mục Việt Nam về Việc Tôn kính Tổ tiên và các Bậc Anh hùng Liệt sĩ* (Announcement of the conference of the Vietnamese bishops regarding the veneration of ancestors and heroes) which presented the concrete norms for the implementation of the Instruction.¹¹⁴ With regard to practices concerning the communication in 1965, the bishops issued an announcement in order to specify the practices, attitudes and rituals which are permissible in the veneration of ancestors (11th November 1974).¹¹⁵ The authorization of the veneration of ancestors in Vietnam has gradually facilitated evangelisation and the correct understanding of the church as the family of God.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Cf. VBC, *Giáo hội Công giáo Việt Nam*, 487-490; Nguyễn Văn Bình, “Văn kiện về Lễ nghi tôn kính tổ tiên,” [Documents on the rites of ancestor veneration] and Angelo Palmas, “Letter of October 14, 1964 to Paul Nguyễn Văn Bình, Archbishop of Saigon,” *Sacerdos* 36 (1964), 890-893; “Thông cáo của Hội Đồng Giám Mục Việt Nam về Việc Tôn kính Tổ Tiên và các bậc Anh Hùng Liệt Sĩ,” [Announcement of the conference of the Vietnamese bishops regarding the veneration of ancestors and heroes] *Sacerdos* 43 (1965), 489-492; “Hội thảo về Phúc âm hóa: vấn đề thờ cúng tổ tiên (Nha Trang 14/11/1974),” in VBC, *Giáo hội Công giáo Việt Nam*, 490.

In reply to the letter of the Vietnamese bishops, Cardinal Gregory Agagianian, Prefect of *Propaganda Fidei*, sent a letter of 2nd October 1964 to the Apostolic Nuncio Angelo Palmas in Saigon informing the approval of the request for the application of the Instruction to Vietnam. Then, in his letter of 14th October 1964, the Apostolic Nuncio officially announced this good news to Archbishop Paul Nguyễn Văn Bình of Saigon. “Through the document no. 3787/64, dated the second of this month, Cardinal Gregory Peter Agagianian, the Prefect of the Congregation has just let me know that: the Holy Father, in the audience on 29th September 1964, joyfully accepted the above petition and gave permission to Vietnam to apply the Instruction “*Plane Compertum Est*” that the Congregation of Evangelisation had sent to the Ordinaries of China on 8th December 1939”. After receiving the letter of the Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Paul wrote a pastoral letter, entitled “Văn kiện về lễ nghi tôn kính Tổ tiên” (Document on the rites of ancestor veneration) to the clergy, religious and the faithful in Vietnam. This letter briefly explained the biblical and cultural backgrounds of ancestor veneration, the reasons of this veneration and ordered that the bishops would promulgate the directives and regulations of the practical application of ancestor veneration.

¹¹⁴ “Thông cáo của Hội Đồng Giám Mục Việt Nam về Việc Tôn kính Tổ Tiên và các bậc Anh Hùng Liệt Sĩ,” 489-492.

¹¹⁵ “Hội thảo về Phúc âm hóa: vấn đề thờ cúng tổ tiên (Nha Trang 14/11/1974),” 490: “The gestures, attitudes, and rites which by themselves or due to circumstances clearly contain a secular meaning to express patriotism, filial piety, respect, or remembrance of ancestors and heroes (e.g., to set up a picture or an image, a statue; to bow with respect; to decorate with flowers, lanterns; to organise death anniversaries...) are allowed to be practised and actively participated in”.

¹¹⁶ For an example of the effects of the veneration of ancestors on evangelisation and on the understanding of the church as family, see Thành, “Aspects of Christianity in Vietnam,” 95-109. Cf. Palmas, “Letter of October 14, 1964 to Paul Nguyễn Văn Bình,” 892: “It is hoped that the veneration of ancestors and sages, which has already been deeply rooted in the hearts and in the custom of the Vietnamese, now helps everyone to increase filial piety ... families to be in everlasting peace, religious organisations and the people in Vietnam to love one another, especially all peoples to acknowledge the First Supreme Ancestor, who

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries prohibition of ancestor veneration was one of the causes for persecution of Catholics and missionaries in Vietnam.¹¹⁷ Those who became Catholics did not take part in ancestor veneration, therefore they were regarded as followers of a foreign religion. Consequently, they were seen as outsiders to their families and sometimes had to leave their own families and villages. Even today when ancestor veneration is accepted in the church some Vietnamese Catholics still would not take part in it because of earlier teachings on this practice. The Vietnamese church needs to do some work more concretely in explaining ancestor veneration to people and applying it to church life when it promotes the ecclesiological model of family in order to help people overcome the misunderstanding that occurred in the past.

In addition to the influence of church documents, the social context might have made some impact on the vision of Bishop Nguyễn Văn Hiến regarding the church as family. The first attempt to reform the family in South Vietnam was carried out by a Catholic president of the Republic of Vietnam in 1959 through the enactment of the 1959 Law of the Family. Indeed, the family code decreed an ideal family which had some similarities with Christian families, such as equality between men and women, the prohibition of divorce¹¹⁸ and the support of ancestor veneration. These characteristics of the Vietnamese family were the background for the bishop to acknowledge the value of the family among Vietnamese.¹¹⁹ In other words, the legal and social contexts provided the background for the promotion of the concept of the church as family. This argument is

begets forefathers, us, and all posterity and who is God, the Common father in whom humanity in all ages come together, saying: Our father who are in heaven”.

¹¹⁷ Cf. Piero Gheddo, *The Cross and the Boo-Tree: Catholics and Buddhists in Vietnam* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1970), 9. The author gave this account. Emperor Gia Long of Vietnam in the nineteenth century was not converted “particularly because of the church’s intransigent position towards ancestor worship ... For more than half a century his successors were pitiless towards the Christian religion and abandoned themselves to excesses violence rarely encountered elsewhere in the numerous persecutions suffered by Christians at different times and places”; Nguyễn Sơn Lâm, “Christians Sense of Family with Tradition,” *OR* 13 May 1998, 13: “In Vietnam the ban against ancestor worship imposed on the Christians for three centuries had the effect of estranging them from that which is the very foundation of Vietnamese society. This explains why they were considered strangers in their own country, and persecuted”.

¹¹⁸ The 1959 Family Law, Article 1, 55-56. Cf. Soạn, *Les institutions familiales au Viet Nam*, 94; John C. Donnell, “National Renovation Campaigns in Vietnam,” *Pacific Affairs* 32 (1959), 80-81; *Times of Vietnam*, 21 December 1957, 8. Soạn remarked that the ban of divorce in the 1959 Law of Family was so challenging to the majority of Vietnamese during that time. Therefore this prohibition was cancelled in the later Decree and Law of Family of the Republic of Vietnam. Donnell analysed the influences of Confucian, and of personalism (and humanism) of European philosophy on the legislation and administration policy of President Ngô Đình Diệm in general and on the 1959 Law of Family in particular. “The ‘spirit of personalism ... constitutes the leading thought of the Family Bill,’ according to the joint committee reporting the bill to the Assembly in December. The delay of final passage until May was marked by ‘lengthy and passionate debate’ at least on its ban of divorce”.

¹¹⁹ Cf. *Acta Synodalia*, vol. 2, pars II, 44: “I would dare to say that in all the East, where the family is still held in great honour, such a vision [church as family] moves more loftily into the mind and more deeply into the heart”.

more explicit in later documents of the Vietnamese church when the bishops' conference further considered the model of the church as the family of God.

5.2.2 The Church as the Family of God in the Documents of the Vietnamese Church

The war between North and South Vietnam ended on 30th April 1975 and the country was reunified in 1976 under the communist government. Five years after the end of the war the Vietnamese bishops gathered in the first national assembly in Hà Nội from 24th April to 1st May 1980. This was an historical event because, since the establishment of the hierarchy, it was the first time that all the Vietnamese bishops gathered to set up a structure of governance for the church in Vietnam. From the time of that assembly, the Vietnamese bishops' conference has held an annual assembly which issues a pastoral letter to the people of God. The annual pastoral letters are the only means of communicating the pastoral directions of the conference to Vietnamese Catholics.¹²⁰

After a long period of war, the mission of the local church was needed to assist people on many fronts: education, living conditions, human and moral development. However, church activities were limited to the area of religious celebrations. All activities of religions in Vietnam were controlled by government policies. Limits were imposed on many areas as the bishops pointed out:

After the events of 1975, the Vietnamese government imposed limits on the life of the church: limits on the activities of parishes and associations, on catechetical instruction and even on pastoral activity at all levels of the hierarchy. The mass media became the monopoly of the state. The church, having lost the schools and hospitals which it formerly owned, finds itself deprived of the material means for its works of evangelisation.¹²¹

The Vietnamese church faced a big challenge from communism, but it chose to dialogue with all Vietnamese including the communists because they are its brothers and sisters. This Christian anthropology or this concept of the church as the family of God has been mentioned in some documents of the church in Vietnam since 1980. It is particularly emphasised in the documents of the Vietnamese bishops prepared for the Synod for

¹²⁰ It is noted that some important pastoral letters of VBC are called episcopal letters (*thur chung*), for instance the episcopal letters in 1980 and 1998 while the others are called pastoral letters (*thur mục vụ*), such as the 2003 Pastoral Letter.

¹²¹ VBC, *Bản trả lời*, I, 11. Cf. For the difficulties that the Vietnamese church encountered, see: "Letter from the Vietnamese Episcopal Conference to the Prime Minister of Vietnam and the office for Religious Affairs," *Catholic International* 4 (1993), 75-77.

Asia (1998). This synod helped to emphasise the influence and the significance of this model as it is known beyond the confines of Vietnam.¹²²

The First National Assembly of Bishops was held to give pastoral directions for a new era. Its pastoral letter presents the church as the people of God whose mission is for humankind and the church of Vietnam as a church in the midst of the nation. The Vietnamese bishops follow the spirit and the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, particularly *Ad Gentes* and *Gaudium et Spes*, in determining the *nature* and the *mission* of the local church. This Vietnamese bishops' document emphasises the pneumatological dimension rather than the hierarchical character of the people of God. The nature of the church is universal. Therefore the church gathers "people from all regions of the earth, transcending at once all racial boundaries. The Holy Spirit unites them when liberating them from sins and giving them the favour of becoming God's children".¹²³ The variety of offices in the church is also mentioned in this document, but these offices are for the good of the whole church and for the building up of the reign of God. Indeed, the role and the promotion of the laity, particularly women, in the life of the church and society are emphasised.¹²⁴ In other words, the ecclesiology of the 1980 Episcopal Letter is regnocentric rather than ecclesiocentric.¹²⁵ The church for humankind exists in the midst of the Vietnamese nation. Therefore members of the church have to show solidarity by marching along with their fellow people (*đồng bào*) in order to fulfil their vocation as children of God.¹²⁶ They also should establish a way of living and expressing their faith in accordance with national traditions. The latter function is expressed thus in this document:

We have, on the one hand, to deeply study the bible and theology, and on the other hand, to understand deeply the way of life of every people in order to discover its specific values. Hence, we make intensive use of the values taken from our cultural treasure in order to build up a way of living and expressing the

¹²² Cf. VBC, *Thư chung năm 1998*, no. 3: "During the preparation for the [Asian] Synod, Bishop Paul Nguyen van Hoa was invited to join the Central Preparatory Committee. Our bishops' conference sent in a contribution that captured the interest of worldwide public opinion".

¹²³ VBC, *Thư Chung 1980 của Hội đồng Giám mục Việt Nam* [The 1980 Episcopal Letter of VBC], no. 6.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 12; VBC, *Thư mục vụ năm 1992* [The 1992 Pastoral Letter], no. 16; VBC, *Thư chung năm 1998*, no. 17: "Let us revitalize and accept lay collaboration in [our] service to the community of the people of God, promote women's advancement in society and the church, and facilitate their participation in the administration and animation of parish life".

¹²⁵ "Regnocentric" and "ecclesiocentric" are the terms which Phan used to describe the contrast of church mission between a church for the reign of God and a church for the development of its structures and membership. Cf. Peter C. Phan, "Ecclesia in Asia," in Phan, *Christianity With an Asian Face*, 176.

¹²⁶ VBC, *Thư Chung 1980*, nos. 8-9.

faith which is more in accordance with the traditions of all ethnic groups living together in the same motherland and in this ecclesial community.¹²⁷

The expressions, *ethnic groups living in the ecclesial community* or *Vietnamese Catholics as the children of God*, show the concerns of the church in Vietnam to build up the church as family in terms of participation and solidarity. Besides, the pastoral orientation of VBC, which is summarised in the statement of “living out the Gospel amid the nation”, has become a popular motto to which the other pastoral letters of the conference usually refer when the bishops highlight the efforts and expectations in proclaiming “the Good News in a Vietnamese way”.¹²⁸ This Vietnamese way is recognised in the institution of the family which is described in some later pastoral letters issued by the unified bishops’ conference.

In the 1990s, the Vietnamese bishops, inspired by the pastoral orientation of the first national assembly, and showing more concern for the social and national issues, proposed a “moral reform” as a necessary approach to the problems in society and in Christian life. This reform calls for a restoration of the basic spiritual values of the Vietnamese which are “characterised by a sense of decency, filial piety, a fraternal spirit modesty, respect for duty and a contempt for riches” and at the same time also welcomes the values from other cultures and all Christian or gospel values.¹²⁹

The government renovation policy of 1986 had both some positive and negative impact on society and the family. In that social context, the 1992 Pastoral Letter of VBC highlighted family values, such as filial piety, respect for ancestors’ wisdom and fidelity between the spouses, in order to restore and to build a just society and a just church in its attempts to counteract some problems emerging from the market-oriented economy. The bishops stated that the church in Vietnam should learn from their ancestors how to use the best in local culture to express their faith and their relationship with the Lord not only in daily life but also in theological reflection. Indeed, since the beginning of evangelisation in the country the concept of family has been used as a model of church organisations and of relationships with God.¹³⁰ Besides, one of the best things to be

¹²⁷ Ibid. Cf. VBC, *Thư mục vụ năm 1992*, no. 19: “Our spirit of collaboration is the spirit of Christ’s incarnation. We collaborate as genuine members of the national community, not as foreigners”.

¹²⁸ VBC, *Thư mục vụ năm 2000 của Hội đồng giám mục Việt Nam* [The 2000 Pastoral Letter of the VBC], no. 1; *Thư chung năm 2001 của Hội đồng Giám mục Việt nam gửi cộng đồng dân Chúa* [The 2001 Episcopal Letter of VBC to the people of God], no. 2.

¹²⁹ VBC, *Thư mục vụ năm 1992*, no. 7.

¹³⁰ Alexandre de Rhodes inculcated filial piety to God in the Vietnamese context. The three organisations patterned on the Vietnamese family were discussed in 5.1 of this chapter.

learned from ancestors was the importance of the education of children in the family, a “church in miniature”. By using the comparison taken from *Familiaris Consortio*, the Vietnamese bishops highlighted the good values and practices in the family which have contributed to the building of society and of the church. In other words, the values in family should be utilised in order to develop other institutions including the church:

While strongly preserving and developing the moral values of the Vietnamese family, sublimated by the gospel and the sacrament of marriage, the Christian family is obliged to renew itself because of its place and mission within society and the church.¹³¹

Since the Vietnamese church has chosen to be part of the nation which is a large extended family, the bishops in the 1992 Pastoral Letter encouraged the faithful to care for the poor who represent an important part of the population. Caring for the poor is a Christian duty, but it is also an expression of solidarity with other members because both Catholic as well as non-Catholic Vietnamese belong to the same ancestor.¹³²

The 1998 Pastoral Letter, issued after the Synod for Asia, highlighted the role of the family and its members in the building of the church according to the call of the Message of the Asian Synod. The Vietnamese bishops called the faithful to renew their families so that their homes become “the place where the first lessons about prayer and love for God and for people are learned and thought”.¹³³ The bishops also encouraged Catholics to dialogue with their fellow country people in order to bring about “mutual understanding, respect and love among Vietnamese people, believers and non-believers alike, regardless of their religious affiliation”.¹³⁴

Similarly, the 2002 Pastoral Letter described the characteristics of the traditional Vietnamese family that are close to the Christian faith, such as the reference to filial piety, to the fourth commandment in the Decalogue and the relationship between faithfulness in married life, and the sixth and the ninth commandments. This document also mentioned that the Vietnamese family, in the solidarity among its members and with other families, is a natural and convenient milieu for the growth of faith and for the expression of Christian fraternity. Therefore, in the eyes of the Vietnamese, the church is

¹³¹ VBC, *Thư mục vụ năm 1992*, no. 7.

¹³² Ibid., no. 19: “When she [the church] commits herself to the building up of secular society, she does not rely on power; nor does she seek to obtain power. Our spirit of collaboration is the spirit of Christ’s incarnation. We collaborate as genuine members of the national community, not as foreigners”.

¹³³ VBC, *Thư chung năm 1998*, no. 7.

¹³⁴ Ibid., no. 5.

usually perceived as a family, even though they know the church is often defined as the People of God, the Body of Christ and the Temple of the Spirit.¹³⁵

Based on the ground that their compatriots are their brothers and sisters the Vietnamese bishops in the 2003 Pastoral Letter invited Catholics to join their fellow people in building a healthy lifestyle in their neighbourhood and in eliminating all social evils. Practically, “each Catholic family should connect with a non-Catholic family in their neighbourhood. This can be realised by praying, visiting, interacting and sharing material goods”.¹³⁶ In doing charitable work, Catholics should have concrete charitable work through activities such as providing relief for disaster victims and helping the poor in all aspects. In long-term plans, their charitable work should be aimed at comprehensive development to help the poor live with human dignity.¹³⁷

From the study of the above selected pastoral letters, it is clear that the Vietnamese bishops have taken into account the socio-cultural situation of the nation and of the Vietnamese family in order to respond to the needs of the local church and of Vietnamese society.¹³⁸ For them, the church as the family of God consists of Catholics who must show their solidarity with other people in the country because they are brothers and sisters of the same ancestors. Indeed, the Vietnamese word “đồng bào” (literally, people coming from the same womb), translated into English as compatriot or fellow people, are often used in these pastoral letters to show the solidarity with other Vietnamese non-Catholics. The efforts of the local church demonstrate the initiatives of inculturation and the symbiotic relationship between the church and society in proposing the model of the church as family. The church as God’s family is also the church where lay participation is highlighted and appreciated since all members are God’s children.

In addition to the building up of the Vietnamese church as family the Vietnamese bishops also emphasised developing the church as communion which can be considered another image or expression of the family. The family and its members should live in communion among one another and with God, if it is to be a family in the full sense. The local church needs to be in communion with God, with its members and with all people in order to fulfil the mission of love and service advocated by Jesus Christ towards, in this case, the

¹³⁵ VBC, *Thư mục vụ năm 2002*, no. 2.

¹³⁶ VBC, *Thư mục vụ năm 2003* [The 2003 Pastoral Letter], no. 12.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ Cf. VBC, *Thư mục vụ năm 2001*, no. 2: “As bishops and members of the bishops’ conference, we have always been journeying with you through the historical stages in the past two decades [1980-2001], as has been manifested in our common and pastoral letters”.

Vietnamese.¹³⁹ This is another evidence of the relationship or similarity between the model of the church as family and as communion as mentioned earlier in Chapter Two.

In particular, the concept of the church as the family of God is emphasised in the Vietnamese bishops Responses to the *Lineamenta* and the Contribution towards the elaboration of the *Instrumentum laboris* of the Asian synod. In fact, the bishops first recalled the conciliar intervention of Bishop Nguyễn Văn Hiền on the church as the family of God and then developed it in the present context of the local church. In other words, the concept of the church as the family, which had been adopted by other Vietnamese council fathers, became the model chosen by all the bishops who are the representatives of the whole church of Vietnam.

According to the Vietnamese bishops, the church as the family of God is a community in which God is the Father, Jesus is the firstborn, and all peoples are brothers and sisters and in which the sense of bonds uniting all the members of one family or communion must be realised.¹⁴⁰ In this respect, the Holy Spirit is the foundation of communion among members in the church as the family of God. The Vietnamese church leaders proposed that:

[i]t is equally necessary to build the church as a family of God's children more than as a hierarchy endowed with structures and perfectly formulated laws. The church as a family community will integrate better in the Asian society.¹⁴¹

The Vietnamese church leaders implicitly criticised the hierarchical structure of the universal church. They called for an image of "a large regenerated human family, in which all live a relationship of filial piety towards the Father, in the love and harmony of brothers and sisters" because these characteristics are close to Christians and to Asians.¹⁴² This image is more attractive to the Asians than any feudal image of the kingdom. In other words, the family qualities or spirituality, such as love of, care for others and respect for all people, need to be applied to ecclesial life.

In order to concretise the communion in the church as the family of God, the Vietnamese bishops suggested building a church with the participation of lay people and religious, with the option for the poor and with the development of small communities. These characteristics of the church could be identified with those of the church as the family of

¹³⁹ VBC, *Thư mục vụ năm 1997* [The 1997 Pastoral Letter], no. 3.

¹⁴⁰ VBC, *Bản góp ý*, C. 3, 19.

¹⁴¹ VBC, *Bản trả lời*, II, 14.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

God as described in Chapter Three of this thesis. The bishops acknowledged the contributions of lay people and women religious in particular as the contemporary missionaries in Vietnam whose efforts and hardships must be encouraged. The laity should have a greater awareness of their vocation and of their role by entrusting them with more responsibility in the life of the church and in evangelisation. This is the model of a participatory church which could be called by other names, such as “a poor church”, “a church without power” or “a humble and small” church, in order to be easily adapted to the majority of poor people in Asia and to take care of their various needs.¹⁴³ The bishops summarise the model for the church as follows:

To sum up, only a poor church will be able to adapt itself to a huge mass of poor people. A church, which is humble and small, will blend more easily with the poor masses of Asia. A church without power will more easily approach so many men and women who only ask for the right to live as men and women, to have enough to eat and to wear, to study and to find work.¹⁴⁴

The church as the family of God is also the church which promotes a sharing of life following the example of Jesus. That is the social mission of the church. Jesus led a life of unconditional and endless love for all; he dared to accept the sacrifice of his life for those he loved. So the ecclesiology of the church as the family of God comes from a Christology which is more anthropological and existential. Such a Christology helps the church and its members easily experience their relationship with Jesus and become his witnesses.¹⁴⁵ Besides, the church as family finds itself at home among many Asian peoples since they value the family greatly. In other words, the church as family will be the church of Asia, not only the church in Asia.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 16: “Has not the time to create new types of church, such as small communities which are more easily set up in society, [...]; communities which are open rather than closed; communities which are more attentive to the whole of human living - and not just the purely religious - to help improve the physical and material life of the poor, to raise up their cultural level?”

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Nguyễn Văn Hoà, “Evangelisation in Vietnam,” in Phan (comp. and ed.), *The Asian Synod*, 123. In his Asian synod intervention, the bishop of Nhatrang stated that the classical treatises on Christology presented Jesus from an ontological point of view, i.e., to explain the one divine person in two natures of Jesus. Such a perspective might be difficult for Asians to understand. So he suggested a Christology from the cosmic and historical perspective so that the presence of “the Word of God would be seen in the life, cultures, and religions of the peoples as the Wisdom of God. Such a Christology will allow us to regard with ease believers of other religions truly as our brothers and sisters”.

¹⁴⁶ VBC, *Bản trả lời*, II, 14-15. Cf. Peter C. Phan, “*Ecclesia in Asia: Challenges for Asian Christianity*,” in Phan (comp. and ed.), *The Asian Synod*, 250-253. Phan argued that in order to be familiar with or be localised to Asians the Asian churches must not be simply *in* Asia but *of* Asia. “If the Asian synod is to have a lasting transformative effect on the churches in Asia, so that they may become truly *of* Asia and their association with colonialism may be removed, the most important thing, in my judgment, is that Asian Catholics take their Asianness seriously as the context of their being Christian”.

The concept of the church as the family of God in the Vietnamese bishops' documents for the Synod for Asia was described more in pastoral than in doctrinal terms. However, the reference to this ecclesiological concept in the bishops' documents could be seen as an affirmation of the Vietnamese bishops' conference of the interventions of Bishop Nguyễn Văn Hiền in the Second Vatican Council as well as a synthesis of the development of the applications of the concept, which appeared in the pastoral letters of the bishops' conference since 1980.

Thus according to the Vietnamese bishops, communion of church members and solidarity with people in the country are the two main contents of the concept of the church as the family of God. The Responses to the *Lineamenta* and the Contribution towards the *Instrumentum laboris* for the Synod for Asia emphasised the promotion of the relationships among members as the characteristic of the family values that need to be applied in the church. The pastoral letters highlighted the mission of the local church among the Vietnamese including the renewal of the Vietnamese family which is also the image of the church. Both aspects are related to one another because the renewal of the family will lead to the renewal of the church and society. Therefore the call for family renewal in terms of values, relationships and co-responsibility must also be developed in the church so that the church will become the family of God. Moreover, both documents of VBC, the pastoral letters and the Response to the Asian Synod, emphasise the role and the contribution of the laity in the church as family.

5.3 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the implications and the development of the concept of the church as the family of God in Vietnam. It can be concluded that this concept which has been tested through three centuries, has some advantages, besides its limitations, for the present church in Vietnam. However, some social changes in the recent decades, particularly since the renovation era in Vietnam (1986), have affected the Vietnamese family. In order to counteract these changes the Vietnamese church has increased its efforts to renew the family so that the family becomes the family church. Besides the family ministry for the renewal of the domestic church, the local church has also promoted the model of the church as family as a special initiative of the church in Vietnam. This ecclesiological model needs further social and theological studies so that its implications for the local church become more meaningful and effective in society and in the church today.

The experience of the model of the church as family covers almost three centuries before the theoretical development of this concept. It is founded in the cultural fact that the

family is valued by the Vietnamese, and that it was easily integrated into the organisation of the seventeenth-century church. This initiative was the result of the efforts of the local church attempting what later came to be known as inculturation. Indeed, the Vietnamese bishops wrote that from the very beginning of evangelisation in Vietnam, “our ancestors knew how to use what was best in the treasure of our national culture to express their faith ... They did this ... even through the way they organised the family ... and the parish”.¹⁴⁷ The roles, functions and values of the Vietnamese family are still appreciated in society since the family has been the basis of social and religious institutions in Vietnam. It can be concluded that it is one of the reasons for the Vietnamese church to promote the model of the church as the family of God. However, inculturation of the church today needs to be more critical in order to overcome some identified limitations in the application of this model in the past.

The development of the concept in the documents of the Vietnamese bishops reflected the theological and pastoral concerns in the area of communion among church members and solidarity with people in society. It was demonstrated that the conciliar intervention of Bishop Nguyễn Văn Hiền, the documents of the Vietnamese bishops for the preparation of the Synod for Asia and the pastoral letters of VBC highlighted the theological and pastoral foundations of the church as the family of God, and concluded that there is a need for the renewal of family values in society today. The latter is an application of the concept of the church as the family of God to social life. The church as family means family values such as love, equality and participation have to be developed as well as to be emphasised in the ecclesial structures in order to make the church the meaningful expression of communion between God and people and among people.

The implications of the concept of the church as God’s family in three organisations which developed since the seventeenth century demonstrated both its strengths and limitations. These limitations were found to be: the hierarchical structure, the lack of lay empowerment in the church and concern for the social apostolate. However, some very positive strengths have also been identified, such as lay participation and the promotion of community life, although they also need to be renewed according to the conciliar and post-conciliar documents. Therefore the model of the church as the family of God is significant for the local church. In that context, both advantages and disadvantages of the model of the church as God’s family, particularly the participation in the church and the social mission of the church, will be further examined in the two final chapters of this thesis.

¹⁴⁷ VBC, *Thư mục vụ năm 1992*, no. 9.

CHAPTER SIX

THE PARTICIPATORY CHURCH AS THE FAMILY OF GOD IN VIETNAM

The ecclesiology of the church as the family of God in Chapter Three mainly deals with the relationships among members in this divine and human institution. As the Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* states, this ecclesiological image emphasises “care for others, solidarity [and] warmth in human relationship”.¹ This is also the point of view of the Vietnamese bishops when they propose to build the church as a family of God’s children in order to overcome a hierarchy endowed with structures and perfectly formulated laws.²

The participatory structure of the church is necessary to guarantee the authenticity of the church as truly God’s family. In this sense, the structure, which is the relationships between the members of the people of God, must reflect the spirit of the family of God. The church will no longer be considered as the family of God when it fails to demonstrate explicitly the characteristic of God’s family, the trinitarian communion, in its structure and organisation. That is why authoritarian leadership and clericalism are considered to be detrimental to the promotion of the model of the church as God’s family.³

In order to promote participation in the church as the family of God, it is necessary to have a proper understanding of hierarchy and relationship among the members of the people of God, particularly between the ministerial and common priesthoods. These issues are considered in the context of a model of the participatory Christian community, and thus become more significant in the church as the family of God.

This chapter will treat hierarchy and ministry from the participatory-ecclesial perspective, which is an application of a trinitarian ecclesiology, and then move to the theoretical issues and practical applications in the church as the family of God in Vietnam.

6.1 Hierarchy in the Church as a Condition for Participation

Hierarchy is necessary for any institution. The Catholic Church as a human institution has the hierarchical structure including bishops, priests, deacons and lay people. These

¹ *EIA* 63.

² VBC, *Bản trả lời*, II, 14.

³ A. Emmanuel Orobator, “Leadership and Ministry in the Church-as-Family,” *Studia Missionalia* 49 (2000), 297-301.

ministries, at least in a broad sense, go back to Jesus who “instituted in his church a variety of ministries which work for the good of the whole body”.⁴ *Lumen Gentium* predicated simultaneously the divine institution and the character of service of the ecclesial ministry. Indeed, service is intrinsically linked to the sacramental nature of the ministry. Church hierarchy is believed to have been, in some way, divinely instituted; however, an incorrect understanding of the divine institution might cause the problem of clericalism. The following comment will provide an understanding of church hierarchy in order to avoid this clerical distortion of hierarchy.

First, Christ founded the church. Those who support a direct institution of the church or an ecclesiastical organisation often argue that such a church was established when Jesus chose Peter as the rock on which he built the church (Mt 16:13-19).⁵ Historically, the ecclesiology of an institutional or hierarchical church started with the Council of Trent.⁶ The way this council defined the church gave the impression that “Christ himself left behind a blueprint for the establishment of the church”.⁷ For contemporary theologians, Jesus’ statement to Peter often mentioned as a proof of the institution of the church is regarded as a post-Easter statement, whereas the twelve apostles called by Jesus (Mk 3:13-19) symbolically meant the twelve tribes of Israel because apostleship is a post-Easter concept.⁸ It is not theologically correct to link the development of the church with Jesus without acknowledging the role of the Holy Spirit in this development. In this context, some authors as described below would say that the historical Jesus founded the church as a movement which would be fulfilled by the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit changed Jesus’ disciples and made them the builders of the church from Pentecost to the end of the world.

⁴ LG 28; 18.

⁵ Cf. Lennan, *Risking the Church*, 98; Fuellenbach, *Church: Community for the Kingdom*, 175; 27; Michael A. Fahey, “Church,” in Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin (eds.), *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, vol. 2 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 16-17; Haight, “Ecclesiology from Below: Genesis of the Church,” 321-322. According to these authors, there was a tendency of maintaining that Jesus explicitly instituted a hierarchical church with a pope and bishops when he said to Peter that he would build the church on Peter’s rock (Mt 16:18). In particular, Fahey argued that the description of Jesus’ intention of founding the church during his earthly life would make people neglect the role of the Spirit during Pentecost and the ensuing years of the apostolic period.

⁶ Schroeder (trans.), *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, can. 1, 162-163: “Whoever says that there is in the Catholic Church no hierarchy established by divine ordinance, consisting of bishops, presbyters, and deacons, let him be anathema”. Cf. Thomas P. Rausch, *Authority and Leadership in the Church* (Wilmington DE: Michael Glazier, 1989), 29; Yves Congar, *Power and Poverty in the Church* (Baltimore, MD: Helicon Press, 1965), 70; Kurien Kunnumpuram, “Beyond the Clergy-Laity Divide,” *Vidyajyoti* 63 (1998), 828: “The Council of Trent was greatly influenced by the theology of ministry prevalent at the time ... Trent laid great stress on the hierarchical structure of the Church, while totally ignoring the universal priesthood of the believers”.

⁷ Lode L. Wostyn, *Doing Ecclesiology* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1990), 27-30.

⁸ Ibid; Aloysius Pieris, “Two There Are, Your Holiness,” *EAPR* 41 (2004), 294.

The foundation of the church by Christ is more acceptable when “institution” is properly defined. According to Harrington, the term “Jesus” covers the whole period of his ministry from the passion to the resurrection; the church is understood as “the Jesus movement”; and the verb “instituted” or “founded” has the meaning of providing “the dynamism and energy (the ‘Spirit’) to inspire others to carry on”.⁹ The gospels describe Jesus who gathers a group of disciples, but they do not present him as the founder of an institution.¹⁰ Harrington concluded that the understanding that “Jesus, by his life, death and resurrection, set in motion a movement that developed into the church [...] seems to reflect more closely what really happened”.¹¹ Such a broader understanding of the development of the church does not deny the fact that Jesus is the founder of the church, but it allows one to recognise “God’s self-gift in Word and Spirit”.¹²

Secondly, the character of the divine institution of the ministry is service. Granfield affirmed the institutional aspect of the church and the divine origin of power in the church, but he also argued that from that foundation the church could develop an ecclesial democracy.¹³ In order to understand two concepts which seem to be incompatible with each other, he distinguished the difference in authority between the church as the “vesting of ecclesial authority” and the “structure of ecclesial authority”.¹⁴

In the first meaning, ecclesial authority is something the church received from Christ and, ultimately, from God. It is not authority from the people. The human community possesses no “authority over its leaders” so that, in this sense, “the church is not a democratic system”.¹⁵ However, Granfield also acknowledged that God does not take from the church its ability to practise democracy through inviting all members of the church to participate in decision-making on some issues belonging to their rights.¹⁶ In the second meaning, the church could develop a democracy. It has authority over its

⁹ Harrington, *The Church according to the New Testament*, 20-21; Lennan, *Risking the Church*, 98-99.

¹⁰ Cf. Mt 4:18-22; 10:1-4; Mk 1:16-22; Lk 5:1-11, Jn 1:35-51; Lennan, *Risking the Church*, 99.

¹¹ Harrington, *The Church According to the New Testament*, 20-21.

¹² Bernard Cooke, “Jesus of Nazareth, Norm for the Church,” *CTSC Proceedings* 49 (1994), 35: “Jesus founded the church by freely and unreservedly opening himself to God’s self-gift in Word and Spirit - from that emerged a transformed humanity shaped by the Word and animated by the Spirit and a community of believers dedicated in faith and discipleship to bringing about a new humanity”.

¹³ Cf. Patrick Granfield, “Ecclesial Cybernetics: Communication in the Church,” *TS* 29 (1968), 667-668.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.* Cf. Kasper, *Leadership in the Church*, 63: “Naturally, the church is not a democracy - but nor is it characterised exclusively by its hierarchical structure!”

¹⁶ Patrick Granfield, *Ecclesial Cybernetics: A Study of Democracy in the Church* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1973), 209: “Theologically, power in the church is held to come directly from God and not from the people. But nothing prevents the designation of the decision-makers by the members of the church. Moreover, this same type of decision-making could function in other areas, excepting, of course, the special prerogatives of the Pope and the college of bishops”.

members due to its structure; however, it “needs not and should not function as a monarchy” but must promote collegiality and the charismatic aspect.¹⁷ Ecclesial authority is viewed in the context of service. It functions in love and is empowered by the Holy Spirit to facilitate communication in the church.¹⁸ The ecclesial authority in the church as God’s family must model on trinitarian communion, *perichoresis*. Although such an ecclesial communion is analogically compared to the Trinity, it does not allow any members in the church to be overpowered by ministers who exercise authority.¹⁹

Another misunderstood description of church hierarchy arises when ordained ministers as successors of the apostles are regarded as the instrumental cause for the establishment of the church, and so set above non-ordained ministers so that these are in an inferior position.²⁰ This misunderstanding left a negative impact.²¹ For such an ecclesiological view does not pay much attention to the role and presence of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, it is prone “to limit initiative within the church to the ordained and to render the laity, by comparison, quite passive”.²² The result would be the clericalism to which we refer, when all initiative is limited to bishops and priests, as Crosby has pointed out.²³

¹⁷ Peter C. Phan, “A North American Ecclesiology: The Achievement of Patrick Granfield,” in Phan (ed.), *The Gift of the Church*, 483.

¹⁸ Cf. Granfield, “Ecclesial Cybernetics: Communication in the Church,” 670: “Ecclesial authority so conceived creates a favourable atmosphere which encourages communication on all levels. The principles of collegiality and subsidiarity, the decentralisation of authority, the national Episcopal Conferences, the synod of Bishops, and the internationalization and reform of the Roman Curia have struck a telling blow to church bureaucratisation”.

¹⁹ Drilling, “Discipleship, Ministry and Authority,” 15-16.

²⁰ Cf. Pieris, “Two There Are, Your Holiness,” 295. Pieris argued that, in the early church, there were two structures of ministry (the mobile and the static ministries) or two kinds of ministers (the itinerant and the sedentary ministers). But the latter gradually became dominant. He writes “bishops and priests began to monopolize all ministries. This is the androcratically hierarchical monism which accounts for the present crisis”. Cf. Congar, *Power and Poverty in the Church*, 62. The title “Vicar of Christ”, given to the pope, bishops and even priests, originally meant that Christ was present and active in his minister. But gradually a ‘possession-of-power theory’ came to develop. According to this theory, Christ first gave power to his vicar, that is, to “a representative who takes his place and who hands on to those who came after him, in an historical sequence of transmission and succession, the power thus received”.

²¹ Congar, “My Path-Findings,” 169-188; William Henn, “The Identity and Mission of the Laity from the Point of View of Ecclesiology,” *Studia Missionalia* 49 (2000), 84-85. Congar acknowledged that an over-emphasis of a sharp distinction between ordained and non-ordained ministries led to the dependence of the laity on the clergy. Henn remarked that the merely “christological understanding which viewed the life of the church as flowing from Christ to the apostles and their successors in the hierarchy, and ultimately to the community of believers” easily brought about “a predominantly juridical understanding of a community as a *societas inequalis*”.

²² Henn, “The Identity and Mission of the Laity,” 85.

²³ Cf. Michael H. Crosby, *The Dysfunctional Church* (Notre Dame, ID: Ave Maria Press, 1991), 9. Crosby mentions that “patriarchal clericalism as the specific addiction to authority that can be found in contemporary institutional Catholicism”. Cf. Peter J. Cullinane, “Clericalism - Avoidable Damage to the Church,” *The Australasian Catholic Record* 74 (1997), 181-191; “Faith Seeking Understanding of Why Ordination is Reserved to Men,” *The Australasian Catholic Record* 80 (2003), 474-484: “The 1983 Code of

Accordingly, clericalism can be defined as “the conscious or unconscious concern to promote the particular interests of the clergy and to protect the privileges and power that have traditionally been conceded to those in the clerical state”.²⁴ It arises from both “personal and social dynamics” and “is reinforced by institutional structures”.²⁵ In African and Asian churches its roots are often traced back to the impact of the past history of evangelisation, the formation of the priesthood and cultural background. Some authors maintain that it could be inherited from the missionaries of the colonial area as in Africa²⁶ and in Vietnam²⁷ or it could be reinforced by “mandarin” attitudes from Confucian culture which despises women and subordinates.²⁸ Whatever the cause, such clericalism becomes a great challenge for the development of the church as God’s family.

The problem is intensified in Vietnam where society and family are hierarchically structured, following the influence of Confucian culture. Mandarins in the imperial court usually considered ordinary people as subordinates or inferiors. This attitude has also been seen among the heads of families who are given much authority and power over their children. This model of hierarchical and patriarchal leadership dovetails with that found in institutional organisations in Vietnamese society. Similarly, in the church, the clergy are considered as authorities on whom the laity have to depend in terms of theological knowledge and liturgical celebrations.²⁹ Priests in their pastoral ministry have

Canon Law did away with distinction and modes of separatedness and privilege that were based on institutional clericalism ... But other aspects of the subculture of clericalism do not change easily”.

²⁴ *In Solidarity and Service: Reflections on the Problem of Clericalism in the Church* (Washington, DC: Conference of Major Superiors of Men, 1983), 2; cf. Crosby, *The Dysfunctional Church*, 82.

²⁵ *In Solidarity and Service: Reflections on the Problem of Clericalism in the Church*, 2.

²⁶ Ade Ajayi, *Christian Mission in Nigeria 1841-1891: The Making of a New Elite* (London: Longman, 1965), 114; cited in A. E. Orobator, “Leadership and Ministry,” 297-298.

²⁷ Cf. Cong and Haas, “The Catholic Community in the Vietnamese Nation,” in Haas and Cong, *Vietnam: The Other Conflict*, 12-13. These two authors described Christian communities in Vietnam organised and headed by French missionaries and Vietnamese priests. The organisation of these communities was described in Chapters Four and Five of this thesis.

²⁸ VBC, *Bản góp ý*, C. 7, 19; cf. VBC, *Thư chung năm 2001*, no. 20: “The attitude of respecting men and despising women still persists more or less. The Confucian legacy has advantages but also disadvantages. We need to sift that legacy and apply the church’s teachings in order to return to women their own dignity and role”.

²⁹ Cf. Peter C. Phan, “The Dragon and the Eagle: Toward a Vietnamese American Theology,” in Phan, *Christianity with an Asian Face*, 232. “Asia: Testing Ground for a Truly Global Church?” *China Reflections* March 2003; Richard Madsen, *China’s Catholics: Tragedy and Hope in an Emerging Civil Society* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1998), 25-33. Madsen described that the Chinese church’s hierarchical identity has been its resonances with Chinese culture. The article of *China Reflections* examined the consequences of the Jesuits missionaries Francis Xavier and Mateo de Ricci on the church in China. The importance of the clergy is one among the practical consequences of the hierarchical structure of Confucianism and the Catholic Church on the Chinese, Korean and Japanese Christians. “The clergy were viewed as the unique agents of God to declare what to believe, what was right and wrong and how liturgy was performed. This limited the growth and initiative of the ordinary believer who became dependant rather than actively seeking spiritual growth”. This comment is also applicable to the Vietnamese Catholics since they were under the same Confucian influence. See also FABC VIII, *The Asian Family Towards a Culture of Integral Life*, 6: “The world view of patriarchy lies deep in the cultural and

tended to act in a paternalistic way towards their people. Some priests do not want the laity to participate actively in the decision-making process of parish activities.³⁰ Clericalism exists in many institutions of the church, but it must have an easy development in the church that follows or promotes the family model as developed in Vietnam. Therefore the church as family needs to find ways to counteract this obstacle when implementing this ecclesial model.

In addition to the external causes of clericalism, the hierarchical model of the church of the post-Tridentine era is considered the internal cause. The church was conceived as a pyramid which means “a visible society whose members are subordinated in a descending order to the hierarchy and to the pope”.³¹ To some extent this institutional or hierarchical model still exists in the church, although the Second Vatican Council tried to correct this model.³² It seems that the church cannot reject its hierarchical structure because this model has had strong endorsement in many church documents in the past and even in Chapter Three of the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* of the Second Vatican Council. This model also provides the church with a strong sense of corporate identity, that is, a clear definition of the role of every member in the church, and also a historical continuity which connects the present church with its past history. However, this institutional model has more weaknesses than strengths.³³ The hierarchy is an undeniable reality in the church which must be properly explained and understood in order to limit its negative impact on the church.

There have been some explanations of hierarchy,³⁴ but, to speak generally, hierarchy meant inequality in the pre-conciliar theology which considered the church as a *societas inaequalis hierarchica*.³⁵ Congar³⁶ critiqued the “hierarchology” of the neo-Scholastic

religious subconscious of Asia and dominates politics, economics, human relationships, childrearing views and practices, stereotypes about men and women, community roles, etc. Patriarchy defines man in terms of prowess, brawn, authority and dominion. It is at the basis of male chauvinism in society and men’s authoritarianism in the family”.

³⁰ Nguyễn Văn Nội, “Công đồng Vatican II với Giáo hội Việt Nam,” [The Second Vatican Council and the Church in Vietnam] *Triết Đạo* 5 (2003), 90-91; cf. Cong and Hass, “The Catholic Community in the Vietnamese Nation,” 11-13. Cong and Hass described Catholic communities under the leadership of missionaries and local priests as follows: “Missionaries and Vietnamese priests organised their Christians socio-economically in such a manner that the faithful enjoyed a reasonable welfare”.

³¹ Joseph Areeplackal, *Spirit and Ministry* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1990), 21.

³² Fuellenbach, *Church: Community for the Kingdom*, 176.

³³ *Ibid.*, 173.

³⁴ Groppe, “The Contribution of Yves Congar’s Theology of the Holy Spirit,” 473-474. According to Groppe, in contemporary language, hierarchy referring to “a social body organised by gradations of rank and authority” often connotes “inequality and the dominance of those in superior positions over those who are subordinate”. This sociological meaning of hierarchy is also used in some theological studies.

³⁵ Yves Congar, “R. Sohm nous interroge encore,” *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 57 (1973), 281.

treatises on the church for emphasising the institutional and hierarchical principle and for neglecting the principle of collective life in the church. He did not, however, criticise the very concept of hierarchy.³⁷ In fact, he described the ecclesial hierarchy consisting of the diaconate, presbyterate and episcopate as a divinely instituted means of grace. He also emphasised that the church is a divine institution from above. However, this divine institution is instituted by Jesus and is also co-instituted by the Holy Spirit. Jesus cannot found the church without the work of the Holy Spirit. The fact that the church comes from above means its origin comes from God, not from human agency. Nonetheless, this does not mean dominion, superiority or subordination because hierarchy in the New Testament was understood as service according to the model of Jesus.³⁸

Ashley mentioned two concepts of hierarchy: linear and non-linear approaches.³⁹ The linear approach, which was first used by Pseudo Dionysius the Aeropagite of the late fifth century and has remained with the church, understood the hierarchy in terms of the order of entities, that is, the subordination of inferior entities to superior ones or of entities in the low level to the higher one. In this linear hierarchy, “the laity are totally dependent on their priests for all graces, the priests totally dependent on the bishops, the bishops on the pope, the pope on Christ and Christ on God”.⁴⁰ These church leaders are themselves considered the heads in the ecclesial hierarchy so that the laity are the extension of the clergy. In this view the leaders enjoy a monopoly of authority and initiative over the rest of the faithful whose principal virtue is obedience to their shepherds. Such an understanding, particularly in the church as the family/household of God, might easily lead to pyramidal and authoritarian leadership.⁴¹

³⁶ For an analysis of hierarchy in Yves Congar, see Groppe, “The Contribution of Yves Congar’s Theology of the Holy Spirit,” 451-478.

³⁷ Yves Congar, *Lay People in the Church* (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1965), 34-38; 52.

³⁸ Cf. Congar, *Power and Poverty*, 98-99. Congar refers to Mt 18:1; 23:2-3; Lk 22:25-27, Jn 13: “There is never simply a relationship of subordination or superiority, as in secular society, but always a loving obedience to Christ, shaping the life of each with all and for all, according to the position which the Lord has given him in the Body. In this service, fundamentally identical and coextensive with the fact of being a Christian, some command and others obey: whether as leaders or as simple members of the brotherhood, they are wholly engaged in the service of Christ and their brethren”.

³⁹ Benedict M. Ashley, *Justice in the Church: Gender and Participation* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University Press, 1996), 10-11.

⁴⁰ Ashley, *Justice in the Church*, 11; Gaillardetz, “The Ecclesiological Foundations of Ministry,” 34; cf. Colm Luibheid (trans), *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works* (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1987), 31. The medieval ecclesiology used the cosmology of Pseudo-Dionysius for viewing the church as a descending ladder of states of being and truth, with the fullness of power given to the pope and shared in diminishing degrees with the lower levels: bishops, priests and deacons.

⁴¹ Cf. Orobator, *The Church as Family*, 141-142; Johnson, “After the Big Chill,” 20: “Ecclesial development has tended towards the establishment of the bishop of Rome as the supreme ‘head of the household of faith’... The line of authority - and of teaching - moves downward from pope to bishops to priests to laity”.

The non-linear approach was developed by Thomas Aquinas.⁴² Ashley maintained that Aquinas explained the hierarchy based on the anthropological nature of all people living in a chain of subordination to one another and in a unique relationship with a personal God. The subordination to other people is merely relative because they are co-creatures, but it is total to God who is their creator.⁴³ Thus in the non-linear hierarchy, the laity is not considered inferior to the clergy because “the subordination of the laity to the hierarchy does not render the laity more distant from God since each Christian has unique graces directly from God, mediated only through Christ, his Divine Son, by Christ’s Holy Spirit”.⁴⁴ The clergy and the laity are equal members, but due to their different functions in the church, they are functionally unequal. The inequality in hierarchy happens because God created people with different gifts, offices and status, but this inequality must help the church to “achieve the common good of its members and to permit the maximum participation by all”.⁴⁵ In other words, charisms in the non-linear approach are acknowledged as contributions made by church members and the charisms belong to the essence of the church.⁴⁶ So this approach is appropriate for the understanding of hierarchy in the church as God’s family. Indeed, in the family of the triune God, the three persons are equal, even if there are different missions.

Related to non-linear hierarchy is collaborative or community leadership. In this leadership, an ordained minister who is a representative of Christ in his threefold office works with lay collaborators. The ordained draw authority not independently, but from Christ and the church. For their part, lay people share the salvific mission of the church. It is rooted in their baptism; and they are called to direct collaboration in the apostolate of the hierarchy. “Community leadership cannot be exercised in an autocratic manner; it must collaborate with other ministries and with the entire community”.⁴⁷ Such collaborative leadership played an important role in the early church,⁴⁸ is supported by

⁴² Ashley, *Justice in the Church*, 11; cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I, q. 105, a. 1; q. 45, a. 5, c (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1948).

⁴³ Ashley, *Justice in the Church*, 12; cf. Fuellenbach, *Church: Community for the Kingdom*, 178. It is noted that the difference between people in terms of function and talent makes unique the individual contribution to and participation in the common good of the community. In the church, the hierarchy which is the result of these differences and of the subordinations among people could go hand in hand with the effort of every member in contributing to the development of the church.

⁴⁴ Ashley, *Justice in the Church*, 12.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 164.

⁴⁶ Fuellenbach, *Church: Community for the Kingdom*, 179.

⁴⁷ Kasper, *Leadership in the Church*, 68-72.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 69; cf. Rom 16:1-16; Phil 2:25; 4:3; Col 4:10-15.

the Second Vatican Council and the canon law,⁴⁹ and is developed in organisations as well as in families today.

In summary, clericalism and authoritarianism in church leadership promote the hierarchical model in ecclesiology in which the authority of the church is based only on the sacrament of orders and not on the community. Clericalism and authoritarianism ignored the whole teaching of the New Testament in its entirety about authority⁵⁰ and the responsibility for decision-making in doctrinal and moral matters in the early church.⁵¹ Clericalism and authoritarianism ignored other charismatic ministries in the church, such as the prophetic and teaching ministry.⁵²

The Second Vatican Council revolutionized ecclesiology when it put a stop to the image of the church as an exclusive hierarchy, while balancing this hierarchical image with the charismatic elements. The church is built, not only by institutional structures but also by a variety of gifts in order to fulfil its mission through both hierarchy and laity. That is the work of the Spirit among all members of the people of God for the service of the church.⁵³ All members participate in church activity according to their own rights and duties. However, the question of a harmonious and effective functioning of the charismatic ministries of the laity and the institutional ministries of the clergy still remains. It can be reconciled when the hierarchical model recognises the proper importance and relative independence of the charismatic ministries from the ministry of office in the church. Such a recognition requires that church government is not based entirely on the sacramental dimension but on the charismatic element as well.⁵⁴ This kind of governance should be developed in the church. But in the present practice, the governing power is overwhelmingly based on the sacrament of orders so that an inequality exists among the different ministries and charisms in the church.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ Kasper, *Leadership in the Church*, 69-72; cf. CIC, can. 517 § 2.

⁵⁰ Mt 16: 19 mentions that Peter was entrusted with the capability of binding or loosing the mistakes of people on earth, but Mt 18: 18 applies the same statement to all the disciples or even to the church in general.

⁵¹ Bas van Iersel, "Who according to the New Testament Has the Say in the Church," *Concilium* 148 (1981), 11-17. According to Iersel, the Christian community in the early church played a much more active role in the decision-making process.

⁵² Fuellenbach, *Church: Community for the Kingdom*, 176.

⁵³ LG 4; 12; 33; 35.

⁵⁴ Fuellenbach, *Church: Community for the Kingdom*, 179-181.

⁵⁵ Ibid. Cf. Philip J. Rosato, "Priesthood of the Baptised and Priesthood of the Ordained," *Gregorianum* 68 (1987), 215-266. Rosato analysed the interrelation between the two modes of Christian priesthood in four complementary approaches: ontological, existential, practico-social and eschatological.

Thus church hierarchy modelled on the hierarchy of the Trinity must be developed on the ground of participatory leadership rather than clericalism. Participatory leadership was reflected in the house-churches during New Testament times and emerged in the present family in Vietnam as studied in Chapter One and Chapter Four of this thesis, respectively. The Vietnamese church, if it is to be the family of God, needs to adopt that model of leadership to show its authenticity in accord with its trinitarian foundation, and to meet the realities of the modern Vietnamese family.

Hierarchy is often misunderstood or misused, so that clericalism is a universal problem. This problem also occurs in local churches, particularly in those following the family model. In order to solve the problem of clericalism, which has a negative impact on the church, it is important to correctly understand the notion of hierarchy in relation to the proper understanding of ministries.

6.2 Ministries in the Church as the Family of God

Participation in the church depends on the foundation on which ordained and non-ordained or lay ministries are developed. Ministry is “the public activity of a baptised follower of Jesus Christ flowing from the Spirit’s charism and an individual personality on behalf of a Christian community to proclaim, serve and realise the kingdom of God”.⁵⁶ The foundation of Christian ministries based on either the sacrament of orders or baptism has different results in the participation of the clergy and the laity in the church. The post-Tridentine theology often identified the Christian ministry with the sacrament of orders,⁵⁷ while the conciliar and post-conciliar documents and theology have broadened the understanding of ministry to include particularly lay people whose ministry is grounded in baptism.⁵⁸ The pre-conciliar theology made the laity passive, while the post-conciliar one has created more opportunities for the laity to actively participate in the church. The broader understanding of ministry is appropriate in the church as the family of God. Baptism, not ordination, makes a person a member of God’s family as discussed earlier in Chapter Two.

⁵⁶ Thomas E. O’Meara, *Theology of Ministry*, rev. ed. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999), 150; cf. Thomas Vijay, *Lay Ministries in the Renewed Church of Asia*, 2 (Hong Kong: FABC Papers 92, 2000).

⁵⁷ Cf. *Decree Concerning the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist*, in J. Waterworth (ed. and trans.), *The Canons and Decrees of the Sacred and Oecumenical Council of Trent* (London: Dolman, 1848), 75-91; Paul Bernier, *Ministry in the Church: A Historical and Pastoral Approach* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1992), 163-172.

⁵⁸ Cf. Thomas P. Rausch, “Ministry and Ministries,” in Wood (ed.), *Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood*, 56-60. Rausch mentioned that after the Second Vatican Council, there have been three approaches of ministry in developing ministry: the expanding, the deconstructive and the restrictive approaches.

The Second Vatican Council implicitly acknowledges lay ministry when it brings out that baptism is the foundational sacrament as well as the source of Christian ministry. In fact, it applies the term “ministry” to the service of all the faithful.⁵⁹ The council did not accept the post-Tridentine reduction of ministry to priesthood alone, but re-established diversity in ministry (deacon, priest and bishop). It also provided a new framework, namely, that of the people of God, as a common matrix in order to emphasise the fundamental equality and dignity of all the baptised. In baptism, all Christians are initiated into the church, the body of Christ, and are drawn by the Spirit into the trinitarian participation.⁶⁰ Through baptism Christians are connected with the Trinity, with other Christians and with their mission in the world. After the council, the official use of the term “ministry” for the laity was found in the *Motu proprio Ministeria Quaedam* (1972).⁶¹ This document recognises the existence of two lay ministries called “instituted ministries” which were very significant at that time. Later, the term “non-ordained ministries” is given official status in the Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (1987).⁶²

However, up to the present, church documents still maintain the distinction between the clergy and the laity. Ministerial or hierarchical and common priesthoods “differ essentially and not only in degree; each in its own way shares in the one priesthood of Christ”.⁶³ Such a division between the two modes of priesthood aims to promote complementarity,⁶⁴ but the council did not provide a clear explanation of the relationship among the ministerial, common priesthoods and the priesthood of Christ. So some theologians suggested changing the terms “clergy/priests” and “laity/laypeople” in order to avoid misunderstanding or misuse.⁶⁵

⁵⁹ Chapter One in *Lumen Gentium*, particularly LG 7-8; LG 30. Cf. can. 230 § 3; Peter Drilling, *Trinity and Ministry* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 32. In footnote 15, Drilling stated that he found two instances in the conciliar documents in which the term ministry is applied to the non-ordained. See AG 23, and particularly AA 2 which notes: “*Est Ecclesia diversitas ministerii, sed unitas missionis*”.

⁶⁰ Kenan B. Osborne, *Ministry: Lay Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1993), 530-535; cf. LG 4; 12.

⁶¹ The minor orders were classified and reduced to two ministries: lector and acolyte. These ministries, which were no longer reserved to candidates for priesthood, could be given to lay men.

⁶² ChL 23: “The Pastors, therefore, ought to acknowledge and foster the ministries, the offices and roles of the lay faithful that find their *foundation in the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation*, indeed, for a good many of them, *in the Sacrament of Matrimony*”.

⁶³ LG 10.

⁶⁴ Cf. Rosato, “Priesthood of the Baptised and Priesthood of the Ordained,” 215-266.

⁶⁵ Cf. Forte, *The Church*, 49-50; Drilling, “Common and Ministerial Priesthood,” 81-99; Gideon Goosen, “A New Relationship Between the Ministerial and Baptismal Priesthood,” *Compass* 32 (1997), 17-24; Kunnumpuram, “Beyond the Clergy-Laity Divide,” 824-838.

In this regard, a number of contemporary theologians suggest that baptism is the foundation of ministry, and here they refer to the early church.⁶⁶ It is argued that all the baptised are called and sent by the Holy Spirit to share ministries for the service of the church. The Spirit led the first Christians into a self-understanding that they live in communion with Jesus. So they felt called to live in brotherhood/sisterhood and to participate in decisions as presented in *Acts* and Paul's letters. Indeed, ministries in the New Testament "flow from the call, the gifts, the needs, the faith, the discipleship and the Holy Spirit. [Therefore] ordering or structuring the ministries is as after-effect done by the responsible ministers themselves, and perhaps, by whoever has the gift of administration".⁶⁷ Only by the third century was there a clear understanding of ordained and non-ordained ministries. Bishops, presbyters and deacons were ordained ministers, while lay ministers such as widows, lectors and subdeacons were non-ordained. However, all ministries were designated by the bishops. Ordination was not so much a sign of empowerment to function, but a recognition of the activity of the Holy Spirit in a person.⁶⁸

In order to promote participation in the church, it is appropriate that ministry in the church as the family of God should be grounded in baptism. The sacrament of baptism is the common ground for the clergy and the laity. The vocation of all the faithful starts when they become Christians. All members in the church must receive and are consecrated in baptism and confirmation because these are the foundational sacraments. Indeed, in baptism, all the faithful are reborn and share a common dignity. "All are called to holiness; all cooperate in the building up of the one Body of Christ, each in accordance with the proper vocation and gift which he or she has received from the Spirit".⁶⁹ The consecration of ordination comes later. Its purpose is to carry on the apostolic ministry. The unity and equality of all members of the church is rooted in baptism and confirmation and is strengthened by the eucharist. But diversity is also a work of the Spirit. It is the

⁶⁶ Susan K. Wood, "Convergence Points Towards a Theology of Ordered Ministries," in Wood (ed.), *Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood*, 257: "Baptism is an initiation into the life of Christ and the way of discipleship in the church by which all participate in the mission of the church. It is the ground for all discussion of ministry". Cf. Vijay, *Lay Ministries in the Renewed Church of Asia*, 2; Acts 2:43-47; 6:1-6; 8:14-17; 1 Cor 12:4-11; 12:8-18; Rom 12:7-8.

⁶⁷ Vijay, *Lay Ministries in the Renewed Church of Asia*, 2.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* (VC) 31. Pope John Paul II in *Vita Consecrata* explained that the theological foundation of the different states of the Christian life is rooted first in baptism.

Spirit who establishes the church as an organic communion in the diversity of vocations, charisms and ministries in order to fulfil its mission.⁷⁰

In the context of emphasising baptism as the foundation of ministry, Chauvet used the image of a tree-trunk with many branches to describe the mutually inclusive and interdependent relations between the ordained and baptismal ministries. These two ministries come from the same source, that is, the common trunk (baptism, confirmation and eucharist), but do not belong to the same branch.⁷¹ This theological understanding is significant for the participation in the church as the family. On the one hand, the ordained ministry is not situated as the prolongation of the ministry of the laity; it is not derived from the common priesthood of the baptised. On the other hand, the ministry of the laity cannot be considered a kind of by-product of the ordained/priestly ministry which can lead to clericalism. According to Chauvet, this image helps to understand properly the formula in *Lumen Gentium* 10. Indeed, it maintains the relations between the ministerial and common priesthoods as well as the distinction of the former from the latter which is also the conciliar teaching of *LG* 10.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994) also affirmed that all the members of the church belong to a priestly people. They all participate in the priesthood of Christ. Therefore this priesthood is called “the common priesthood of the faithful” which becomes the foundation on which the sacrament of orders is developed. The latter cannot exist without the former or it presupposes the reception of the sacraments of Christian initiation.⁷² Based on the sacraments of initiation, all Christians are aggregated to the people of God and qualified as members of the body of Christ; they also become living stones in the temple of the Spirit.⁷³

In order to promote a complementarity between the ministerial and the common priesthood, one must pay attention more to the similarities between the two priesthoods. The similarities between the ministerial and the common priesthood are based on the

⁷⁰ Ibid. “The consecration of baptism and confirmation common to all members of the people of God is a sufficient foundation. In addition to this basic consecration, ordained ministers receive the consecration of ordination in order to carry on the apostolic ministry in time”.

⁷¹ Louis-Marie Chauvet, “Les ministères de laïcs: vers un nouveau visage de l’Église?” *La Maison-Dieu* 215 (1998), 47-48. The author described the schema as follows:

Sacraments of initiation ----->lay ministries
 L→ ordination ----->ordained ministries

⁷² CCC 1591: “Based on this common priesthood and ordered to its service, there exists another participation in the mission of Christ: the ministry conferred by the sacrament of holy orders, where the task is to serve in the name and in the person of Christ the Head in the midst of the community”. Cf. *PO* 2; CCC 1563.

⁷³ Chauvet, “Les ministères de laïcs,” 39.

fact that both participate in the priesthood of Christ⁷⁴ and both are called to holiness.⁷⁵ The priesthood of Christ is the referent of the two modes of the priesthood; it is the only priesthood found in the New Testament. In other words, the priesthood of Christ is shared by the entire people of God; or, to put it in another way, the Christian priesthood is only understood analogically in the context of the priesthood of Christ.⁷⁶ In the New Testament, the priesthood of Jesus is that of being consecrated and of being sent as a servant to carry out his Father's plan to the end.⁷⁷ In the same way, the disciples of Jesus are also called to follow their Teacher in the dedication of their whole lives to doing the Father's work. Thus ordained ministers in the church as the family of God must give their lives for the service of the church and of others since the church is their family and church members are their brothers and sisters.

Grounding ministry in baptism is to ground it in the trinitarian and ecclesiological foundation. This perspective places ordained ministers among other non-ordained in the sense that ordained ministers are founded in, and formed for and in, the church. Such a perspective has three advantages. First, it prevents clericalism because it reminds one that baptism is more important than the sacrament of orders. An ordination does not make a Christian more superior than others. Ordained and non-ordained Christians have different functions, but they are equal before God. Secondly, it emphasises that a man is ordained not for himself, nor for an additional sanctification which is missing in the sacraments of initiation, but for the mission of the church. Lastly, it promotes an organic complementarity and interdependence of different gifts of the Spirit for the building of the church and the service of the gospel.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ LG 10: "Each in its own way, shares in the one priesthood of Christ"; cf. Pius XII, Allocution *Magnificate Dominum*: AAS 46 (1954), 669; Encyclical Letter *Mediator Dei*: AAS 39 (1947), 555. The encyclical states "[B]y reason of their baptism Christians are in the Mystical Body and become by a common title members of Christ the Priest; by the character that is graven upon their souls they are appointed to the worship of God, and therefore, according to their condition, share in the priesthood of Christ himself"; CCC 1547.

⁷⁵ Theologically, there is no difference in degree of holiness between the ministerial and the common priesthood. PDV 17: "Indeed the ministerial priesthood does not of itself signify a greater degree of holiness with regard to the common priesthood of the faithful; through it, Christ gives to priests, in the Spirit, a particular gift so that they can help the People of God to exercise faithfully and fully the common priesthood which it has received".

⁷⁶ Bernier, *Ministry in the Church*, 44, and 279; cf. Heb 5:1-5; Rev 1:6; 5:9-10; 20:6; 1 Pet 2:4-10; 3:15. It is noted that in the *Letter to the Hebrew* the term "priest" (*hierus/archierus*) was applied to Jesus, the High Priest, in order to emphasise that he is the only one who is worthy of this title and that his priesthood differs from that of the Old Testament. In two other New Testament writings, *Revelation* and the *First Letter of Peter*, this term was applied to the whole church and not to any individual Christian. Cf. David Coffey, "The Common and the Ordained Priesthood," *TS* 58 (1997), 214-218. According to Coffey, the teaching of the Second Vatican Council only explained the relationship between the ministerial priesthood and the priesthood of Christ, but left no explanation of the connection between the common priesthood and the priesthood of Christ.

⁷⁷ Cf. Mk 10:43-45; 1 Pet 5:3; CCC 1551.

⁷⁸ Chauvet, "Les ministères de laïcs," 39-41.

The trinitarian foundation of ministry implies the three characteristics of the divine communion: equality, diversity and mutuality, which need to be properly understood in the context of theology of Trinity and ministry.⁷⁹ These qualities are also significant in the church as God's family and in human families. Therefore grounding ministry in the church as the family of God in baptism has many advantages. Moreover, such a foundation of ministry makes it easier to promote the role of women in church ministry. Laywomen have been assigned in some ministries in recent decades. However, the roles and contributions of lay and religious women need to be more appreciated in the administrative and decision-making organs of the universal and local church. The acknowledgment of women in these organs will justify the authenticity of the church as the family of God since men and women are equal before God. The equality of women in the church does not merely belong to their human rights, but it exists in the dignity of every Christian regardless of gender or social status.

Based on the sacrament of baptism as the common and basic ground of the ministerial and the common priesthoods, there are some suggestions that either the framework for the distinction between the two priesthoods or the relationship between them should be changed, particularly in the church as the family of God. O'Meara⁸⁰ argued that a social framework of distinction between clergy and laity seems not to be necessary in the church in order to develop a better participation of all members in the church. Beinert⁸¹ and Henn⁸² agreed that "the fundamental qualification for service in the church, and at the same time the basis for the unity of particular gifts, is not the sacrament of orders, but baptism".⁸³ Beinert also mentioned that "the distinction of clergy and laity is essential to the church and is thus indissoluble and indispensable", but "this distinction is solely sisterliness in the one family of God. All exclusivity of worth, rank or competency is forbidden".⁸⁴ That is the ideal of the church which the church as the family of God promotes because it benefits all members of the church.

The above acknowledgement of the common priesthood of the faithful as the foundation of the sacrament of orders brings about some positive impact on Christian life. On the one hand, it will help to reduce "hierarchism" which prevents the full participation of the

⁷⁹ Cf. Drilling, "Discipleship, Ministry and Authority," 16-17.

⁸⁰ O'Meara, *Theology of Ministry*, 181. O'Meara writes that "the social framework given by the clergy-laity distinction cannot survive and one must place several ordained ministries at the centre of circles of ministries, themselves of varying importance and activity".

⁸¹ Wolfgang Beinert, "What Values Does the Laity Have in the Church?" *Theology Digest* 35 (1988), 42-43.

⁸² Henn, "The Identity and Mission of the Laity," 109.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Beinert, "What Values Does the Laity Have in the Church?" 42-43.

laity and religious in the activities of the church, because hierarchism is prone to narrow down the initiatives of the laity and also to make them dependent on the clergy.⁸⁵ Such a reduction of hierarchism is essential in the church as the family of God. On the other hand, it promotes a participation of the laity in their varied services for building the church.⁸⁶ It also encourages the laity to pursue theological studies. Such study will strengthen their own faith as well as that of others, providing a good opportunity to deepen their faith which they will pass to others through their duty as catechists.⁸⁷

The distinction between the clergy and the laity is only necessary when it promotes a participation in their various functions. The principle that states that “Christ makes the hierarchy and [that] the hierarchy makes the church as a community of faith” is inadequate.⁸⁸ Omitting the role of the laity respects neither God’s actuating power nor the activities of the Holy Spirit working through the different charisms and ministries to build the church. Such an understanding viewed the church in a linear way and placed either the hierarchy over or outside the community, or the role of the clergy over that of the laity. The Second Vatican Council tried to overcome that exclusively christological approach by adding the trinitarian approach in its description on the church. The church originated from the Trinity and its members contribute their efforts to the building of the church.⁸⁹

6.3 The Relationship of the Laity, Religious and Clergy in the Church

The aim of the description of the relationships of the laity, religious and clergy in church documents is to promote communion within the church. These relationships need to be critically revised and concretely practised in terms of collaboration in order to develop the church as the family of God.

⁸⁵ Laurenti Magesa, “Hope Lies in Togetherness: the Laity in the Church of the Third Millennium in Africa,” *EAPR* 35 (1998), 382.

⁸⁶ For example, lay people will take an active part in worship and in assuming some functions in the eucharist which were naturally reserved to the priest, such as giving the introduction to the eucharistic celebration or the readings and distributing the communion.

⁸⁷ Jean Daniélou, “Participation,” *OR* 14 November 1968, 10: “The abandonment of theological studies by lay people has been marked down as one of the causes of the weakening of faith; today it is most encouraging to see many of the laity taking an interest in this type of study. It is quite clear that catechetical instruction at all levels must in future be entrusted for the most part to the laity. It should further be added that questions arising from their secular education and from their life in the world provide the laity with an essential stimulus to pursue their studies in dogmatic and moral theology”.

⁸⁸ Congar, “My Path-Findings,” 174-179.

⁸⁹ *LG* 2; 4.

6.3.1 Church Documents on the Relationships of the Laity, Religious and Clergy in the Church

The Second Vatican Council was the first council to focus on the church and particularly on the laity. It presented a theology of the laity which is different from that prior to the council.⁹⁰ The laity are considered the members of the church whose mission is in the church as well as in the world, though the nature of their particular mission is more secular than ecclesial. The role of lay people through their participation in the church has become clearer in the post-conciliar documents.

Before going to the conciliar documents,⁹¹ it is necessary to be familiar with Congar's understanding of the laity which influenced the council. According to Congar, the word "lay" was distinguished from "cleric" and "monastic" from about the middle of the third century. In other words, laity did not belong to the hierarchical structure of the church from the beginning, but they belonged to the "permanent pattern" which this structural church took in history.⁹²

Chapter Four of the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* provides a description of the laity, the participation of the laity in the three offices of Christ and the character of the laity in the church's mission.⁹³ This statement of the council is not a theological and canonical definition of the laity. Rather, it is a "popular understanding" of the term in order to underscore the "practical dimensions" of this description.⁹⁴ Such a description lacks a distinctiveness.⁹⁵ However, by mentioning the common identity in performing Christ's

⁹⁰ Cf. Yves Congar, "Moving Towards a Pilgrim Church," in Alberic Stacpoole (ed.), *Vatican II By Those Who Were There* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1986). Congar mentioned that while the terms like *laicus* and *ministerium* were not found in the First Vatican Council they were mentioned respectively 200 and 147 times in the documents of the Second Vatican Council.

⁹¹ Cf. Henn, "The Identity and Mission of the Laity," 84-97. Henn mentioned that all four constitutions of the Second Vatican Council directly or indirectly discuss the laity.

⁹² Congar, *Lay People in the Church*, 3-27.

⁹³ LG 31: "The term laity is here understood to mean all the faithful except those in holy Orders and those who belong to a religious state approved by the church: all the faithful, that is, who by Baptism are incorporated into Christ, are constituted the people of God, who have been made sharers in their own way in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ and play their part in carrying the mission of the whole Christian people in the church and in the world".

⁹⁴ Gérard Philips, *La chiesa e il suo mistero nel concilio vaticano II* (Milano: Edit. Jaca Book, 1975); cited in Kenan Osborne, "The Meaning of Lay, Laity and Lay Ministry in the Christian Theology of the Church," *Antonianum* 63 (1988), 230.

⁹⁵ It starts with the negative traits of the laity who are classified as non-ordained and non-vowed religious members, then, describes the positive aspect of the laity, that is, the sharing in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ.

offices which is shared by both lay, religious and priests, it does not make the laity distinct from the other two groups.⁹⁶

The above description of the laity has some shortcomings. However, it is far from the restrictive view dominant prior to the council and has influenced other documents of the council.⁹⁷ It describes the laity sacramentally and ecclesially. Moreover, the identity and the activity of the laity are rooted in baptism and are expressed in the life in the church and in society. The laity exist and work alongside the hierarchy.⁹⁸ They are called to participate actively in the entire life of the church and to be witnesses to Christ “in all circumstances and at the very heart of the human community”.⁹⁹

The mission of the laity occurs in the church and in society. The social dimension is often emphasised as the special characteristic of the laity.¹⁰⁰ Such an emphasis can lead to a bipartite division of the church: clergy and religious are involved in sacred or spiritual matters while lay people are involved in earthly considerations. This is not appropriate in the church as the family of God. Actually, there is only one mission to spread “Christ’s kingdom throughout the world to the glory of God the Father”.¹⁰¹ In the church, the laity can be in charge of catechetical, liturgical and even administrative functions.¹⁰² But because of the secular character of the laity, they are encouraged to perform their apostolate in different areas in society. They are not exclusive members in this apostolate because the clergy and religious are also involved in this social apostolate.¹⁰³ The fact that laity, religious and clergy share the same apostolate is similar to the sharing of members in the church as family.

The Second Vatican Council focused on the doctrine of the church and left the task on the laity to the Pontifical Council on the Laity.¹⁰⁴ Since the increasing participation of the

⁹⁶ Henn, “The Identity and Mission of the Laity,” 90.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ AG 21.

⁹⁹ GS 43.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. LG 31; AA 5. See also *ChL* 15; The 1997 Instruction “Some Questions Regarding Collaboration of Non-ordained faithful in Priest’s Sacred Ministry,” 1; Aurelie A. Hagstrom, “The Secular Character of the Vocation and Mission of the Laity,” in Wood (ed.), *Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood*, 152-174. According to Hagstrom, the secularity of the laity might be interpreted in three approaches/descriptions: (1) typological or phenomenological, (2) theological or ontological, (3) sociological and theological. The first and the second ones are supported by conciliar documents while the third one by the Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*.

¹⁰¹ AA 2.

¹⁰² AA 5; 10; 24.

¹⁰³ GS 43: “It is to the laity, though not exclusively to them, that secular duties and activities properly belong ... Let them be aware of what their faith demands of them in these matters and derive strength from it; let them not hesitate to take the initiative at the opportune moment and put their findings into effect”.

¹⁰⁴ Henn, “The Identity and Mission,” 96.

laity within the church ministries the Synod of Bishops on the Laity was held in 1987 whose fruits appeared in the 1988 Exhortation entitled *The Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and the World*. This title showed the concern of the church with the role of the laity in the church in particular for the benefit of the church.¹⁰⁵ The Exhortation also describes the co-responsibility of the clergy as well as the laity in church mission.¹⁰⁶ The purpose of entrusting a great part of this responsibility to the laity is to form “mature ecclesial communities” through “an active and responsible participation in the life of the community”.¹⁰⁷ This co-responsibility clarifies the participation of the laity in the administration of the church.¹⁰⁸ Such a participation is necessary because of the principle of subsidiarity and of the need for integrity which the church promotes and requires to be implemented in all organisations.

Actually, the role of the laity as lay ministries had been recognised in *Ministeria Quaedam*. This document officially mentions the lay ministry of lector and of acolyte called “installed ministries”. The establishment of institutionalised ministries makes the laity more aware of the church as a true family since they can contribute to the development and the mission of the church. So it has a significant impact on the church as the family of God. Lay ministries, which might include “commissioned ministries”,¹⁰⁹ contribute to the cure of traditional clericalism and to the development of the church as a family-community.¹¹⁰

The participation of the laity within the church, however, is not sufficiently implemented in the church. Specifically, there is a need for this in the areas of consultation of the laity, of new methods and models for lay education and formation and a new image for the parish

¹⁰⁵ Chapter Two of *Christifideles Laici* discussed the participation of the lay faithful in the life of the church as communion which maintains the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, Canon Law and some other papal addresses. However, the document also includes some issues on the participation of the laity that came from the propositions of the synod fathers. Some of these issues are the creation of diocesan pastoral councils and the importance of the parish pastoral councils. Cf. *ChL* 25.

¹⁰⁶ *ChL* 32: “The Lord entrusts a great part of the responsibility to the lay faithful, in communion with all other members of the people of God”. Because of this model of communion “they [pastors] also know that they themselves were not established by Christ to undertake alone the entire saving mission of the church towards the world, but they understand that it is their exalted office to be shepherds of the lay faithful and also to recognise the latter’s service and charism that all according to their proper roles may cooperate in this common undertaking with one heart”.

¹⁰⁷ *ChL* 34.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. *ChL* 28, 29.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Gaillardetz, “The Ecclesiological Foundations of the Ministry,” 46-47. Commissioned ministries is the term used for cantors, ushers, greeters and so on in order to imply their new degree of accountability and their needs for specialised formation as well as their formal authorization.

¹¹⁰ Pierre Lefevre, *Ministries and Community for a Church as a Family* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1998), 36-37.

in order to enhance the role of the laity in the church.¹¹¹ There is also a need to develop an ecclesiology of “ministries/modes of community service” rather than of the distinction between “priesthood/laity”¹¹² because the former is closely related to trinitarian ecclesiology.

In the church as the family of God, there is an urgent need to acknowledge and promote lay ministries and the participation of the laity in the church, in order to emphasise equality, diversity and mutuality since both the clergy and the laity are brothers and sisters in the family of God. The acknowledgement of lay ministries in church activities makes the church more aware of the need for formation or training of the laity to help them to fulfil their mission. These two issues have a reciprocal impact. Lay people who receive training and formation will contribute more in the church since they realise their responsibility towards others who are their brothers and sisters.

Besides the proper understanding of the role of the laity in the church that of religious also needs to be clarified in order to promote participation and to avoid clericalism. The relationship between diocesan bishops and religious institutes is an issue for many local churches. While the bishops may ask the laity to show obedience to their authority, religious need to be more independent in their governance or in their apostolate to fulfil their charisms. This relationship needs to be clarified in the church as the family of God because it becomes problematic, particularly in local churches where the activities of most of the local religious congregations depend on diocesan bishops, especially in the Vietnamese church.¹¹³ It might happen that sometimes bishops want religious congregations to carry out the diocesan apostolate while congregations have their own apostolate according to the congregational charism. Some bishops can adopt an authoritarian attitude, and this affects the autonomy of religious institutions.¹¹⁴ The difference between these two apostolates leads to tension between two parties.

The *Directives for the mutual Relations Between Bishops and Religious in the Church* (1978) mentioned particularly for the first time the principle of autonomy of religious.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Jon Nilson, “The Laity,” in Phan (ed.), *The Gift of the Church*, 408-410.

¹¹² Congar, “My Path-Findings,” 176.

¹¹³ The church in Vietnam has six congregations for men and sixteen congregations for women under the jurisdiction of the diocesan bishops. Cf. VBC, *Giáo hội Việt Nam*, 305; 357.

¹¹⁴ Cf. Buzo, *African Theology*, 89; 98-100.

¹¹⁵ MR 13: “Institutes then have an internal organisation on their own which has its proper field of competency and a right to autonomy, even though in the church this autonomy can never become independence. The correct degree of such autonomy and the concrete determination of competency are contained in common law and in the Rules or Constitutions of each institute”. The Directives also described some structures or bodies to promote the cooperation between diocesan bishops and religious, such as the council of major superiors collaborating with episcopal conferences or the diocesan office of the episcopal vicar

This “rightful autonomy” of religious institutes was officially acknowledged in the Code of 1983 in terms of governance, the particular discipline and heritage of each institute. The Code also requested “local ordinaries to safeguard and protect this autonomy”.¹¹⁶ This issue significantly relates to the apostolate of religious within the local church. Bishops have authority over the works of the apostolate carried on by religious. However, the Code also mentioned that religious are subject to their own superiors and must be faithful to the discipline of their institutes. Therefore it is necessary that “diocesan bishops and religious superiors proceed after consultation with each other” regarding the apostolate of religious in the diocese.¹¹⁷

However, some problems in the relationship between bishops and religious still surfaced during the interventions of the synod on the consecrated life (1994).¹¹⁸ In response to these problems, some synod fathers spoke of the submission of religious to the hierarchy or even a total obedience to diocesan bishops. For those bishops, such submission is needed to keep communion in the church. But there were also other bishops who tried to resolve the problems in terms of mutuality and partnership.¹¹⁹

In the Exhortation *The Consecrated Life and Its Mission in the Church and in the World* (1996), Pope John Paul II insisted on the dialogue between bishops and religious for the organic development of diocesan pastoral life and for the promotion of mutual understanding.¹²⁰ This document also recommended the inclusion of the theology of the particular church, the theology as well as the spirituality of the consecrated life and of the diocesan clergy in the formation programmes as a necessary means to maintain and foster their harmonious relationship.¹²¹ In addition, the clergy, particularly bishops, should acknowledge and respect the importance of the charism of consecrated life in the

for religious (*MR* 54; 63). Cf. Benoit Malvaux, “Les relations mutuelles entre évêque et institutés religieux: quelques propositions canoniques à la suite du Synode sur la vie consacrée et de l’Exhortation apostolique postsynodale *Vita Consecrata*,” *Studia canonica* 32 (1998), 297.

¹¹⁶ CIC, can. 586 §1. “For individual institutes there is acknowledged a rightful autonomy of life, especially of governance, by which they enjoy their own disciplines in the church and have the power to preserve their own patrimony intact as mentioned in can. 578 §2. It belongs to local ordinaries to safeguard and protect this autonomy.”

¹¹⁷ CIC, can. 678. Cf. Jordan F. Hite, “Canons and Commentary,” in James A. Coriden, Thomas J. Green, Donald E. Heintschel (eds.), *The Code of Canon Law* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985), 508-509.

¹¹⁸ Malvaux, “Les relations,” 299. Some religious congregations complained about the lack of autonomy in doing pastoral works and expressed their wish to be independent of the interference from dioceses in their apostolate. They also asked bishops to be concerned more about their special charism of community and religious life when assigning their members to a position or requesting them to carry out an apostolate in dioceses.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 309.

¹²⁰ *VC* 48-50.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

church.¹²² In other words, a correct understanding of charisms, autonomy and interdependence of clergy and religious contributes to the promotion of a participatory church and to the building of the church as the family of God. However, the lack of dialogue and consultation still exists in the church, particularly in local churches where the family church model is promoted since clericalism is quite easy to develop in this ecclesiological model. This lack points to an authoritarian style of leadership.¹²³

Another issue affecting the identity of religious in terms of mutual relationship is “the objective superiority” of the consecrated life. The Exhortation described this superiority as a way that highlights the holiness of consecrated/religious people and the special value of the consecrated life in Christian tradition.¹²⁴ This description was criticised because it could be seen as a return to the mentality of valuing the privileged state of religious and denigrating the other states of life of Christians or relegating the clergy and laity to the status of second-class citizens in the church.¹²⁵ In order to avoid an unfair interpretation, Billy suggested understanding this concept in the context of the whole document.¹²⁶ Besides, the document also emphasised the underlying unity of the clergy, laity and religious.¹²⁷ An incorrect understanding of the “objective superiority” could damage the understanding of the equality among the members of the church and affect the harmonious relationship between bishops and religious.

The image of the church as the family might become harmful if it “perpetuates the mentality that the hierarchical priesthood is active while the common priesthood is passive, or that the hierarchical priesthood is superior to the priesthood shared by all Christians, the baptised and the ordained”.¹²⁸ In the church as the family of God, the participation of all members in the threefold function of the priesthood of Christ is of a great importance because if the church fails to express or develop this characteristic the situation probably will develop into “benign paternalism ... [and] end up again with a

¹²² VC 48-49. Charism is an “experience of the Spirit, transmitted to their disciples to be lived, safeguarded, deepened and constantly developed by them, in harmony with the Body of Christ continually in the process of growth”.

¹²³ Cf. Bujo, *African Theology*, 98-99.

¹²⁴ VC 18; 32.

¹²⁵ Dennis J. Billy, “Objective Superiority in *Vita Consecrata*,” *Review for Religious* 5 (1996), 640.

¹²⁶ VC 4, 32; Billy, “Objective Superiority in *Vita Consecrata*,” 642-645. According to Billy, in the context of *Vita Consecrata*, the objective superiority is understood as a way of clarifying “the specific identity of the various states of life” in the church or “of showing forth the church’s holiness”.

¹²⁷ VC 16.

¹²⁸ Drilling, “Common and Ministerial Priesthood: *Lumen Gentium*,” 96.

pyramid structure of the church instead of a circular one of communion".¹²⁹ Indeed, the nature of the model of the church as the family of God promotes the concept of communion and active participation. That is why the Message of the Synod for Africa decried "[a] certain idea of the church [that] produced a type of lay person who is too passive". This Message also calls the attention of bishops to develop programmes for the sake of participation because "the church-as-family is a church of communion. All pastors are invited to develop a pastoral programme, in which the laity rediscover their proper place and importance".¹³⁰ The participation of members in the church, be they clergy, lay or religious, can develop when there is a correct understanding of hierarchy and of ministry grounded in baptism, of the complementarity of the ministerial and the common priesthood, of the promotion of the laity, and of the mutual relationship among religious, priests and bishops.

Ministry in the church, particularly the church as the family of God, must develop in terms of communion in order to avoid clericalism and to promote co-responsibility. All ministry of the baptised and the ordained comes from Jesus and is developed by the works of the Holy Spirit. Its aim is at the service of the church. Tavad synthesises the communion model of ministry as follows:

The christological centre establishes a norm of worship and teaching that is to be followed and protected in all the acts of ministry and of the Ministry. The ecclesial context gives values to these acts by setting them in the *koinonia* of the faithful with Christ and with one another. But it is only by the continuing action of the Spirit of God and of Christ that the ministerial actions convey divine grace.¹³¹

The above description of ministry grounded in baptism and in the trinitarian and ecclesiological perspectives will strengthen the participatory relationships of members of the church as the family of God. The following section will examine such relationships in the Vietnamese church.

6.3.2 The Relationships of the Members of the People of God in Vietnam

Generally, the relationships among bishops, priests, religious and lay people in the church in Vietnam seem to be harmonious. One will not find many articles written about the leadership of bishops and priests, nor any written considerations of the relationships

¹²⁹ John Mary Waliggo, "The Synod of Hope," in African Faith & Justice Network, *The African Synod: Documents, Reflections, Perspectives*, 208.

¹³⁰ Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for Africa, *MOS* 57.

¹³¹ George H. Tavad, *The Church, Community of Salvation* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 140.

among the members of the church in Vietnam, let alone calls for clericalisation or democratisation.¹³² Silence on these issues should not be taken to mean that this local church is not challenged by the issues like participatory leadership, participation in the ministries, and cooperation among its members, even if there has been little opportunity for public discussion to occur.

Some authors describe the Vietnamese church as very institutional church in form. The role of the lay people in parishes as well as in their religious and social activities is passive while all initiative and authority emanates from clergy. As a consequence, Catholics, cultivating an individualistic piety, are concerned only with the internal problems of the church to the neglect of dialogue with believers of other religions. Although there are disadvantages, there are also some advantages, such as high respect for priests and religious, popular devotions and promotion of vocations.¹³³

The above observations are supported by other comments which come from reliable sources. In a preparatory document for the Synod for Asia (1998) in which the model of the church as the family of God was promoted in other Asian churches, the Vietnamese bishops warned that there are some priests and religious enjoying a lifestyle which is considered superior to that of their people, in terms of attitude and self-esteem. Therefore, regarding the formation of priests, the bishops suggested the formators “put an end [to] the tendencies towards clericalism” evidenced among Asian priests.¹³⁴

In the preparation period for the Tenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (2000), some groups of priests, religious and lay people in the archdiocese of Hồ Chí Minh City were invited to study the *Lineamenta* of this synod. They offered some

¹³² One of the reasons for the lack of such materials can be the difficulty of religious publication in Vietnam since all publication is under the control of the government. Cf. Ordinance on Belief and Religious Activities (2004); Article 32 states that “the publishing, printing and distributing of prayer books, newspapers, magazines and other publications on belief or religion...are to be carried out in accordance with government regulations”.

¹³³ Nguyễn Trọng Viễn, “Is the Vietnam Church Becoming just an Institution?” *Asia Focus* 6 July 2001, 3: “Our churches are often crowded when there are worship services, but they are almost empty the rest of the time. Parishes are very well organised hierarchically with many different levels of management, but a lifestyle integrated with the Good News cannot be clearly seen. Parish organisations and activities are closely linked with a “class” of clergy and religious who are responsible for them and whose obvious, prestige and importance derive from this. Consequently, the vitality of the church is expressed mostly through varied and lavish activities and organisations. Cf. Nguyễn Hồng Giáo, “Hiên tình Giáo hội Việt Nam 2005 – Vài nhận định,” [Present situation of the church in Vietnam – Some comments], accessed 30 January 2006; available from <http://www.nguoinhuvu.com/tamlinh/HongGiao/vainhandinh2005.html>; Internet; Phan, “The Dragon and the Eagle,” 232-233. Phan mentioned that the ecclesiological model which Vietnamese American Catholics have used to describe the Vietnamese church in the United States, is an institutional church which they see primarily as a social institution.

¹³⁴ VBC, *Bản góp ý*, C. 3, 19.

comments about the role of bishops. According to one lay group,¹³⁵ the role of the bishop should be closer to the faithful in order to create a suitable climate in which meetings and dialogue can take place. The pastors should be simple and popular ministers who want to reach out to their people, particularly to the poor and the marginalised. The clergy should encourage lay people to join diocesan councils and committees in order to lessen the gap between the bishops and the faithful. Men and women religious also suggested that the bishops should find appropriate ways to improve their mutual cooperation and communion in the church. These religious proposed that the bishops and priests should study and implement *Mutuae Relationes* in order to avoid some possible conflicts in carrying out their apostolates.¹³⁶

There have also been some articles on the ministry of the local clergy. Generally, Vietnamese priests are praised for being “aware of democratic values and civic rights”, and as having “a high sense of fraternity and solidarity with everybody”.¹³⁷ They are also praised in their efforts to “proclaim the Gospel of Christ in the country with conviction and courage”, and for working generously and passionately to “build fraternal communities that bear witness to a welcoming, missionary church”.¹³⁸ However, some defects are noted. One local bishop in charge of priests and seminarians observed:

One dark spot is hunger for power, manifested as authoritarian attitudes in pastoral ministries and ambitious undertaking. In seeking authority or power, a priest may rely on a certain power base. After attaining that power, however, he may fear that his authority would be shared or lessened, so he monopolizes the work and refuses to share responsibility with anyone else.¹³⁹

Some of the above deficiencies in leadership in the church in Vietnam derive from a clericalism owing to the social and historical conditions in Vietnam. According to Cho,¹⁴⁰ unlike clerical life in most of the developed countries, the living standards of priests in Vietnam are often higher than that of ordinary people. Some priests can receive financial support from overseas Catholics so their standard of living might create divisions among

¹³⁵ “Bản góp ý cho Thượng hội đồng Giám mục thế giới kỳ X,” [Contributions for the 10th Synod of Bishops] *Hiệp Thông* 5 (1999), 15. The comments of Couples for Christ and women and men religious supposedly refer to Vietnamese bishops.

¹³⁶ “Bản góp ý cho Thượng hội đồng Giám mục thế giới kỳ X,” 17.

¹³⁷ Nguyễn Bình Tĩnh, “Vietnam Clergy Face New Temptation from Society,” *UCAN Commentary* 20 October 2002; accessed 14 November 2003; available from <http://www.ucanews.com>; Internet.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ Phan Đình Cho, “Tương lai của Giáo hội Việt Nam,” [The future of the church in Vietnam] in *Góp ý chuẩn bị Thượng Hội Đồng Giám mục Á châu* (Reichstett, France: Định Hướng Tùng thư, 1998), 29-30.

the clergy themselves and between the clergy and the laity. In addition, priestly formation and ordination are not regular activities in the local church because these matters are under government control. Seminarians who can pass the government criteria to enter seminaries and then are ordained become privileged people. Besides these social and historical reasons, Confucian culture with “its emphasis on deference for authority and tradition” is a further reason for clericalism in the local church.¹⁴¹

Clericalism has also affected the participation of the laity in the mission of the church. In many local churches in Asia the role and the participation of the laity have not been greatly acknowledged. In a statement made by the Vietnamese Bishops’ Conference to the pre-synodal Committee of the Synod for Asia, they suggested that the church “should help the laity to have a greater awareness of their vocation and of their role by entrusting them with more responsibility in the life of the church and the work of evangelisation, as was the case formerly in the history of the Asian churches”.¹⁴²

In Vietnam, the limited participation of the laity arises, then, from two reasons: government policy on religious activities and the leadership of the local hierarchy. The government only allows the church to organise its religious activities within the compound of parish churches. Generally, they recognise priests, but not lay people, as representatives of the church. They also limit the number of lay people in parish pastoral councils. These government restrictions on the activities of the church limit the involvement of the laity in the apostolate. But the other limiting cause is the leadership-style of the local hierarchy and clergy affected by the patriarchal attitude of Confucianism. So the social situation preventing activities of lay people and the lack of awareness of the important role of the laity in the church from the bishops and priests have had a negative impact on the laity. Catechists receive a limited formation in doctrine and skills for their apostolate. Parish council members do not get enough training for their pastoral work and not even acknowledgment from some priests. Both formation and acknowledgement are necessary if the laity are to be encouraged to fulfil their role in the church.¹⁴³ Fortunately, this situation has been improving in recent years.

In summary, the above comments point to problems in the relationships among the members of the church in Vietnam. The paternalistic style of pastoral ministry among

¹⁴¹ Phan, “The Dragon and the Eagle,” 232.

¹⁴² VBC, *Bản góp ý*, C. 3, 19.

¹⁴³ Nội, “Công đồng Vatican II,” 95. Cf. “Une description critique de l’Église de Vietnam,” *EDA* 236 (1997), 15-16.

some local bishops and priests is preventing a participatory style of leadership.¹⁴⁴ In order to develop a more inclusive approach to leadership in the church, all the members of the people of God should be included in the planning and decision-making process at diocesan and parochial levels, particularly in developing the role of the pastoral parish councils.¹⁴⁵ Moreover, the participation or co-responsibility in the church in Vietnam is facilitated when the role of the hierarchy in the church must be correctly understood. The appropriate formation regarding authority in the church and the roles of the laity and religious in relation to all members of the church is an urgent necessity. The following section suggests practical directions inspired by an ecclesiology of the church as the family of God in Vietnam.

6.4 Applications of Trinitarian, Basic Ecclesial Communities, and Ancestral Veneration Ecclesiologies to the Church as the Family of God in Vietnam

The ecclesiology of the church as the family of God is a synthesis of four components: trinitarian ecclesiology, BECs, ancestral veneration and liberation ecclesiologies as presented in Chapter Three. From that description, the first three components become the basis for the development of a participatory church as the family of God in Vietnam. These three components will be reviewed below and practical consequences for a more participatory church will be outlined.

Trinitarian ecclesiology in conciliar and post-conciliar documents discusses the role of the Trinity in the economy of salvation and particularly emphasises the mission of the Holy Spirit and the trinitarian foundation of the church. Trinitarian life is relational, and provides the model of communion among church members.¹⁴⁶ Formed in this trinitarian image, the church must be so structured as to allow unity in diversity. The mutuality in relations among the divine persons will lead to an understanding of relationships in the church as being Spirit-filled and leadership as being Spirit-led. In particular, the practical consequences of a pneumatological ecclesiology will help to harmonise the tension between the various ministries and charisms in the church.¹⁴⁷

The ecclesiology of ancestral veneration is based on the model of Jesus as the Proto-Ancestor and the Eldest Brother in the family of God and the Communion of Saints. The

¹⁴⁴ Nôi, "Công đồng Vatican II," 95.

¹⁴⁵ Phạm Minh Mẫn, "Hội nhập văn hoá," [Inculturation] *Hiệp Thông* 5 (1999), 25. Cf. VBC, *Thư chung năm 1998*, no. 17.

¹⁴⁶ Rigal, *Découvrir l'Église*, 66-68.

¹⁴⁷ P. D. Lee, *Pneumatological Ecclesiology in the Roman Catholic – Pentecostal Dialogue. A Catholic Reading of the Quinquennium (1985-1989)*, (Rome: Pontificia Studiorum Universitas A. S. Thoma A. Q. in Urbe, 1994), 2.

meaning behind these images is an eschatological life of mutual relationships. Jesus is considered as the source of a new life among all the members of the people of God and of unity among his brothers and sisters in the church. He is also a man of the Spirit (Lk 3:21-22; 4:8-12; 24:49). An ecclesiology of ancestral veneration focuses on family relationships and ties. This can be explained so as to foster communion between the living and the dead, including the saints in heaven and those in a state of purification. On the negative side, unless the ecclesiology of ancestral veneration is properly explained it can be misused to legitimate paternalism and nepotism in church structures.

The ecclesiology of BECs is based on the concepts of solidarity and participation. This ecclesiology promotes various ministries and charisms which must be shared by all members of Christian communities. Thus participation is much appreciated and emphasised. In addition, the ecclesiology of BECs also supports the development of an ecclesial structure in which ecclesial, social and human concerns are met. The spirit and reality of these basic communities are the foundation for building up the church as the family of God, forming relationships among members of the church and leading all members to the reign of God. In other words, BECs are the ecclesial model in which the ecclesiology of trinitarian communion and of ancestral veneration can be developed and implemented.

6.4.1 Leadership, Communication and Ministries in Trinitarian Ecclesiology

There is no leadership in the Trinity as understood in human society, but an order exists among the divine persons. The Father is the source from whom proceed the Son and the Spirit. Thus there is a dynamically relational order in the trinitarian relations, beginning with the Father (cf. Jn 14:10-11; 26). However, the Father's authority does not overpower or diminish the full divinity of either the Son or the Spirit. Leadership and hierarchy in the church, particularly the church as God's family, must follow the trinitarian model. Ecclesial order or hierarchy mirrors its trinitarian form and source. In that context, the clergy and those in leadership positions should not be authoritarian and paternalistic leaders, but they should be supportive ones. They should respect and empower the faithful and serve the common good of other members although there is a hierarchy among ministries.¹⁴⁸

In addition, the Trinity is characterised by three qualities: equality, diversity and mutuality.¹⁴⁹ Each of the persons of the Father, the Son and the Spirit is God and is fully

¹⁴⁸ Cf. LG 18; 21.

¹⁴⁹ Drilling, "Discipleship, Ministry and Authority," 16-17.

divine. But the Father is not the Son as well as not the Spirit and vice versa. They act together in every instance, but each divine person acts in accord with its distinct personality. The relationship in the Trinity is called *perichoresis*, that is, the compenetration of the three persons in which each is totally present and within the other. This divine *perichoresis* has two dimensions: each of the divine persons abides in the others (*circuminsessio*) and the life of the three divine persons is characterised by mutual yielding and relationships (*circumincessio*). Each is in the other, and each exists for the other.¹⁵⁰ These qualities animate the communal reality of the church, called to participate in the divine life.

The clergy, for their part, need to internalise these qualities in their lives and leadership. They should recognise that their ministry might be more public and demanding in terms of commitment and time than lay ministries, but the clergy cannot fulfil their ministry apart from the ministries of others. Indeed, before God, both ministries have the same value, that is, to bring God's salvation to all. The clergy should acknowledge the diversity of charisms as the various gifts of the Spirit in the laity which are necessary for the church. This diversity of talents is important for the development of the church and for the success of the ministry of the clergy. All service is for the common good of the church and others. Therefore they should adopt the *kenosis* of the Son and the Spirit in their missions in order to develop a selfless leadership or authority which is also the characteristic of ideal parents in families.

In particular, leadership in the church as family can no longer be expressed in authoritarian terms but in relationship and service to one another. It is also characterised by teamwork rather than individualistic approach. In other words, authority in the church as family is not power over other members. Contrarily, it must encourage dialogue and participatory decision-making among lay as well as religious people. So a leader in the church as family is a mentor, a developer and an enabler.¹⁵¹ This type of leadership calls for a proper formation in seminaries or formation houses which gives priority to human and spiritual formation. The former trains candidates to become mature people who are capable of respecting, relating and communicating with one another while the latter forms them to be disciples of Jesus who are committed to living and proclaiming his gospel values.¹⁵² The formation of these two areas needs the contributions of parish

¹⁵⁰ Michael O'Carroll, *Trinitas: A Theological Encyclopedia of the Holy Trinity* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1987), 69; Drilling, "Discipleship, Ministry and Authority," 18; Kelly, *The Trinity of Love*, 177-184.

¹⁵¹ Cf. Peter Lwaminda, "The Church-as-Family: Its Implementations for the Formation of Agents of Evangelisation," *AFER* 41 (1999), 189-191.

¹⁵² Cf. Cecil McGarry, "Formation of the Agents of Evangelisation for the Realities of Africa Today: Urgency and Importance," *AFER* 41 (1999), 203-209.

community and its clergy and lay leaders. With regard to academic formation it should organise that seminarians study theology alongside lay people, and teaching and governing staff should include lay people, particularly women.¹⁵³

Leadership in the church in Vietnam is often dominated by the undeniably important roles of clergy and religious. This dominant presence flows from the way church-life is often reduced to liturgical activities. These activities need clerical and religious organisers to carry out these celebrations. Moreover, in most cases, it is only priests and male religious who work in some church organisations. Some dioceses have Diocesan Pastoral Councils, but these councils do not include women religious and lay members.¹⁵⁴ In other words, leadership still reflects hierarchical, patriarchal and institutional aspects of Confucianism and the feudalism of the past. Such a leadership needs to be changed in order to adopt a Spirit-filled leadership of the early church which does not rely on human power, authority and possessions. The local church must be able to discern how these worldly characteristics decrease the power of the Spirit. A Spirit-led leadership promotes a spirit of self-emptying, love and self-giving service which attracts Asians and can overcome the dichotomy between the faith and life of many Christians including Vietnamese Catholics.¹⁵⁵

Leadership must appreciate the cultural values, such as non-violence, detachment and caring, which also arise from the presence of the Holy Spirit.¹⁵⁶ Indeed, Taoist values and those of indigenous Vietnamese, such as sharing of power and participation between spouses in families, are now more appreciated in the contemporary Vietnamese family. Consequently, the practice of these values in church leadership is a need in Asian

¹⁵³ Cf. Synod of Bishops, Synod for Asia, *Proposition 24*. On the formation of Asian seminarians the synod fathers recommended emphasis on building of community and training for participatory leadership and animation of lay leaders. FABC Office of Education and Student Chaplaincy (1999), *Seminar for Rector and Spiritual Directors of Asian Seminaries*, in F-J. Eilers (ed.), *FAPA III*, 22-26. According to Sr. Teresa Kim Sung-hae, one of the speakers of the seminar, “the seminary should strive to develop a positive attitude towards women in the seminarians. Otherwise, they can adopt uncritically patriarchal attitudes, which are resented by women today. This also leads to arrogance and authoritarianism, traits which render the priest’s ministry less effective”. The participants also recommend that “Asian seminaries should model a simple life-style, centred on Christ, and stress the importance of family values in the very structure of the program”.

¹⁵⁴ Nội, “Công đồng Vatican II,” 90.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Gratian Mundaban, “Leadership in the Church in Asia,” in Phan (ed.), *The Synod for Asia*, 110-111. He describes the advantages of a Spirit-led leadership as follows: “The leadership of the church will have to discern and activate the various charisms of the whole Christian community to build up communities of love and fellowship as did the apostles. Such a leadership will seek to strengthen the capacity of the people of God to become true faith communities...[and] will help make these communities into powerful evangelising communities and empower the faithful to face their challenges, present and future, with interior power, power from above, and not with worldly wisdom and efficiency.

¹⁵⁶ FABC Office of Theological Concern, *The Spirit at Work in Asia Today*, in *FAPA III*, 257. The document described some Confucian and Taoist values that are considered as the manifestation of the working of the Holy Spirit through different cultures in Asia. These virtues, such as, docility, trust, humility, non-violence, detachment, equanimous love, responsibility, honesty and fidelity, could be adopted by ministers as their efforts in assuming the local style in the exercise of the ministries.

churches, particularly in Vietnam.¹⁵⁷ It will help avoid clericalism and authoritarianism in the church and maximise lay talents for the development of the church.

Communication in the Trinity is transparent. There is neither dominance nor competition. The divine persons give themselves to one another and to the world through the missions of the Son and the Spirit.¹⁵⁸ In Christian families, there is a three-directional communication: communication with God, among family members and between families.¹⁵⁹ Similarly, the first kind of communion is the most important because the divine life will, first, sustain life itself in the family, or the church, secondly, it will facilitate loving exchanges between family members, the clergy and the laity, and thirdly, it will promote solidarity with other members outside the family which is the direct consequence of the first two kinds of communication. Thus communication in the church as the family of God needs to follow the self-communication as it exists within God as well as the three-directional communication in the human family. Such communication will promote consultations, dialogue and collaborations in the church on the one hand, and on the other, it will counteract the distorted communications of contemporary culture. People spend much time communicating by modern means of communication, but they have less time for communication among family members. The role of pastors in the church as the family of God should be an example of a three-directional communication based on communion in the Trinity.

In terms of ministry there is a need for emphasising the role of the Spirit in the church as the family of God. The FABC document entitled *The Spirit at Work in Asia Today* (1997) placed an emphasis on the Spirit in the church by mentioning the four shifts in the exercise of ministries in Asian churches for the purpose of the renewal of the church in the changing situations of society today.¹⁶⁰ Among them is the multi-directional expansion of ministry that moves from liturgical celebration to that of the service of life, from the parochial to trans-parochial sectors, from the ministries of an intra-ecclesial character to more extra-ecclesial domains. This shift implies the increase of lay

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 309-311. The document proposed four shifts in the exercise of ministries in Asian churches. The first three shifts are: the expansion of multi-directional ministry, the increase of lay participation and the significant presence of women in sharing ministerial responsibilities. The fourth is the inclusion of local values in the exercise of ministries.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. LaCugna, *God for Us*, 221-222.

¹⁵⁹ Anthony Roman, *Family and Communication in the Family*, 8 (Hong Kong: FABC Papers 110, 2004).

¹⁶⁰ Cf. The conclusion of *Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church* organised by FABC at Hong Kong in 1977 mentioned thirteen kinds of ministry of lay people. Some of them are: evangelist, catechist/religion teacher, ministry for liturgy and liturgical animation, ministry of family apostolate, ministry of healing, ministry of interreligious dialogue, ministry of social concern, and ministry for youth.

participation and their involvement in different areas and at various levels since their contributions are substantial in the church.

The Vietnamese clergy should take into account the above proposal for their leadership so that the ordained and non-ordained ministries in the local church express clearly the family characteristic of the church. The diversity of ministry in various areas will make the church present in many aspects of human life. It also reminds the clergy that their leadership is neither an authoritarian imposition upon the baptised nor a usurpation of their rightful activities as full members of the people and the family of God.¹⁶¹ On the contrary, their leadership means servant leadership since all ministries in the church derive from and share in the servanthood of Christ (Mk 10:43-46; Mt 20:24-28; Lk 22:24-27; Jn 13). Church ministers, the clergy and the laity, need to develop for themselves the servant spirituality and to be persons of the Spirit.¹⁶² Indeed, participatory or servant leadership calls for the practice of non-domination leadership as well as an attitudinal change, particularly on the part of the clergy, which is an attitude of trust in people and an appreciation of their reliability and competence in order to bring out the best in others for the service of all people.¹⁶³

6.4.2 Service and Solidarity in Ecclesiology of Ancestral Veneration

The application of the ecclesiology of ancestral veneration can be seen mainly in the role of Jesus as the exemplary model of leadership for bishops and priests, and the responsibility of all family members for the benefit of the church as their family.

Jesus acted as the Proto-Ancestor and the Eldest Brother in order to bring life to members in the church and in society. The role of bringing life is appropriate to bishops and priests; however, it is also applied to lay and religious people. Therefore every member of the people of God in Vietnam can assume these roles to offer life to other members in the church and in society.

Like ancestors who are the source of life and unity in the family or clan, Vietnamese bishops and priests are also the heads of the ecclesial community. This position is an honoured or privileged status in the community, but it is more important to see it as a ministry or a service in the ecclesial community. This service must be actualised in the person of bishops and priests in order to transmit to people the life of Jesus, the Proto-

¹⁶¹ Cf. Drilling, "Discipleship, Ministry and Authority," 24.

¹⁶² Cf. FABC Office of Theological Concern, *The Spirit at Work in Asia Today*, in *FAPA III*, 311-312..

¹⁶³ Cf. Catholic Bishop's Conference in India, "Response of the General Body to CBCI Evaluation Report", in *Catholic India*, 1996, 24; cited in Kunnumpuram, "Beyond the Clergy-Laity Divide," 836.

Ancestor. They have to act to strengthen the Mystical Body so that all the members in the family of God may enjoy fullness of life.¹⁶⁴ This fullness of life exists when Christians are united with Jesus and with one another. Therefore bishops and priests must be the centre of unity. They must promote unity and eliminate divisions among the people of God in the church. In other words, the ministry of bishops and priests must be an effective channel in communicating the life of Jesus to consecrated and lay people in the church. Apart from clergy, seminarians also need to be helped to form themselves according to the model of Jesus - the elder Brother in the family of God, and the holy people who are their elder brothers/sisters in faith. They are requested to commit all their energies to become like Jesus and their Christian ancestors in giving life to all people.

In a family or clan the eldest often takes the role as a representative of the father to be responsible for life in general, or to take care of the various needs of the family or family members. Similarly, the ministry of the clergy includes the ministry of sacraments, word, and pastoral care. Therefore the concerns of Vietnamese bishops and priests should not only be liturgical and administrative but also social and political. They need to show their concern regarding poverty, unemployment, the availability and quality of education. In fact, all matters dealing with the life of the faithful are their domain. In this sense, bishops and priests can fulfil the responsibilities of an ancestor or eldest son/brother who watch over and share whatever they have in order to promote the fullness of life of their members. To them also belongs the task of bringing about a shift in the exercise of the church's pastoral ministry to respond more to the needs of Christ's faithful as suggested by the documents of FABC.¹⁶⁵

The above description is in line with that of the Synod for Asia regarding the person and ministry of Jesus. Jesus is the Saviour whose mission of love and service in Asia is to offer his life so that the people of God may have life and have it abundantly.¹⁶⁶ The mission of Jesus in all its dimensions is also the model for ministry of Vietnamese bishops, priests and religious. They are not just "charity workers or institutional administrators" but people "whose minds and hearts are set on the deep things of the Spirit".¹⁶⁷ They must be the witnesses of the mission of love and service of Jesus through "their life of prayer, zealous service and exemplary conduct".¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context*, 88-92.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. FABC Office of Theological Concern, *The Spirit at Work in Asia Today*, in *FAPA III*, 309-314.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. Jn 10:10. The Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* is entitled Jesus Christ the Saviour and His Mission of Love and Service in Asia: "...that they may have life and have it abundantly".

¹⁶⁷ *EA* 43.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

Ancestral veneration emphasising the role of the eldest son in the Vietnamese family is often considered as patriarchal or paternalistic and must be taken into account in the context of the ecclesiology of ancestral veneration in order to limit its negative impact. It is also easy for clericalism to grow in this environment. Therefore it is important to know that the role of the eldest son needs to be understood and developed in the context of the gospel. Indeed, the gospel description about Jesus and his community is totally opposite to human thinking. Jesus is a servant-leader and his community is made up of men and women who create a family of brothers and sisters. Therefore bishops and priests, who take seriously the model of Jesus as the Proto-Ancestor and the Eldest Brother, have to reject the pyramidal church model and clericalism. Church leadership has to become a servant-leadership model in which the participation of religious and lay people can develop.

In order to encourage the involvement of religious and lay people in various church activities, Vietnamese bishops and priests need to overcome the paternalistic aspect of the familial model. This is a big challenge because the clergy have a dominant presence in the church in Vietnam. Some priests act in an authoritarian manner with regard to both laity and religious. Their control is so strong that the independence of lay community life and the apostolate of religious communities can be blocked.¹⁶⁹ Such control makes the faithful dependent on the clergy and destroys any possibility of initiative or creativity, and moreover, it damages the charisms of religious congregations. In response to this challenge, one should know that the fundamental distinctions between members in a family are made on the basis of relationships, not of jobs or functions. Accordingly, the church as family must promote the relationships among the laity, religious and the clergy rather than the differences in terms of functions in the church.

The participation of the laity, particularly women, has been a challenge to the church in Vietnam which has developed in a hierarchical and patriarchal society. Women are the main contributors to the Christian life in communities as in families, but they have often been marginalised.¹⁷⁰ Lay and religious people should be encouraged to contribute much more to the church. Like every member in a family or clan who has the responsibility to

¹⁶⁹ Cf. Thiện Cẩm, "Tương quan mục vụ giữa nữ tu và linh mục," [The relationships between women religious and priests] *Chia Sẻ* 5 (1995), 25-37; Cù, "Vài nhận định về đời sống Kitô giáo," 150-156. In his article, Thiện Cẩm mentioned some direct interference of priests in the apostolate and even in the leadership of some women congregations in Vietnam. Tư Cù remarked that some priests still considered the faithful as lowly educated people who need detailed instructions or guidelines from priests to fulfil their Christian life.

¹⁷⁰ VBC, *Thư chung năm 1998*, no. 8: "Women in the church never cease to contribute to faith formation and the promotion of community life ... However, we have not yet fully promoted the role of women within the community and in their service to the church... Let us revitalize and accept lay collaboration ..., promote women's advancement ..., and facilitate their participation in the administration and animation of parish life".

contribute to the life of the family or clan, lay people are called to contribute their resources for the building up of the church. They should be invited to be involved in the mission of the church and to contribute their own resources to church activities. In a similar way, religious congregations should be encouraged to develop and share their different charisms and put them at the service of the local church to serve the needs of the people of God and of society. The Vietnamese lay people need to be made more aware of their responsibility for the life of the church and encouraged to use their gifts and other resources for the mission of the church. This responsibility must also be felt by Vietnamese religious congregations so that they will find different ways to live out their charisms in the context of society today.

The application of the ecclesiology of ancestral veneration to the church in Vietnam challenges the church to respond to the real needs of people today through a diversified pastoral service. The mission of the church is to bring the light of the gospel to every aspect of human life including the cultural and social dimensions. Members of the church must be present in different sectors of society acting as a leaven, while priests and religious are also encouraged to study the human sciences and situation in order better to understand the needs of people. Further, religious congregations are requested to adapt their apostolates to respond to the real needs of people especially the less privileged.

The promotion of life in an ecclesiology of ancestral veneration is also to be seen as communion between the living and the dead, within each family and in the family of the church.¹⁷¹ Belief in the Communion of Saints manifests itself in horizontal fellowship and solidarity among members of the church as God's family. The belief helps to foster communion among the people of God while the practice of ancestral veneration can also help exploration and promotion of the common priesthood of the faithful. It is to be noted that the father or the eldest son who presides over the rites of ancestral worship on solemn occasions every year is not an ordained minister. Furthermore, the mother or any other person in the family may also practise this rite, on behalf of the family, on a daily basis or on solemn occasions because of the absence of the father or the son. Therefore the application of the ecclesiology of ancestral veneration will foster the involvement of the laity in some celebrations in the family and in the community which are not exclusive to the ministerial priesthood.¹⁷²

¹⁷¹ Cf. CCC 1475; *Indulgentiarum Doctrina* 5; LG 49.

¹⁷² See De, *A Cultural and Theological Foundation for Ancestor Veneration*, 240: "Overall, in ancestor veneration the priesthood of the laity (regarding offering sacrifice) is to some extent fulfilled. Any person may exercise his or her common priesthood in ancestor veneration. This emphasises the idea that there is

6.4.3 The Laity and Community Building in Ecclesiology of BECs

The applications of the ecclesiology of BECs need to be developed in the field of the promotion of lay participation in the church, of formation of the laity, and of the involvement of the laity in various activities of the church and the building of community.

BECs are often considered as the new ways of being church for they provide the new and appropriate forms or structures that have the capacity to fulfil the mission of the church today. BECs are called “a meeting point of ecclesiologies” since they virtually reflect the five models of the church as institution, communion, sacrament, herald and servant.¹⁷³ Similarly, BECs are communities of faith in which the practical consequences of both the ecclesiology of trinitarian communion and of ancestral veneration can be integrated. In other words, BECs are the most appropriate ecclesial model to develop an ecclesiology of the church as the family of God.

One of the factors that limit the participation of the laity in the life of the church is the lack of formation or training of the laity. Over the years, the Vietnamese church has spent time and resources to educate clergy and religious and their candidates which often set them apart from laity. The Vietnamese bishops acknowledge that many lay Vietnamese people have “a very limited intellectual and doctrinal level, a level of doctrinal formation which leaves much to be desired.”¹⁷⁴ While this is true of lay people in general, it is particularly true of members of parish pastoral councils. They have not yet received the necessary formation to understand their role in the church and in society.¹⁷⁵ The Vietnamese laity need a thorough theological and spiritual formation in order to live the Christian faith and to carry out their mission in a context where the majority are Buddhists and in a Communist-governed society. Catechists and members of parish pastoral councils need to understand the mission of Jesus and their role in the mission of the church in order to be able to fulfil their ministry. These understandings should be given serious attention because the Vietnamese laity have lacked an appropriate formation to

only one high priest, Jesus Christ (Heb 5:10; 9:11), and that all members of the Mystical Body participate in the priesthood of Christ according to their proper functions (1 Cor 12:4-26; Rom 12:4-8) to offer to God the sacrifice of thanks and praise. Furthermore, it is necessary to stress the idea that all members through baptism “in their own way share the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ” (LG 31; AA 2). This threefold office goes hand in hand with the threefold duty of sanctifying, teaching and ruling (LG 21; AA 2). This threefold duty in principle belongs to bishops. However, it may be applied to the lay people as well”.

¹⁷³ Avezedo, “Basic Ecclesial Communities: A Meeting Point of Ecclesiologies,” 601-620. Avezedo used the five models described in *Models of the Church* by Avery Dulles to justify BECs as a meeting point of ecclesiologies.

¹⁷⁴ VBC, *Bản trả lời*, I, 12.

¹⁷⁵ Nội, “Công đồng Vatican II,” 95.

help them become true members of the church and witnesses in society.¹⁷⁶ Vietnamese bishops and priests need to take into account the words of Pope John Paul II in order to find ways to respond to the lack of religious formation.¹⁷⁷

The availability of adequate formation for the laity, as the documents of the church require, has been a challenge for the church in Vietnam. Although this local church has faced some difficulties because of long years of war or restrictions imposed by the Communist government, the Vietnamese pastors should consider seriously the need for formation of lay people as the recommendations of the pope during their *Ad limina* visit.¹⁷⁸ Moreover, the laity must be empowered when the local church promotes the ecclesiological model of the family of God. Before God all members in the family of God, clergy, religious and laity, are equal, therefore all need to be trained for their task in the church and in the world. Accordingly, the lack of formation of the laity is hardly justified in the church as the family of God.

The acknowledgment of the need for formation of the laity is an official recognition of their Christian dignity and rights. Their contributions in the church are necessary not because of the scarcity of priests and religious which is not a big problem in Vietnam, but also because these are their basic rights as children of God. In that context, the Vietnamese church should develop instituted and commissioned ministries for the laity which are not available in Vietnam up to the present.¹⁷⁹ The institution of lay ministries formalises these ministers a new ecclesial relation within the community which brings about a high degree of stability for their service. It will also compel the local church to pay more attention to the formation and training of the laity so that they can fulfil their

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ John Paul II, "Structure of Participation Must Reflect the Church's True Nature," *OR* 13 October 1993, 9-10: "A constant concern of the church's pastors must be the question of whether Catholic laity are receiving a continuing theological and spiritual formation, including formation in the church's social doctrine, of a sufficient high level to enable them to fulfil their role in the church and in society. This formation should be arranged in such a way as to meet practical difficulties at the parish level where so may secular interests compete for people's attention".

¹⁷⁸ John Paul II, "Vietnamese Church Has Given Heroic Witness to Christ's Love," Address to 1997 *Ad Limina Apostolorum* Bishops' Conference of Vietnam, *OR* 8 January 1997, 9-10: "I understand the difficulties deriving from the limitations imposed on those who have received from Christ the responsibility for organising the apostolate of the faithful...[However], it is necessary that the human spiritual and doctrinal formation of the laity has a recognised place in pastoral programmes"; cf. John Paul II, "There is a Personal and a Social Right to Religious Freedom," Address to 2002 *Ad Limina Apostolorum* Bishops' Conference of Vietnam, *OR* 6 February 2002, 3: "Your quinquennial reports mentioned several times the need to develop initial catechetical formation, as well as ongoing formation for priests, men and women religious and the lay faithful. Long years of war, the spread of Christian communities and an uneven level of the instruction of the faithful have made it difficult to present and organise this formation. I encourage you to promote and support all the initiatives...by means of appropriate formation...to offer them sound teaching on the social doctrines of the church".

¹⁷⁹ For instituted and commissioned ministries and formation, see The Motu proprio *Ministeria Quaedam*; FABC, *Asian Colloquium on Ministries*, in *FAPA* I, 78-84; United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord* (Washington, DC: 2005).

ministries.¹⁸⁰ The institution of these ministries and the training given to them are reciprocal influences. Furthermore, the development of these lay ministries for men and women¹⁸¹ also show the authenticity of the church as family. Priests, religious, laymen and women have their various ministries according to their status. All need access to adequate formation for their mission. Without the contribution of lay men and women as a group of instituted and commissioned ministers one cannot develop and imagine the church as family.

The above shortcomings in developing the role of the laity in the church in Vietnam suggest the need for developing an ecclesiology of the church as the family of God. In any Vietnamese family every member, men as well as women, has the duty and responsibility to work for the well being of the family. Every member of the church needs to believe and feel that the church is also their family. The benefits of the clan or family must be met first rather than those of individuals. Then the local church should facilitate the contribution of the laity for the benefit of the church. It seems that the church in Vietnam needs to learn from the experiences of other Asian churches, such as the Philippine and Korean churches, in order to promote the contribution and the participation of the laity and to encourage them to carry out their responsibility for the mission of the church.¹⁸²

The Synod for Africa acknowledged that the church as the family of God only reaches its full ecclesial potential in BECs.¹⁸³ The Synod for Asia underlined the value of BECs as “an effective way of promoting communion and participation” and “as a genuine force for evangelisation”. BECs are highly suited to develop the implications of the ecclesiology of the church as the family of God in local churches because the former “aim to help their members to live the gospel in a spirit of fraternal love and service, and are therefore a solid starting point for building anew society, the expression of a civilisation of love”.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁰ Cf. FABC, *Asian Colloquium on Ministries*, in *FAPA I*, 81-83; Gaillardetz, “Ecclesiological Foundations of Ministry,” 44-47.

¹⁸¹ FABC, *Asian Colloquium on Ministries*, in *FAPA I*, 83: “The Asian context demands special attention be given to women in ministry. This must be based on the recognition of their fundamental equality in the church’s universal ministeriality”.

¹⁸² Cf. James H. Kroeger, *Becoming Local Church* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1999); Julia Neo *et al.*, *Towards a New Way of Being Church Today* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1998); Paul Lee Pombae, “Pourquoi désirent-ils donc devenir chrétiens?,” *Missions Étrangères de Paris* 391 (2004), 235-238.

¹⁸³ *EIA* 89.

¹⁸⁴ *EA* 25.

VBC also recommended that it is necessary to form BECs in parishes.¹⁸⁵ However, it needs to be remembered that BECs are a new reality in this local church.¹⁸⁶ Some of the reasons that limit the development of BECs come from the historical reality of the church in Vietnam. This local church has not yet experienced a shortage of priests as in other places¹⁸⁷ and it has had a period of isolation from the other Asian churches since 1975.¹⁸⁸ It was during this period that BECs began and developed among the churches in this geographical area. However, it seems that the church in Vietnam has another way to promote the spirit of BECs. Instead of BECs, this local church has developed the activities of religious groups or associations such as Catholic Women, Catholic Youth, prayer groups and so on. In particular, parishes in Vietnam are often divided into clusters or areas in which the faithful form into family groups. Member groups come together for weekly prayers, prayers during Lent or for funerals. Beside the above traditional groups or associations, in some recent decades, new groups have been formed, such as Catholic students, *Khôi Bình* (Kolping Society), and *Gia đình cùng theo Chúa* (Couples for Christ).¹⁸⁹ These groups consist of members who either belong to the same or similar social status or have the same apostolate.

Most of the Catholic groups or associations are organised by both laymen and laywomen, with exceptions, such as the Franciscan or Dominican Third Orders which are led by clergy or religious. Participation and sharing are developed in these groups/associations. They also carry out diversified apostolates in various religious and social areas. To some extent they have the characteristics of BECs in that they are lay, para-liturgical and participation-orientated. So the application of the ecclesiology of BECs should be to deepen and implement the characteristics of BECs in the current

¹⁸⁵ Cf. VBC, *Thư mục vụ năm 2000*, no. 10: "Building up the parish into a community that lives out, bears witness to and proclaim the Good News. The parish is the essential unit for all activities of the community".

¹⁸⁶ Cf. "In Vietnam, Church Health Care is Slowly Coming of Age - Vatican Official sees other Hopeful Signs, even in Hanoi"; accessed 5 April 2005; available from <http://zenit.org>; Internet. This was the comment of Archbishop Paul Josef Cordes, President of the Pontifical Council 'Cor Unum' on the church healthcare and church activities in Vietnam. After his visit to Vietnam (1-20 January 2003) he observes that "the new movements and ecclesial communities of the laity have not arrived yet... The only thing I was able to see in several places were the prayer groups of Taizé Community, which was a real surprise. I detected a certain friendliness on the part of the bishops, who see in this community a 'school of prayer' for young Vietnamese".

¹⁸⁷ According to the 2004 Report of the Vietnamese Bishops' Conference, there were 2,927 priests for 5,667,428 Catholics in Vietnam. At the present, vocations for the priesthood and religious are abundant.

¹⁸⁸ Vietnam Bishops' Conference was one of the founding members of FABC in 1970. Since 1975, under the Communist government in Vietnam, VBC could not attend FABC general assemblies. However, since 2000, the government allowed the Vietnamese bishops to join these assemblies but not to hold any position in FABC.

¹⁸⁹ Cf. VBC, *Giáo hội Công giáo Việt Nam*, 449-452. "Couples for Christ" is a lay movement which was started in the Philippines in 1981. Its mission is evangelising the world through the witness of the family life of the members. This movement was brought to Vietnam in 1993.

organisations or movements in the church in Vietnam. However, this does not mean that the church in Vietnam does not have the need to form BECs when the conditions are suitable.

In addition to the formation of BECs, there is a need for the building of human or neighbourhood communities (NCs) which can work alongside those organised by the government since Catholics are still the minority in Vietnam. According to Roman,¹⁹⁰ NCs which have been initiated in more than seventeen Asian countries since 1990s, have proved to be an effective tool for promoting lay ministries and activation of the lay charisma. These NCs will provide opportunities for an authentic Christian witness and evangelisation because they interact with people of other faiths and even communists in mutually addressing problems of life. Moreover, when working in these NCs, Catholics can carry out new ministries and commitment to social transformation. Being imbued with Christ's love, they are able to show how sources of division such as tribalism and casteism can be removed in order to build the family of God in society.

In summary, the applications of an ecclesiology of the church as the family of God emphasises the working of the Holy Spirit in the Church which is characterised by the exercise of many ministries and in the participation of all the people of God in order to bring new life within the church and in society. The church instituted by Jesus and co-instituted by the Holy Spirit will become the family of God. This model of church comes from an ecclesiology that includes both christological and pneumatological approaches.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter explored the conditions and the practices for the development of a participatory model of the church as the family of God suitable for the church of Vietnam. It was done by analysing the hierarchy, the ministry, and the relationships of the members of the people of God in order to promote a participatory church as family. It proceeded to identify the relationships between the members of the people of God in Vietnam, and then to draw out the practical implications of an ecclesiology of the church as the family of God in Vietnam.

The hierarchy in the church is an issue which needs critical clarification based on biblical understanding. The conclusions of many contemporary scholars showed that hierarchy in the church was formed through the history of the church and it must be properly understood in its context. It can be concluded that hierarchy in the church needs to be

¹⁹⁰ Roman, *Family and Communication in the Family*, 9.

promoted in a non-linear approach rather than linear one. Indeed, church hierarchy is not a monarchy; therefore it must promote participation or co-responsibility at all levels. The ultimate reason for this understanding is that the church as the family of God must follow the relational model in the divine family or the Trinity which is a perichoretic communion.

The grounding of ministry in baptism is recognised in the New Testament, church documents and theological understanding/studies. Such a foundation has proven many advantages for the church as family, particularly in the area of the participation of the laity and religious. Therefore it helps to overcome the lack of active contribution of the laity and the development of clericalism, which are often considered as the negative consequences of grounding ministry in the sacrament of orders. It is concluded that ministry in the church as the family of God should be grounded in baptism. Indeed, baptism is the foundational sacrament of different ministries in terms of ordained and non-ordained, gender and status. Through the sacraments of initiation all Christians are called to participate in the royal priesthood of Christ in various ways as lay, religious, and ordained people. Thus the clergy need to acknowledge equality, diversity and mutuality in ministries in order to facilitate the co-responsibility in the church as God's family. The authenticity of the church as the family of God is only guaranteed when a participatory relationship exists at all levels of the church.

The review of the situation the church in Vietnam showed that there have been some indications of clericalism among the local clergy. This authoritarian attitude might originate from both local culture as well as the historical and political experience of Vietnam in recent times. Such leadership affects the active participation of the laity in the church of Vietnam. The development of theology of the church as God's family and its implications is one of theological and pastoral solutions to overcome clericalism.

For the church in Vietnam, trinitarian ecclesiology calls for a shift in the exercise of ministries which is more inclusive in terms of areas of service, lay participation, the role of women, and the integration of local values into the exercise of ministries. The ecclesiology of ancestral veneration focused on the life which Jesus has brought to every member in the church as the family of God. Following Jesus' model, every member in the church has to work in different ways to promote the new life rooted in the gospel message to others in the church as well as in society. Bishops and priests have to reflect the gospel value of authority as service in their ministry and relationships in order to develop a participatory church in which the involvement of the laity and religious is promoted. The ecclesiology of BECs was considered as the appropriate model to implement the two other ecclesiologies because it provides more opportunities to apply

the ecclesiology of the family of God. It is concluded that the church in Vietnam needs to carry out a critical and thorough study and implication of this ecclesiology based on the experiences of African and some Asian churches in order to show its effort in promoting the church as the family of God. Without such a study and implication the model of the church as the family of God cannot be an authentic model for the church in Vietnam.

Overall, participation in the church can only be promoted when there is a proper understanding of church hierarchy and ministry, and the relationships among members of the church are based on mutual respect and love. The quality of these relationships should reflect the values of communion and co-responsibility belonging to the church which, in turn, are a reflection of trinitarian relationships. Such a quality of relationships needs to be encouraged and carried out in order that the church really will be the family of God. Indeed, the ecclesiologies of trinitarian communion, ancestral veneration and BECs provide many opportunities for as well as challenges to the church in Vietnam in developing the ecclesiological concept/model of the church as the family of God in terms of a participatory church. The church in Vietnam should take into account these opportunities and challenges when it promotes the church as the family of God. As a corollary of the model of the church as the family of God the last chapter of this thesis will examine the relationship of this church with the world in which it is situated.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE SOCIAL MISSION OF THE CHURCH AS THE FAMILY OF GOD IN VIETNAM

The social mission of the church has received great emphasis with the publication of social encyclicals, particularly since the Second Vatican Council. This mission has become more challenging to the church as the family of God because it is authentic only when it bears witness to Christ by promoting justice and peace on the continent and throughout the world.¹ The social mission is the immediate application of this ecclesiological model which emphasises a sharing in life.² This solidarity, expressed through life and service, is the foundation of the social mission of the church as family. This prophetic mission must be exercised so that the church is “the voice of the voiceless” to protect the human dignity of every individual and to fulfil its mission.³

The church has developed an adequate teaching on social mission. This development provides the church with both theories and tools in order to carry out effectively its mission. Though the social teaching of the church is universal, the tools for carrying out the social mission might vary from one place to another. In other words, for the success of its social mission, the social and cultural context needs various tools which are relevant to its social context, particularly to that of the church as family. Besides, the socio-cultural context and influences could be also the challenging factors in carrying out the social mission of the church.

This chapter will explore the characteristics of the social mission of the church as the family of God, the practical tools for the social mission, the perspectives of the Vietnamese church on social mission, and its effort towards the social mission of the church as family. The chapter aims at understanding the importance of the social mission of the church as God's family and the implications of this model. This will hopefully also

¹ *EIA* 105-126. Cf. *EA* 32-41. Chapter 6 of *EA* calls for the service of human promotion: “In the service of the human family, the church reaches out to all men and women without discrimination, striving to build with them a civilisation of love, founded upon the universal values of peace, justice, solidarity and freedom, which find their fulfilment in Christ”. Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est (DCE)* 25: “The church is God's family in the world. In this family no one ought to go without the necessities of life. Yet at the same time caritas-agape extends beyond the frontiers of the church”.

² VBC, *Bản trả lời*, II, 13-15.

³ *EIA* 70; cf. *EN* 31.

assist the church in Vietnam in promoting and strengthening the social mission of the local church in the light of its self-image as the family of God.

7.1 The Characteristics of the Social Mission of the Church as the Family of God

The social mission of the Catholic Church belongs to the nature of the church.⁴ It is not a strategy but “an essential part of the church’s mission”.⁵ This mission of the church continues that of Jesus whose ministry is to preach the reign of God.⁶ It is more significant for the church as the family of God because of its world-relational dimension which is grounded in the theological, biblical and anthropological dimensions of the divine and human family.

Theologically, the family of God is the Trinity which is characterised by communion in terms of *ad intra* and *ad extra*. *Ad intra* communion referring to the immanent Trinity is the reciprocal relationships of the Father, the Son and the Spirit. *Ad extra* communion, the economic Trinity, refers to the three manifestations of God as Father, Son and Spirit in the world. The economy particularly denotes the missions of the Son and the Spirit who are sent by the Father to the world for the work of salvation and sanctification. Their missions concretise communion between God and humankind which is the communion of self-giving or ‘being-in-love’.⁷ Indeed, the relational characteristic of the family of the triune God urges the three persons to reach out to each other and to people in the world. In love, the three divine persons are united to one another, and extend this communal love, in the economy of salvation: the economic Trinity flows from the immanent Trinity, just as the economic Trinity reveals the communal life of God from which it comes.⁸

In biblical terms, the metaphor of the family of God refers to the Israelite family of the kinship network ensuring the life of its members. Jesus’ teaching goes further to indicate the universality of brotherhood/sisterhood which transcends the narrow bonds of consanguinity of the human family. Based on these teachings the community life of the

⁴ Cf. GS 1.

⁵ Cf. EA 29.

⁶ Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Bangalore/Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2005), 305-322. The two authors discussed the church’s mission as liberating service of the reign of God. According to them, it is also the ground that Paul VI took as a point of starting for the description of Jesus’ mission as well as that of the church in the Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. The church’s role in evangelisation comes from its vocation to prolong and continue Jesus’ mission in the world (EN 15). Cf. EN 6-7; 49-58.

⁷ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 211-213; Kelly, *The Trinity of Love*, 147-149: “The Be-ing of God is manifested not only as communion, but as communion in self-giving ... [T]he divine mystery, as incarnate in Jesus Christ and manifest in the gift of the Spirit, is Being-in-Love”. LaCugna remarked that strictly speaking there is an economic ‘Binity’, not Trinity because God the father is never sent but only sends.

⁸ Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970), 22.

early church developed and Christians were encouraged to have responsibility and concern for each other's welfare. They are to carry each other's burdens and to pursue not selfish interests but those of others (cf. Acts 2:46; Gal 6:2; 1 Cor 12:25; Phil 2:4; 1 Thess 5:11).

Culturally and anthropologically, the family implies the image of humankind since people are social beings. The Vietnamese who have been influenced by Confucian culture often consider society as a large family because they consider that "tứ hải giai huynh đệ" (within the four seas all men are brothers).⁹ People are parts in an interconnected community; therefore they must be responsible for the life of one another through their service for the common good of all. The Vietnamese also consider themselves as *đồng bào* (people coming from the same womb or a common father and mother) regardless of ethnic, religious and social backgrounds. The close relationship or communality among the Vietnamese is often valued for promoting the solidarity and support for one another in daily as well as in special needs. It is also emphasised in the pastoral letters of the Vietnamese bishops.

The theological, biblical and cultural understanding of family forms the rationale for the social mission of the church as family of God. These foundations will be further examined as the theological characteristics of the church as family at the service of the world which includes a church for life, of solidarity and of service.¹⁰

7.1.1 A Church for Life

Because of its trinitarian model and inspiration, the family of God values and protects the life of its members. In particular, the Vietnamese family is a place of nurturing and developing life. For it, human life begins at the moment of conception and continues after death.¹¹ Accordingly, the church as family is a church for life. Its mission is to proclaim and promote the fullness of life following the example of Jesus.

God created our first parents and the family that results as recipients of the gift of life (Gen 2:7). He continued to care for them in the history of his chosen people, particularly in the Exodus event (Ex 3:7-8). In the New Testament times he gave his Son, Jesus, who is Spirit-filled, to people so that they might have the fullness of life (Jn 10:10;

⁹ Cf. Analects XII: 5 in D. C. Lau (trans.), *Confucius: The Analects* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1979), 143.

¹⁰ Cf. Orobator, *The Church as Family*, 149-165; FABC VIII, *The Asian Family Towards a Culture of Integral Life*, 27-34.

¹¹ According to a popular custom, when a child is born he/she is one year old because of the period of conception in his/her mother's womb. The Vietnamese also practise ancestor veneration since they believe life after death.

20:31).¹² Often Jesus restored life in the context of the family or household (Lk 7:1-10; Mt 8:5-13; Jn 4:46-54). Indeed, the Spirit is the source of life for Jesus and people as well as the Paraclete or the defender of the accused. In his mission Jesus saved the life of his people by liberating them from all kinds of spiritual and material oppression. He died for the life of all. By rising from the dead he conquered death and brought about the gift of the Spirit of life to those who believe and form the community of disciples called the church. Indeed, he commanded his disciples to strive to bring life to all (Mt 10:7-8).

In particular, the church in Asia has chosen its mission by following Jesus to become the church living in the Spirit of life. In that mission the church has to immerse itself totally in the trinitarian life and to live by communion with God. It imitates Jesus in pitching its tents in the midst of all humanity, especially among the poor and the marginalised, in order to build a better world which is the reign of God. The church also needs to die to itself so that it may live for God and for its brothers and sisters, to live in the Risen Lord so that it becomes a symbol of hope for all, and to walk by the Spirit so that it may bear the fruits of life of the Spirit.¹³ Indeed, Asian churches have considered dialogue of life or dialogue with the poor masses to be one of their modes of mission when they proclaim the gospel. They are committed to dialogue with people because they felt that the church and Asians belong to a human family which has a common history and destiny.¹⁴ Therefore in so doing Asian churches become less foreign to local people and more committed to the brotherhood/sisterhood in the human community.¹⁵ This is also the concern of the Vietnamese church to become the church of Vietnam which is founded on the family.¹⁶

The above theological-pastoral reflection leads Asian churches to centre their social mission towards the family, with its members including women and girls, the young and the displaced, and extending to the ecology of life, without which life is necessarily diminished. For Asians, there is the search not simply for the meaning of life but for life itself because life is a gift or a mystery from God. Their vision of life is holistic, from the beginning to the end of the development of the whole person and of every individual, regardless of gender, religion, culture and class.¹⁷ So the mission of Asian churches

¹² In the Johannine gospel, life is understood as eternal life which encompasses and transcends earthly life; cf. Jn 3:16; 4:14; 6:32-66; 11:25-26; 16:6.

¹³ FABC VI, *Christian Discipleship in Asia Today*, in G. Rosales and C. G. Arévalo (eds.), *FAPA II*, 6-10.

¹⁴ FABC I, *Evangelisation in Modern Day Asia*, in G. Rosales and C. G. Arévalo (eds.), *FAPA I*, 13.

¹⁵ Cf. FABC V, *Journeying Together Towards the Third Millennium*, in *FAPA I*, 281-282; 287-288; FABC Bishops' Institute For Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue IV/12 (BIRA IV/12), *Final Statement*, in G. Rosales and C. G. Arévalo (eds.), *FAPA I*, 326-331.

¹⁶ Cf. Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for Asia, Cardinal Paul Joseph Phạm Đình Tụng, "Evangelisation of Asia is Primarily a Dialogue of Life," *OR* 3 June 1998, 15; VBC, *Thư chung năm 1998*, no. 5.

¹⁷ FABC VI, *Christian Discipleship in Asia Today*, in *FAPA II*, 4-5.

must focus on protecting and defending the Asian life against all kinds of death-dealing forces. The social mission of the church draws its inspiration from the family life and is designed for the service of family.

The social mission of the church as family of God inherits its rationale from all the above considerations of the divine, human and ecclesial family. This implies that the church as family should become a church in which people can find protection for their lives. Its mission is particularly to promote an integral life for all as well as to combat all structures and situations engendering oppression, injustice and misery.

7.1.2 A Church of Solidarity

The church, in its turn, follows the triune model of solidarity with humankind, in creation (Gen 1:26-27) and in history. Here it follows Jesus who describes his mission as life-giving and as salvific solidarity with all people in order to build the reign of God (Jn 10:10; Mt 5:3-10). God created all creatures to live in interdependence and harmony; however, this harmony was broken and Jesus came to reconcile people with God and with one another. Jesus in his teaching and life showed his solidarity with people by protesting against injustice in religious and social institutions. He left his mission to the church whose social mission is clearly described in the *Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World*. In this conciliar document, the mission of the church includes active engagement to promote human dignity and to achieve just societies. Its mission for the welfare of people cannot be separated from the preaching of the gospel. Indeed, the social mission is considered as intrinsic to the church's nature, not as an arbitrary extension of the church's life.¹⁸

The Jewish and Roman religious and civil structures during Jesus' time were highly hierarchical and stratified. However, in that context, Jesus proclaimed a new social order where people could commune across class, gender and descent barriers, with equal dignity.¹⁹ All people were valuable and no one was expendable. Jesus had preference for those of the lower classes or the marginalised because they were often more open to, or more receptive of, God's will. In this sense, his mission was social, even if he combined the social and spiritual missions into one action.

In Chapter Four of the *Pastoral Constitution*, the council particularly emphasised that the church and the world are mutually related institutions which can give assistance to each

¹⁸ Cf. J. Bryan Hehir, "Church-State and Church-World: The Ecclesiological Implications," in *CTSC Proceedings* 41 (1986), 56.

¹⁹ Cf. John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: Harper, 1995), 25.

other. The church has “the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the gospel”.²⁰ It is a radical departure from an isolationist model of the church to that of the church at the service of society. The nature of the church is religious, but this nature does not separate the church from the human community which includes the socio-economic and political order.²¹ In its mission the church serves the world as a leaven in order to renew and transform human society into the family of God.²² This solidarity with human life is a “virtue” which means “it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual”.²³ *Gaudium et Spes* generally identified the mutual relationship between the church and the world in the term “world church” - a term used by Rahner when referring to the Second Vatican Council.²⁴ However, some have objected that the council did not reflect the concerns of the peoples of the Third World.²⁵

Asian churches acknowledge the urgent need for solidarity with people living in the Third World so challenging that they must live “in companionship, as true partners with all Asians as they pray, work, struggle and suffer for a better life”.²⁶ The church must walk along with people following Christ’s model because they are created in, redeemed by and united in Christ. Indeed, dialogue with earthly realities is significantly emphasised by Asian churches. In FABC documents, the social mission of the church must reach out to people outside the church since Asian churches consider the world as their partner. This equal partnership enriches both parties in their dialogue.

Apart from that relationship between the church and the world, the social mission of the church as family is more demanding because of the nature of interrelatedness of the family members, particularly the Vietnamese. Anthropologically, the Vietnamese family is a web of relationships among the unborn, the living and the dead. They express solidarity in various ways, including proverbs, which are a popular communication among the Vietnamese. However, this communality of the Vietnamese and their family life can be ambivalent. Nevertheless, in general, relatedness and communality or solidarity are highlighted by the Vietnamese when they talk about the family and this family solidarity is

²⁰ GS 4.

²¹ GS 42-43.

²² GS 40; 44.

²³ John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (SRS) 38.

²⁴ Karl Rahner, “The Abiding Significance of the Vatican II,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 20 (London/New York: Seabury Press, 1981), 90-102. Cf. GS 3.

²⁵ Balasuriya, *Planetary Theology*, 147.

²⁶ FABC V, *Journeying Together Towards the Third Millennium*, in FAPA I, 283.

effectively used by social and religious institutions when they advocate charitable works to help those in need.

Thus solidarity expresses one of the main constitutive characteristics of the Vietnamese sense of family. This anthropological reference of the church as family is strengthened by the theological dimension of the solidarity of the divine family with people. In particular, the covenant solidarity is often described in the context of family relationships (Hos 11:3-4; Isa 66:13). Accordingly, the chosen and covenant people are asked to be in active solidarity with everyone, especially with the orphan, the widow and the stranger (Ex 22:22-23). Solidarity becomes a logically operative element in the church's self-understanding and mission. It impels the church as family to seek to work with other institutions which are committed to the well-being and dignity of the human family.

7.1.3 A Church of Service

The acknowledgement of human life and the promotion of solidarity with people must lead to service because without doing service the first two concepts might be only theories. The dialogue between the church and the world or between the church and people exists in the quality of dialogue, which is a genuine commitment to bring about social justice in society.²⁷

The attitude of the church as a servant of the world is not new. At the beginning and the end of the *Pastoral Constitution*, the council teaches that Jesus came to the world not to be served but to serve; therefore the church has to serve the world by enhancing the brotherhood/sisterhood of all.²⁸ Actually since the early 1960s and after the council, many authors of various Christian denominations developed the model of the servant church. Some of the authors based their model on the two biblical concepts, *diakonos* and *kenosis*, which are very appropriate for a church of service.²⁹ In so doing the church can fulfil its prophetic mission in the world.

The prophetic church could be identified with a metaphor called "contrast-society".³⁰ Following the model of the incarnation of Jesus, the church has the mission of dialogue with society. In this dialogue, on the one hand, the church has to integrate itself in society, and on the other, it has to define its identity as "contrast-society". "Contrast-society" is a metaphor for the values and characteristics which the people of God and the

²⁷ FABC I, *Evangelisation in Modern Day Asia*, in *FAPA I*, 15.

²⁸ GS 3; 92.

²⁹ Cf. Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 81-94.

³⁰ Cf. Lohfink, *Jesus and Community*, 122-132; Fuellenbach, *Church: Community for the Kingdom*, 283-294.

church have to uphold to keep its identity as a holy people chosen by God and living according to Christ's rule.³¹ The idea of the church as contrast-society or counter-society seems to be contradictory to the social mission of the church whose task is to be in the world and in society to serve them. However, this is a misunderstanding. The term does not mean either "contradiction of the rest of society for the sake of contradiction" or "despising the rest of society due to elitist thought", but it means a contrast "on behalf of others and for the sake of others".³² This concept of the church as contrast is expressed in the biblical images in which the church is considered as salt of the earth, light of the world and city on a hill (Mt 5:13-14). The church has to prove these prophetic values in its social mission because, if the church fails to do so, it will lose its identity.³³ Similarly, if the church as family does not show its solidarity with its family members it will not be genuinely the church as family any more.

The model of the church as contrast-society becomes a challenge for the church today. It is necessary for many reasons. It will promote the social mission of the church. The church cannot limit its activities to its purely religious or spiritual areas, but it must be involved in the public realm. In this sense, the church has the mission to offer "a way of conceiving and organising society that is counter to its present dominant form" and "to replace society's dominant values and structures" when those of society do not conform to gospel values.³⁴ In fact, the world today has been influenced by globalisation which has created its own side-effects. Beside its positive impact, globalisation often leads to the exclusion of the poor and the marginalised. As contrast-society, the church must stand on the side of these people to protect and to empower them.

The church as contrast-society is also called a "burning centre" whose purpose is to preserve its identity. Its function as contrast-society is twofold. It is called to be open to

³¹ Lohfink, *Jesus and Community*, 122-123. According to Lohfink, Israel was chosen in its entire existence including its social dimension. Deut 7:6-8 made clear that the people of God was distinguished from all other peoples of the earth by their holiness because they were chosen to live in accordance with the God-given social order which is in contrast to that of other peoples (Lev 17-26). Cf. Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1997), 212; T. Howland Sanks, "Globalisation and the Church's Social Mission," *TS* 60 (1999), 627. The early Christian communities adopted a value system which differed from the rest of society. Christians did not have private ownership and so they shared their wealth with those in need (Acts 4:32). Social status did not count. They lived as members in a family (Gal 3:28). These attitudes were in contrast to those of people in the Roman Empire and were distinctive social ethics underlying the spread of Christianity. However, the idea of the early church as contrast society seemed to be less challenged when the church became more accepted in society after the Edict of Milan in 313. Then, a short time later, this idea was promoted again among members of religious orders and sectarian movements who opposed the compromise that the church made with secular power.

³² Fuellenbach, *Church: Community for the Kingdom*, 286-287.

³³ Lohfink, *Jesus and Community*, 146.

³⁴ Fuellenbach, *Church: Community for the Kingdom*, 287-294.

the world and, at the same time, to be witness to gospel values. In this twofold mission, the church must become a “worshipping community” to avoid a defeat by the world, particularly when the church is in a minority. It needs to be united with its founder in order to have life from him so that it can fulfil its mission in the world and prevent itself from becoming a mere welfare agency.³⁵

The church as family should follow the model of the church as contrast-society. In this sense, the church advocates the positive values of the human family and, at the same time, it rejects its negative values. It also needs to strengthen its identity by referring to the family of God. The church as family in the service of the world has to adopt a proactive and prophetic commitment to social transformation and renewal by a vision of the reign of God.³⁶ According to Orobator, the mission of the church as family “places it at the service of life in the wider sense of the term. This means that the church commits itself to struggle against all the forces of sin, death and destruction, wherever they exist in society”.³⁷

The above description of the theological characteristics of the church as family in its social mission identified the relationships and the foundations of the social mission of the church as family which are referred to as the characteristics of community or family. A community or a family is first understood in the context of relationship or solidarity among its members. The isolation of the church from its socio-economic and political concerns will cause the church to lose its identity and be considered as “a betrayal of the social mission of the church-as-family at the service of society”.³⁸ The anthropological foundation is strengthened by the theological aspect of the family of God. Thus these foundations are significant for the social mission of the church as the family of God. Moreover, the social mission of the church as the family of God is fulfilled with greater effect when the church is equipped with practical tools.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 291-293.

³⁶ For an example of the challenge to the Vietnamese church as “contrast-society”, see Đỗ Xuân Quế, “Số thảo đôi nét về hiện tình Hội thánh tại Việt Nam,” [Some comments on the current situation of the church in Vietnam] *Vietcatholic News*, 30 January 2005; Nguyễn Hồng Giáo “Impact of Vatican Council II on Church in Vietnam,” *Asia Focus*, 6 December 2002, 3. Quế commented that the church in Vietnam enjoys some advantages during the open-door period; however, they could make the church become counter-witnessed to Christ unless the church keeps its identity. Giáo also emphasised the need for the contrast model in Vietnam when the government launched its open-door policy in the early 1990s. “Are the church and religious institutes determined to learn the lessons of the past decades to preserve the spiritual values obtained and continue to be a ‘poor and serving church’ as taught by Vatican II?”

³⁷ Orobator, *The Church as Family*, 163.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 111.

7.2 The Practical Tools for the Social Mission of the Church as Family

The social teaching of the church and other church documents often left the local churches to identify practical tools to carry out their social mission because of the various contexts of local churches. The practical tools, which are appropriate for the church as the family of God to fulfil its social mission, are mainly the following: social analysis, contextual theology, formation in the social teaching of the church and working together among religious groups. These tools are essential to turn the church's encouragement in doing social activities into concrete practices in the church and in society.

7.2.1 Social Analysis

Social analysis is either a task or a tool in pursuing theology in recent decades. It is defined as a task or an effort "to obtain a more complete picture of a social situation by exploring its historical and structural relationships" or as an analytical tool in practical methodology to understand the social reality from the view of its structural components and relationships and of theological reflection.³⁹ From this definition, social analysis is a step in the process to see the social reality as well as to make the effort to describe and obtain a more complete picture of this social situation from the point of view of theologians or pastoral workers. There are four steps which reveal terminological differences among theologians who use social analysis.

For liberation theologians in Latin America, the process begins with a commitment to and solidarity with the poor who are the majority on their continent and in the world. Then it uses sociological theories, particularly Marxism, to analyse the identified situation. This analysis will be re-examined from biblical and theological points of view for the purpose of finding a new interpretation of the situation.⁴⁰

FABC calls social analysis the methodology of the pastoral cycle which has been promoted since the Seventh Bishops' Institute for Social Action (BISA VII, 1986) and was designed in a four-step process.⁴¹ The majority of Asian people are the poor who are the

³⁹ Peter Henriot, "Social Analysis: A Practical Methodology," in Joe Holland and Peter Henriot, *Social Analysis* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983), 95-105. Holland and Henriot called the process of social analysis the pastoral cycle including four steps: insertion, social analysis, theological reflection and pastoral planning; Orobator, *The Church as Family*, 118; Dorr, *Mission in Today's World*, 151-152. Dorr remarked the similarities as well as the differences on solidarity with the poor between the biblical option of liberation theologians and the Marxist option.

⁴⁰ Henriot, "Social Analysis," 95-105.

⁴¹ BISA VII, *Final Reflections*, in G. Rosales and C. G. Arévalo (eds.), *FAPA I*, 231-232. Cf. Dorr, *Mission in Today's World*, 155-156. Dorr emphasised that option for the poor needs a careful discernment and analysis of the situation in order to help those who choose to live in solidarity with the poor as well as the marginalised themselves to come up with actions for change.

special target of the social mission of the church. Therefore the first step is named exposure-immersion to the poor. It is an exposure of a doctor for diagnosing the situation, and at the same time it is an immersion of a genuine friend of the poor into a dialogue-of-life with the poor in order to experience reality from their perspective. This step adopts the basic principle of the incarnation of Jesus. The second step is social analysis whose objectives are to evaluate the social, economic, political, cultural and religious systems and to discern God's plan in the signs of the times, world events, the needs and aspirations of the people. The third step aims at an integration of social analysis with the religio-cultural reality, particularly with that of Asian heritage which is rich in terms of contemplative character. It is called the contemplative dimension of human development. Contemplation enables people to discover the presence and activity of God in social reality which is sometimes not easy to be recognised. This ongoing theological reflection step is an affirmation that the Gospel is being shaped in the reality of the lives of the poor and the Spirit of Jesus is at work among them. The last step called pastoral planning aims at giving a plan of action based on the previous three steps. This pastoral plan must be evaluated during its implementation by a renewal of the first three steps of the pastoral cycle.⁴²

The above four steps must revolve around prayer as a covenantal relationship in faith. This remark is important because it is only in prayer that one can experience God in the poor, reflect on his presence and "bring about what the Lord of history is challenging the church to do for human development".⁴³

Though social analysis itself has its limits, it is important for effective pastoral planning. In terms of limits, it is not a "value-free" analysis and does not provide an immediate answer for the identified problem. It also requires some skills in making a detailed and precise analysis.⁴⁴ However, as a tool for pastoral planning, social analysis has been recognised in the church. Pope Paul VI in his social document in 1971 acknowledged social analysis as the element of the pastoral cycle which challenged local churches to develop it.⁴⁵

In addition to its use for society evaluation, social analysis is also used for the assessment of the church and its mission. The church itself is called to do its own self-

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ BISA VII, *Final Reflections*, in G. Rosales and C. G. Arévalo (eds.), *FAPA I*, 231-232.

⁴⁴ Holland and Henriot, *Social Analysis*, 15-16.

⁴⁵ Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens (OA) 4*: "It is up to Christian communities to analyse with objectivity the situation which is proper to their own country, to shed on it the light of the gospel's unalterable words, and to draw principles or reflections, norms of judgment, and directives of action from the social teaching of the church".

examination. In order to respond effectively to contemporary Asian socioeconomic and political realities which have been faced with demographic, economic, moral and political problems,⁴⁶ the church in Asia really needs to examine itself in terms of structure, theology and approaches to fulfil its social mission.⁴⁷

Social analysis is significant for the social mission of the church and is used by theologians as well as in church documents. The first chapter of the Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* emphasised that the mission of love and service of the church in Asia is conditioned by two factors: the self-understanding of the church as a community of disciples of Jesus and the social, political, religious, cultural and economic realities of Asia.⁴⁸ This Asian synod document firstly gives an analysis of Asian society before analysing the situation of the church in Asia.⁴⁹ The order of these descriptions shows that the reflections on Asian realities are important in understanding the social mission of the church in the third millennium. According to Henriot, the church, in its mission, needs “adequate analysis to pinpoint the deepest roots of the problem and to shape the most effective response”.⁵⁰

In particular, social analysis is essential for the church as the family of God because its methodology promotes a collaboration of many people in the church and in society which is one of the characteristics of the church as family. A social analysis is often carried out with the contributing work of ecclesial and social organisations, of church people and experts from various spheres, of clergy and lay people, Christians and people of other faiths. In particular, the marginalised must be involved in this process of analysis and action.⁵¹ Such a contribution and collaboration of many people and institutions certainly enrich the church as the family of God in developing its social mission as well as its spirit of family. Consequently, the church and those who hold ecclesiastical or clerical office will realise the disadvantages of monopolising the process of analysis. In addition, the use of the sociological approach helps the church to study thoroughly the family and the social situation in order to train pastoral agents and to carry out its mission effectively.

⁴⁶ OA 7-8.

⁴⁷ FABC Theological Advisory Commission, *Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony*, in G. Rosales and C. G. Arévalo (eds.), *FAPA II*, 296: “There is an urgent need for the churches in Asia to make self-examination of their world-view, their faith-vision, their inner life, their attitudes, their relationships, their structures and programs of pastoral action”.

⁴⁸ EA 5.

⁴⁹ EA 6-8; 9.

⁵⁰ Holland and Henriot, *Social Analysis*, 51.

⁵¹ Cf. Dorr, *Mission in Today's World*, 156: “It is not enough that a protest be made *on behalf of* those who have been marginalised; the protest must come *from the group themselves*. Marginalised groups who begin to stand up for themselves are profoundly changed by their action”.

7.2.2 Contextual Theology

Both social analysis and contextual theology are integral to the contemporary theological enterprise. The church needs to develop a theology that is contextualised in social realities and that can offer meaningful contributions to the task of social transformation. In that sense, there are two forms of contextual theology: theology of construction based on African situations and presented by Villa-Vicencio, and contextual theology developed by FABC for Asian churches. The first emphasises the characteristics of contextual theology while the second stresses the contents.

Theology of nation-building or reconstruction must be based on some theoretical framework to incorporate its tasks in the service of local people. Villa-Vicencio described four characteristics of the theology of reconstruction as contextual relevance, interdisciplinary nature, critical commitment to social renewal and concrete strategies.⁵²

First, a theology of nation-building must address the present needs of people and society and try to correct the causes of social problems as well. Its task is to pose questions on social issues which affect, materially and spiritually, the lives of the majority of people. In so doing, theology facilitates church mission in discerning the signs and the meaning of the time. It is a challenge as well as a risk for the church as well as for theologians. The task of the church and theology can become irrelevant when they are “living in a world of pure theory, remote from life, [and] making pronouncements that do not touch the stubborn concreteness of real life”⁵³. Relevancy is essential because a theology that escapes “from the challenge of discerning the liberating presence of God in the midst of the struggle for a better world” misses its aim.⁵⁴

Secondly, a contextual theology is carried out by the assistance of other disciplines, particularly that of the social sciences. Social issues are often related to theological, philosophical, political, legal and economic debates. Therefore theology is “obliged to at once take the challenges and insights of other disciplines seriously, while making its own contribution to this process in a language that makes sense to, and is understood by, other disciplines”.⁵⁵ This interdisciplinary methodology provides “a framework within which the debate on human rights, economics and culture building is to be pursued”.⁵⁶

⁵² Charles Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 7-9; 40-41; 274-275. Cf. Orobator, *The Church as Family*, 121-123.

⁵³ Karl Rahner, *The Shape of the Church to Come* (London: SPCK, 1972), 79-80.

⁵⁴ Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, 40.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 277.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

Thirdly, a theology of reconstruction must be directed to social transformation. It is obliged to say 'yes' to all that promotes social justice and human dignity and 'no' to all that distracts from the life-giving and sustaining process. This task is designed to help the church to keep its mission to tell the truth and to look at the eschatological vision. In so doing, theology draws society beyond what can be accomplished at a given time, to new ideals and better goals and commits to social renewal.⁵⁷

Lastly, a theology of reconstruction aims at contributing to the process of producing a concrete proposal to deal with socio-political problems. This important goal is the focus of the methodology used in a theology of reconstruction. The truth and the social concern, to which the church witnesses, must be measured by action, not by "ivory-tower perceptions of what suffering and renewal are perceived to be. If this last task fails, its social concern "may be no more than an ideological mask".⁵⁸

According to FABC, which has another perspective on contextual theology, the main content of contextual theology deals with the triple dialogue with other faiths, with the poor and with the cultures. In fact, it is a dialogue with all people, particularly the poor.⁵⁹ This is the highlight of the FABC vision during almost thirty-five years of its existence. Indeed, this vision is seen throughout all the FABC plenary assemblies.

At the First FABC Plenary Assembly (1974), Asian bishops prioritised the construction of a genuine Asian theological reflection whose imperatives and insights must be in contact with concrete Asian realities.⁶⁰ Asia is made up of a majority of poor people, particularly in terms of lack of access to resources for living a truly human life as well as of socio-political and economic injustice.⁶¹ So Asian churches committed themselves to bring about social justice and promoted true human development and liberation in society. This commitment is not contrary to the religious mission of the church because, according to Asian bishops in the Second Plenary Assembly (1978), prayer is also bound to solidarity with the poor and the powerless, the marginalised and the oppressed in society. Prayer brings people to the understanding of how injustice is rooted in their selfishness and sinfulness. Consequently, it helps people to discern the tasks and deeds in order to bring about conversion in people's hearts and the renewal of societal structures.⁶²

⁵⁷ Ibid., 274-275.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 33 and 276.

⁵⁹ FABC VII, *A Renewed Church in Asia: A Mission of Love and Service*, in F-J Eilers (ed.), *FAPA III*, 4.

⁶⁰ FABC I, *Evangelisation in Modern Day Asia*, in *FAPA I*, 17.

⁶¹ FABC II, *Prayer - The Life of the Church of Asia*, in G. Rosales and C. G. Arévalo (eds.), *FAPA I*, 33.

⁶² Ibid.

The church is a community of faith. Therefore, according to the document of the Third Plenary Assembly (1982), the theological vision of Asian churches must be turned ever more resolutely to the church's responsibility in the world and the construction of a more fully human future for Asians. As a community of faith the church is rooted in the life of the Trinity and is experienced among its members. It is not a closed community. On the contrary, it must be directed towards the human community and to the world.⁶³ In order to fulfil this task the Fourth Plenary Assembly (1986) called Asian Christians, particularly the laity, to be involved in the social mission of the church in order to counter the threat to human life and dignity happening in society.⁶⁴

For Asian bishops at the Fifth Plenary Assembly (1990), local churches needed to show their identity when confronting social realities. Church members must be companions or partners with Asians in their search for the meaning of human life and progress. They must be also servants of the Lord and of humanity".⁶⁵ This Christian identity was emphasised at the Sixth Plenary Assembly (1995). Asian churches must pay attention to "whatever threatens, weakens, diminishes and destroys the life of individuals, groups or peoples; whatever devalues human beings, conceived, born, infant, old; whatever socio-cultural, religious, political, economic or environmental factor that threatens or destroys life in our countries".⁶⁶

At the Seventh Plenary Assembly (2000) Asian bishops showed their great concern for globalisation because it has caused the phenomenon of marginalisation and exclusion which produced greater inequalities among people. The negative impact of cultural globalisation causes incalculable damage.⁶⁷ In line with this assembly a document from the Office of Theological Concerns in 2000 mentioned that doing theology in Asia must take into account Asian realities as resources of theology in correlation with the scriptures and the tradition of the church.⁶⁸ Participants of the Eighth Plenary Assembly

⁶³ FABC III, *The Church - A Community of Faith in Asia*, in G. Rosales and C. G. Arévalo (eds.), *FAPA I*, 60.

⁶⁴ FABC IV, *The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World of Asia*, in G. Rosales and C. G. Arévalo (eds.), *FAPA I*, 179-180.

⁶⁵ FABC V, *Journeying Together Towards the Third Millennium*, in *FAPA I*, 283.

⁶⁶ FABC VI, *Christian Discipleship in Asia Today: Service to Life*, in *FAPA II*, 3.

⁶⁷ FABC VII, *A Renewed Church in Asia: A Mission of Love and Service*, in F-J. Eilers (ed.), *FAPA III*, 20. Cf. *EA 7*.

⁶⁸ FABC Office of Theological Concerns, *Methodology: Asian Christian Theology*, in F-J. Eilers (ed.), *FAPA III*, 355-356. Traditionally, contextual realities, such as people, their living conditions and their culture are used and meant as the background of theology. They are only the object of theology which theology tries to address and respond. Theology is concerned with how to adapt and to apply the message to people in their concrete socio-religio-cultural situations. But, today, contextual realities are considered resources of theology. In fact, the two understandings of contextual realities are related to each other, but its new connotation will bring fresh questions to theology.

(2004) affirmed that Asian churches should pay more attention to the family since it has faced challenges which impact on the church and society. The dialogue with the Asian family values and challenges to find out effective pastoral plans shows the FABC theological pastoral reflections are grounded in the context of a church in mission through dialogue with people, with Asian cultures and with other faith-communities.⁶⁹

A review of the above statements of FABC notes that the reasons for which FABC promotes contextual theology seem to be more in internal factors than in external factors,⁷⁰ although FABC did not reject the roles of external factors in doing theology in Asia. Theology has to start from below. This means “from the underside of history, from the perspective of those who struggle for life, love, justice and freedom”.⁷¹ But this theology is “an attempt to express from the depths of the Asian psyche the ineffable experience of living faith in Jesus Christ. It is the result of a genuine incarnation of the mystery of Christ in the flesh and blood of Asian peoples”.⁷²

Contextual theology must take into account socio-cultural situations of local people because these situations are attached to people. Such a theology deals with the issues of local people as they belong to a common family. Theologians and local people, including the socio-cultural problems of people, must work together as partners in developing contextual theology. There is a reciprocal and essential relationship among theologians, people and their issues. Thus contextual theology becomes more meaningful when the church promotes the concept/model of the church as family. In fact, it helps the church fulfil its mission as the family of God because it serves the needs of people who are God’s people or belong to the family of God. Moreover, all members of the people or the family of God, especially lay people, can contribute to the development of this contextual theology. This theology is further advanced when Christians are trained in the social teaching of the church.

⁶⁹ FABC VIII, *The Asian Family Towards a Culture of Integral Life*, 45-50. It is noted that there were sixty lay people and some 120 participants who are cardinals, bishops, priests, and religious. The final statement of the assembly was finalised through the reflections and sharing of all participants.

⁷⁰ Cf. Bevens, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 5-10. According to Bevens, the external factors are: historical events, intellectual currents, cultural shifts and political forces while the internal ones are: the incarnational nature of Christianity, the sacramental nature of reality and the change in the understanding of the nature of revelation.

⁷¹ FABC International Theological Colloquium, *Being Church in Asia: Journeying with the Spirit into Fuller Life*, in G. Rosales and C. G. Arévalo (eds.), *FAPA II*, 226.

⁷² *Ibid.*

7.2.3 The Formation in the Social Teaching of the Church

The social teaching of the church has contributed to the promotion of the social mission of the church and to evangelisation. However, this social teaching is not yet well-known among many Catholics, as the African Synod fathers acknowledged.⁷³ Therefore there is an urgent need to educate Catholics in the social teaching of the church and to formulate episcopal conference statements concerning local social issues.

The social teaching of the church developed in the nineteenth century in response to issues raised by modern industrial society. It is “the accurate formulation of the results of a careful reflection on the complex realities of human existence, in society and in the international order, in the light of faith and of the church’s tradition”.⁷⁴ It proposes “a set of principles for reflection, criteria for judgment and directives for action” in the areas of economic and socio-political problems and is based on Christian anthropology.⁷⁵ This teaching has a universal perspective since its audiences are Catholics as well as people of good will.

The aim of the social teaching of the church is to guide Christian behaviour⁷⁶ and particularly to assist its leaders in their duties in the church and in society. It alerts them to their responsibility and guides them in working for human development. It also frees them from “false notions of the human person and human activity”.⁷⁷ This social teaching, by influencing Christian leaders, will have a strong impact on society regarding economic and political issues and thus help to bring about social justice for all people. In other words, the social teaching affects society and can transform it.

On national and regional levels, episcopal conferences have also issued pastoral statements on many issues of social justice concerning their local churches.⁷⁸ Bishops

⁷³ Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for Africa, *MOS* 33; cf. *EIA* 54. The Pope raises the questions “Has the church in Africa sufficiently formed the lay faithful, enabling them to assume competently their civic responsibilities and to consider socio-political problems in the light of the Gospel and of faith in God?” Then, he calls for “the thorough formation of the lay faithful; a formation which will help them to lead a fully integrated life”.

⁷⁴ *SRS* 41.

⁷⁵ *EA* 32. Cf. Charles E. Curran, *Catholic Social Teaching, 1891- Present* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2002), 127.

⁷⁶ *SRS* 41.

⁷⁷ *EA* 32.

⁷⁸ Terence McGoldrick, “Episcopal Conferences Worldwide of the Catholic Social Teaching,” *TS* 59 (1998), 23-32. The author reviewed the book entitled *Economie et développement: Répertoire des documents épiscopaux des cinq continents (1891-1991)*, *Études d'éthique chrétienne* 69 (Fribourg: Editions Universitaires; Paris: Cerf, 1997). It is an 800-page comprehensive research “containing listings and abstracts of statements issued by the worldwide episcopal conferences since *Rerum Novarum* (1891) on ethical concerns related to economic issues in their particular societies”.

consider this task as their prophetic and magisterial duty to speak out on “public and controversial problems” even though they know that their actions run the risk of being persecuted or being wrong.⁷⁹ The publication of these pastoral statements is necessary because local social problems differ from place to place. Therefore the statements need individual attention although they are based on the basic common principles of the social teaching of the church.

Because of its importance the church has requested that members of the people of God must be instructed in its social teaching. Such a request becomes more urgent when the church develops its model as the family of God. It is the responsibility of church leaders to implement this request. However, it is not an easy task, as the experience of the African bishops show. They acknowledged their responsibilities regarding the many forms of inequality or injustice in the world and especially in Africa, since they did not provide adequate formation for the laity for life in society.⁸⁰

One of the roles as well as the benefits of the social teaching of the church is to empower the laity with a degree of competence for their work in public life such as politics. In this way, the laity will be witnesses to the gospel in their working areas. They “can inspire and vivify civil society and its structure with the leaven of the gospel”.⁸¹ In other words, the laity benefit from empowerment which is meaningful from the viewpoint of the church as the family of God. This empowerment implies “a true recognition of the charisms and gifts of lay Christians and a relativisation of clerical monopoly over forms of ministry in the church”.⁸²

Acknowledging the importance of the social teaching of the church in the apostolate, Asian bishops since 1974 recommended that the social teaching of the church should be incorporated into its teaching and preaching at all levels and for all people. The social teaching of the church should be included “in catechism for children and adults, in

⁷⁹ “I Have Heard the Cry of My People: Pastoral Statement of the Catholic Bishops of Northeastern Brazil” cited in McGoldrick, “Episcopal Conferences Worldwide on Catholic Social Teaching,” 23. The bishops of Northeastern Brazil mention that the price of speaking out “has always been persecution from those who think that they are so offering a service to God”. Cf. Episcopal Conference of England and Wales, “The Common Good and the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church”; accessed 4 May 2004; available from <http://www.tasc.ac.uk/cc/cbc/cg.htm>; Internet. The bishops of England and Wales state that “as bishops we have the particular responsibility to discern and interpret the signs of the times, even on occasion at the risk of being wrong”.

⁸⁰ Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for Africa, *MOS* 33-34: “We have not always done what we could in order to form the laity for life in society, to a Christian vision of politics and economics. A protracted absence of the lay faithful from this field has led them to believe that the faith has nothing to do with politics ... Education towards the common good as well as a respect for pluralism will be one of the pastoral tasks which are priorities for our time”.

⁸¹ *EA* 32.

⁸² Orobator, *The Church as Family*, 134.

courses of formation for the laity and religious, and above all in the theological and pastoral formation and renewal of priests, young and old”.⁸³ A similar statement was expressed by the Asian Synod fathers stressing the importance of offering the faithful a solid training in the social teaching of the church.⁸⁴ The concern of the Asian Synod fathers could be an indicator that there is still a great need to offer the formation in the social teaching of the church to all members of the people of God in Asia.

The formation in the social teaching of the church is necessary for all sectors of the church: church leaders, priests, religious and lay people.⁸⁵ However, the formation for the laity is particularly important for the promotion of the role of the laity in the church and in society, because when they are well formed in the social teaching of the church they will be Christian and competent agents for the social mission of the church. Certainly, the need for training the laity in the church’s social teaching should be on a par with the training of priests and religious in this area. Accordingly, lay people in the church as the family of God must be particularly provided with the church’s social teaching so that they are more aware of their mission towards other members as brothers and sisters in their community. As a consequence such a formation leads to working with others in society.

7.2.4 Working with Other Groups

Social justice is the common responsibility of all people. It is the basis on which the social teaching of the church relies to address its appeal for human development to all people of good will. The church realises its limits in solving social problems and calls for cooperation from social and other religious institutions in many forms, such as joint action groups, ecumenical alliances⁸⁶ and dialogue of life.⁸⁷

The church addresses its social teaching first to its members,⁸⁸ but at the same time it also wants to share this teaching with other Christians, believers of different religions and all people. The sharing of the social teaching of the church can be done because this teaching is based on human dignity and human rights. Although the church claims to be an “expert in humanity”,⁸⁹ it also acknowledges that it does not have competence to offer

⁸³ FABC I, *Evangelisation in Modern Day Asia*, in FAPA I, 20.

⁸⁴ EA 32: “The Synod fathers therefore stressed the importance of offering the faithful ... a solid training in the social doctrine of the church”.

⁸⁵ Ibid. Cf. DCE 31: “Individuals who care for those in need must first be professionally competent: they should be properly trained in what to do and how to do it, and committed to continuing care”.

⁸⁶ Orobator, *The Church as Family*, 126.

⁸⁷ FABC V, *Journeying Together Towards the Third Millennium*, in FAPA I, 287-288; DCE 30.

⁸⁸ EA 32.

⁸⁹ Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio (PP)* 13; SRS 41.

solutions for economic and political issues. Therefore the church encourages local churches “to cooperate with the believers of other religions” in the promotion of integral human development.⁹⁰

Based on concrete social situations local churches have suggested different ways of carrying out their social mission. In Africa, joint action groups and ecumenical alliances are the two forms of cooperation to find lasting and effective solutions for human development in Africa. They resulted from multi-faith and multi-oriented initiatives which include people of different denominations, professional associations, human rights groups and the media who work together in order to provide social transformation in the spirit of cooperation and also to avoid competition with each other.⁹¹ The FABC Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs (BIRA I, 1979) proposed another form of cooperation which is called dialogue of life, a dialogue “where people join together to promote whatever leads to unity, love, truth and peace”.⁹² Asian bishops pointed out that the poor whom the church needs to dialogue with could be those who are deprived of economic, educational or human rights. Besides poverty, Asia is a continent of many cultures and religions which have often caused conflict. All these social realities call for a dialogue of life in order to foster mutual understanding and to cooperate in working for human development for all people. The church can fulfil its mission as a witnessing church when it “reaches out to people of other faiths and persuasions in a dialogue of life towards the integral liberation of all”.⁹³ In other words, such a dialogue will enrich and overcome misunderstanding in order to build a human family for the reign of God which is the aim of the church as the family of God.

Working with other people and groups for the development of social mission is beneficial to the church as the family of God. The church as the family of God has often been wrongly criticised because this concept is seen to exclude people of other denominations who do not belong to the children of God in the strict meaning of the term. Actually, the concept of the family could develop some forms of nepotism which are not appropriate for carrying out the social mission of the church. Therefore the church as family needs to increase its effort in working together with other people and groups regardless of their backgrounds for the welfare of all in order to be able to eliminate or overcome the above

⁹⁰ EIA 109; cf. GS 89-90.

⁹¹ Orobator, *The Church as Family*, 126.

⁹² BIRA I, *Statement and Recommendations*, in G. Rosales and C. G. Arévalo (eds.), *FAPA I*, 111.

⁹³ FABC V, *Journeying Together Towards the Third Millennium*, in *FAPA III*, 282; 287-288.

criticism. Moreover, such a working with other people also promotes ecumenism in the church as the family of God.

The emphasis on the practical tools in carrying out the social mission of the church as the family of God will be analysed below and applied to the church in Vietnam.

7.3 The Perspectives of the Vietnamese Church on the Social Mission

The church in Vietnam has developed its social mission based on the social teaching of the church as well as the Vietnamese anthropological perspective on the family. The latter are: solidarity with the Vietnamese compatriots, human dignity as the condition for development, and becoming the church of the poor. These issues clarify the mission of the church as the family of God in Vietnam.

7.3.1 Solidarity with the Vietnamese Compatriots

Solidarity with compatriots as family members is the basis of the social concern of the Vietnamese church for the needy in society. The Vietnamese bishops encouraged the people of God to approach their compatriots “not as strangers [since Christians do not] come to convince, to overcome or to treat them [their compatriots] as objects of charity but above all to encounter and share [with them]”.⁹⁴ This horizontal relationship with people was stressed in many pastoral letters which originated from the first episcopal letter of VBC when it was established in 1980.

The 1980 Episcopal Letter of the Vietnamese Bishops’ Conference was a historic and foundational document envisioning the pastoral orientations of the church in Vietnam. Following the teaching in the *Pastoral Constitution* of the Second Vatican Council, the church in Vietnam affirmed its identity and mission as the people of God. Its mission is to guide people and bring all its earthly realities into the context of the life, love and truth of God. Hence it must be the church for humankind which develops in the midst of the Vietnamese nation. This Vietnamese characteristic of the church has been a landmark of the ecclesiological perspective of this local church. The church in the midst of the nation must march along with people, because “this motherland is the place God has called us to live as his children, [and] this country is the mother’s womb in which we fulfil our vocation as children of God”.⁹⁵

When the Vietnamese bishops used the expression, “being the church in the midst of the nation” they ascertained an attachment “to the destiny” of the country, an observance of

⁹⁴ VBC, *Bản trả lời*, II, 14.

⁹⁵ VBC, *Thư chung 1980*, no. 9.

the “national traditions” and an integration into “the present-day life” of their people.⁹⁶ The bishops understood the difficulties of the country after a long period of war, the tradition of love and service among their compatriots and the poverty in the lives of many Vietnamese. They called all the sectors of the people of God to contribute their effort to the reconstruction of the country in order to build a happy, free and prosperous Vietnam for all citizens. In other words, the church in Vietnam is called to serve its people, particularly the poor, as well as its country ruled by the communist government. However, the purpose of this service is for the sake of people living in the country and not for that of the country alone. This separation was made because the welfare of the country could be misused by a minority of government officials for their own benefit.

The Vietnamese bishops identified the nature and the mission of the local church as the church of service, particularly for the poor, the sick and the marginalised. The poor include those “who are deprived of dignity, knowledge and hope”.⁹⁷ Realising the situation of the country which has been affected by the market-oriented economy, globalisation and natural calamities, the pastoral letters often highlighted these problems and called on the people of God to respond to the needs of the affected people. The 1992 Pastoral Letter studied the social problems when Vietnam began its policies to open its doors to the outside world.⁹⁸ The Vietnamese economy developed and benefited a number of people in cities, but it also widened the gap between these people and others in the country and mountainous areas. The 1996 Pastoral Letter called on local and overseas Catholics and international humanitarian agencies to help those affected by devastating floods. The bishops requested people to show their compassion and Christian charity to their suffering compatriots.⁹⁹ The 1998 Pastoral Letter highlighted the newly emerging problems facing religious and social life, such as the impact of poverty and the consumerist way of life, which affected working people, peasants and migrants.¹⁰⁰

The church in Vietnam, through the different pastoral letters of VBC, claimed to be the church of service for the needy. Indeed, the strongest statement expressing the commitment of the local church to the service for the poor could be seen in the Responses to the *Lineamenta* for the Asian Synod. The local church showed a strong desire to become the church of the poor which is also a humble church in spirit and in

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ VBC, *Thư chung năm 2001*, no. 11.

⁹⁸ Cf. VBC, *Thư mục vụ năm 1992*, no. 1.

⁹⁹ Cf. VBC, *Thư mục vụ năm 1996* [The 1996 Pastoral Letter], nos. 2-3.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. VBC, *Thư chung năm 1998*, no. 5.

practice. The reasons for this option was expressed as “only a poor church will be able to adapt itself to a huge mass of poor people” and a church without power will more easily approach so many people who only ask for the right to live as men and women.¹⁰¹

The concern for human development was also heard during the Synod for Asia (1998). Indeed, development was the focus of many interventions of the Vietnamese bishops at the Asian synod. The bishops realised that poverty and war had affected many parts of the country. Therefore the social mission of the church has focused on providing various kinds of assistance for economic, educational and transportation development.¹⁰² Human development is also directed to the cultural and religious life of ethnic minorities. Such a human development has been practised since the beginning of evangelisation in Vietnam in order to bring the good news and integral development to the tribal peoples.¹⁰³ In other words, a dialogue of life, which is expressed through service and love, is the appropriate means to present Jesus and the church to people in Asia and in Vietnam.¹⁰⁴

The emphasis on the church as the family of God is not only for the sake of inculturation but also of active involvement in doing justice for the needy. Indeed, in 2002, VBC founded an episcopal committee for charitable and social activities in order to develop its social mission. The conference also encouraged the dioceses to establish a similar committee. From that foundation on national and diocesan levels charitable and social services have some progress and draws interest from people.

Solidarity with the Vietnamese compatriots, particularly with the marginalised in society, is highlighted because all Vietnamese consider themselves as brothers and sisters in one family. Therefore solidarity with others through helping one another is a Vietnamese tradition which is expressed in local folklore, such as “the undamaged leaf covers the torn leaf”, “a mouthful given to someone who is starving is worth a bag of food offered to someone who is well-fed”. However, the social apostolate of the Vietnamese church and its influence are minimal because of the lack of organisational structures to coordinate

¹⁰¹ VBC, *Bản trả lời*, III, 16.

¹⁰² Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for Asia, Bishop Emmanuel Lê Phong Thuận, “Intervention of the Church for Human Development,” *OR* 13 May 1998, 13: “All these results, although small, have been achieved primarily through the missionary awareness of the faithful, communion with one another and other religions, solidarity with everyone and also through the contributions of charitable organisations”.

¹⁰³ Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for Asia, Bishop Pierre Nguyễn Văn Nhơn, “Situation of Ethnic Minorities in Viet Nam,” *OR* 13 May 1998, 11.

¹⁰⁴ Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for Asia, Tụng, “Evangelisation of Asia is Primarily a Dialogue of Life,” 15.

the social apostolate and to attract the interest of the local Catholics for a great need for charitable and social work in the country.¹⁰⁵

7.3.2 Human Dignity as the Essential Condition for Human Development

Human dignity is the significant ground on which the church in Vietnam was built and still strives for integral human development which must be equal for all. The issue of human dignity appeared in the pastoral letters of the bishops' conference and the statements either of the bishops' conference addressed to the government or of individual bishops to the faithful. The bishops always emphasised that human dignity is based on being created in the image of God; therefore people must be prioritised over institutions and even over the laws of a country.¹⁰⁶ People must be the goal, the end and the centre of all cultural, economic and social activities. In other words, human dignity must be the basic ground to evaluate the status of a person. In that sense, a person is considered to be marginalised, that is, in need of support when his/her dignity is damaged or lost due to whatever situation. Because of the primacy of human dignity, a person, even in his/her material, physical and spiritual poverty, should not be considered as the object of charity, but as human beings worthy of being respected and listened to.¹⁰⁷

Because of people's primacy and their human dignity as the children of God and as brothers/sisters in one family, they must be respected in the building and developing of a more humane society in the country.¹⁰⁸ Their primacy also requires integral human development incorporating the material, mental and spiritual needs of people. The lack of this total development renders human development handicapped or incomplete. According to the Vietnamese bishops, the devaluation of human dignity is damaging to society and people. Society will be impoverished or people will be humiliated because the disrespect of human dignity often makes rulers or people in power exercise authority arbitrarily. People will become merely cogs in the wheel of production instead of being

¹⁰⁵ Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn, "Cấu trúc văn hóa xã hội của người Việt Nam trong hoạt động xã hội," [The socio-cultural structure of the Vietnamese for social work], *Vietcatholic News* 1 February 2006. According to the local church source, at the diocesan level, there is only one office for social work out of twenty-six archdioceses and dioceses in Vietnam. The majority of the dioceses assign one or two priests/religious to be responsible persons for social work with the assistance of a very limited specialised staff in social work or without any help from the latter. It is also noted that the needs for social work are numerous and urgent. Some figures are mentioned to illustrate the social needs: 26% of the population living in poverty according to United Nations standards, 1.2 million of children disabled out of five million of disabled, almost two million cases of abortion per year, and 265,000 HIV/AIDS patients.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. "Un évêque catholique du pays pass en revue l'individu, la nation, les associations, les Églises au Vietnam et les trouve pauvres en indépendance," *EDA* 355 (2002), 20.

¹⁰⁷ VBC, *Thư chung năm 2001*, no. 11.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Phạm Minh Mẫn, "Lettre de l'archevêque de Ho chi Minh-ville au comité d'Union du Catholicism," *EDA* 368 (2003), 29.

the goal of development. Workers will be exploited for economic gain by their employers rather than encouraged in order to uplift their lives. People will suffer discrimination because they will be evaluated not by human dignity but by outcome or profit. These distortions will not contribute to human development, but will lead to the alienation of people and society.¹⁰⁹

Human development must be equal for all Vietnamese in the country since a genuine development must not discriminate. It is an equal development between people in cities as well as in country and mountainous areas regardless of ethnic, religious and political backgrounds. According to the bishops, this genuine human development must be founded on the following criteria: a respect of the fundamental truth about people; principles of solidarity and subsidiarity; and a promotion of conscience on public welfare and of service.

Human dignity must be based on the truth that all people are equal in their dignity, while the service of people is the *raison d'être* of human development. These fundamental truths understood and applied correctly will eliminate any forms of discrimination, inequality and dictatorship which have existed in society. Particularly, the spirit of solidarity is important because it is also the foundation for an equal development. The bishops did not define the principle of solidarity, but they identified various ways of promoting the spirit of solidarity. Solidarity is fostered when it is grounded in human rights, moral values, legitimate independence of people and autonomy of civil organisations. It must go beyond the benefits of particular organisations and groups in order to serve the development of society and the promotion of human beings and family. It is noted that in Vietnam the development of the nation, which was sometimes identified with that of socialism, has been given priority¹¹⁰ and the benefit of individuals has been sacrificed. However, the bishops claimed that the government must promote harmoniously the developments of the country, of individuals and other organisations such as family and religious organisations.¹¹¹

The spirit of subsidiarity is needed because it is “the necessary foundation for democratic society”.¹¹² According to the Vietnamese bishops, subsidiarity is the principle describing the responsibility of higher organisations over lower ones in a mutual and respectful way.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Cf. VBC, “Contribution de la Conférence Episcopale au VIIIème Congrès du Parti communiste vietnamien,” *EDA* 114 (1991), 20-21.

¹¹¹ Cf. Mãn, “Lettre de l’archevêque de Ho chi Minh-ville au comité d’Union du Catholicisme,” 28.

¹¹² Ibid.

The former, which is the government, must not interfere in the internal activities of the latter, which are social and religious organisations, but they must acknowledge the competence and autonomy of the latter in order to coordinate their activities for the service of society. This subsidiarity must also be applied to the relationship between the government and its citizens. The government facilitates the development as well as freedom of the citizens for the service of society. Subsidiarity must be developed and practised as mutual relationships among the government, organisations and individuals in order to promote genuine development. In other words, the Vietnamese bishops mainly follow the principle of subsidiarity and solidarity as described in the social teaching of the church.¹¹³

The purpose of VBC when referring to subsidiarity is to claim the duty of the church to organise and carry out its social mission by their own right because the government often controls and limits the social mission of the church. The lack of the church's social organisations mainly comes from the state-controlled policies on social work as well as the small number of professional personnel working in this area. In a broad sense subsidiarity also implies the responsibility of the church towards people, especially the needy. This claim is essential because the church as family has the responsibility for the welfare of its members including non-Christians.¹¹⁴

7.3.3 Becoming the Church of the Poor

The church of the poor is grounded in the social teaching on the option or love of preference for the poor.¹¹⁵ The church acknowledged this option as its vocation for the proclamation of the good news and the promotion of justice.¹¹⁶ The church in Vietnam has realised the importance of becoming the church of the poor among its people considering it as a means for the social mission of the local church. Through its efforts and limited potentials the local church has constantly encouraged all sectors of the people of God to carry out this social mission. Many projects, mainly on the parish, religious congregation or lay volunteer levels, have been carried out for the needy. However, in order to be the church of the poor, the local church has faced some internal rather than external challenges. It has difficulties in carrying out its social apostolate

¹¹³ John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* (CA) 48; QA 79-80; SRS 38, PP 14; 42-43; 84; John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris* (PT) 60; DCE 26.

¹¹⁴ Cf. Gregory R. Beabout, "The Principle of Subsidiarity and Freedom in the Family, Church, Market, and the Government," *Journal of Market & Morality* 1 (1998), 130-141. This issue will be detailed later in this chapter.

¹¹⁵ SRS 42.

¹¹⁶ SRS, 39; Synod of Bishops, *Justice in the World* 5; CA 58.

because of the government policies on religious activities. In addition, the local church is facing two internal challenges: the counter-witness of the lifestyle of the people of God¹¹⁷ and the lack of social analysis and research,¹¹⁸ which are the main obstacles for the local church to be the church of the poor.¹¹⁹ Of all the difficulties, the lack of social analysis¹²⁰ might be the root of the problem to help the local church to be the church of the poor.

Becoming the church of the poor has been and will be a challenge to the church in Vietnam because of the witnessing nature of the church in the context of globalisation. According to the documents of FABC, the church of the poor is “a poor church” in its true sense, that is, in self-sacrificing lives of Christians.¹²¹ This lifestyle must be expressed through a witness to evangelical simplicity so that it can welcome all people and be involved in the life of everyone, even the poorest in society, with respect and readiness for service.

In its social mission, the church in Vietnam needs both the support from local churches outside Vietnam and the necessary structures, such as schools, hospital and clinics, to carry out its activities, but these conditions could become the stumbling-blocks for the local church. Receiving financial support from foreign charitable organisations could bring about a dependent attitude on other organisations. So the local church needs to see that financial assistance from other churches must help it gradually to become self-reliant in the social, cultural and religious context of the country.¹²² This acknowledgement is necessary in order to avoid a kind of over-dependence as an effect of parasitism. In addition, under the impact of globalisation the service of structural resources could lose their Christian identity because of competition. Competition in business and benefit in a globalised market could hinder the service and the prophetic role of the schools, hospitals and clinics.¹²³ Therefore in using many resources from

¹¹⁷ Nguyễn Chính Kết, “Những ước mơ về Giáo Hội trước thềm thiên niên kỷ 3,” [The dreams about the church in the third millennium] *Công giáo và Dân tộc* 2 (2000), 27-39.

¹¹⁸ Phạm Đình Thái, “Vietnamese Catholics Search for a New Identity,” *Asia Focus* 21 October 1994, 4.

¹¹⁹ Cf. VBC, *Bản trả lời*, III, 16.

¹²⁰ Cf. BISA VII, *Final Reflections*, in G. Rosales and C. G. Arévalo (eds.), *FAPA I*, 231-232; FABC Report of the Consultation on Integral Formation, *Asian Integral Pastoral Approach Towards A New Way of Being Church in Asia*, in F-J. Eilers (ed.), *FAPA II*, 107-11; FABC Final Report on the First Asian Laity Meeting, *The Commitment of the Laity in the Church's Mission with Special Reference to Implementing the Social Teachings*, in F-J. Eilers (ed.), *FAPA II*, 121-122. Social analysis must be understood as a stage and a tool in the pastoral cycle adopted as an Asian integral approach towards a new way of being church in Asia, which is also the church of the poor.

¹²¹ Bishops' Institute for Missionary Apostolate (BIMA) I, *Letter of Participants*, in G. Rosales and C. G. Arévalo (eds.), *FAPA I*, 94.

¹²² BIMA II, *Letter of Participants*, in G. Rosales and C. G. Arévalo (eds.), *FAPA I*, 100.

¹²³ FABC Conclusions of the Theological Consultation, *Church Issues in Asia in the Context of Evangelisation, Dialogue and Proclamation*, in F-J. Eilers (ed.), *FAPA II*, 197.

overseas organisations for its social activities the local church must prepare itself to become gradually a self-reliant church and must use its resources for all Vietnamese. Society in Vietnam consists of many poor people in its broad sense and of many religious organisations. Therefore schools, hospital and clinics should be accessible to the majority of people, not only to a minority. In the discernment or evaluations of these matters the local church needs the assistance of social analysis in order to fulfil its social mission as the family church.

Social analysis, as mentioned above, is a practical tool for the church providing options regarding approaches and strategies in its social mission. The need for, and the consultation of, social analysis are often mentioned in the pastoral letters of VBC.¹²⁴ However, the problem seems to be that these analyses and evaluations were not carried out properly or done by experts. In fact, there were very few analyses or critical evaluations published by the secretariate of the bishops' conference while there has been a great need of "accurate understanding and thorough analysis" about the situation in Vietnam in order to help episcopal committees to work effectively.¹²⁵ Indeed, social analysis is necessary to focus activities on the concrete situation of the local church as well as society and also one of the keys for success in the social mission of the church.

In spite of some Vietnamese researchers emphasising the importance of this tool in the social and pastoral activities of the church, the local church does not give enough attention to this area. In 1994, a researcher remarked that "the church lacks thorough social analysis and does not have the weight to be a driving force for a new way of social commitment".¹²⁶ In 1998 and 2003, there were still warnings that the statistical reports of the dioceses in Vietnam showed inaccurate figures due to insufficient techniques.¹²⁷ These figures are only a small part of data in a social analysis but they affect the

¹²⁴ In the 1992 Pastoral Letter, the Vietnamese bishops write: "During this meeting we have thought over the situation together and tried to analyse and evaluate the actual state of society and the church in our country". In most pastoral letters, the bishops mentioned that they gave pastoral directions to the people of God after studying of the current situation of the church and society. For instance, in the 2001 Pastoral letter, the bishops stated that at important periods in society the pastoral letters highlighted the significant events or problems to help the people of God to respond to the challenges. It is also noted that living in a communist country the Vietnamese church needs to conduct their own social analysis rather than relying on agencies as in western countries.

¹²⁵ Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn, "Toàn cảnh Việt Nam từ năm 2000-2005. Một vài định hướng mục vụ xã hội," [The panorama of Vietnam from 2000 to 2005: some pastoral orientations in social apostolate], *Hiệp Thông* 13-14 (2002), 173-195. It is noted that such an analysis was not regularly published.

¹²⁶ Thái, "Vietnamese Catholics Search for a New Identity," 4.

¹²⁷ Cf "Les catholiques qui représentent 7% de la population vietnamienne forment une Eglise soucieuse de catéchèse et tournée vers la société du pays," *EDA* 385 (2003), 23: "une presentation critique de ces statistiques a été exposée par le P. Antoine Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn, secrétaire pour le Sud du Vietnam de la Conférence épiscopale. Elle fait apparaitre quelques insuffisances techniques dans les enquêtes réalisées dans les diocèses et elle souligne certaines évolutions en cours dans l'Eglise du Vietnam".

outcome of the analysis. Indeed, the failure to get the numbers right frustrates both pastoral ministry and evangelisation. The problem of the inadequacy of social analysis did not come from the unavailability of personnel,¹²⁸ but it may have come from the lack of the awareness of the necessity of social analysis among local church leaders. The Vietnamese church needs to acknowledge that solidarity with or option for the poor must go together with a careful discernment and analysis of the situation. In other words, the solidarity, which is about lifestyle, and the political or quasi-political aspect, has to do with analysis and action; they are the two equally important aspects in carrying out the social mission in general and option for the poor in particular.¹²⁹

The results of social analysis are used not only to orientate and organise the local church activities but also to change the Christian life in terms of awareness and practices in social mission. Most Vietnamese Catholics go to church and attend Sunday Mass. They help the poor and some are involved in charitable activities such as calamity relief projects, education projects and scholarships for poor students. However, they could be unaware of their role as witnesses to the gospel values or they have not yet committed themselves to doing charitable works as a task required by Christian justice.¹³⁰ This commitment must be mentioned more explicitly in the pastoral letters of the bishops' conference in order to challenge the Christian commitment to the social mission of the church, since these pastoral letters have been the official and unique statements of the bishops giving guidelines for the people of God in carrying out this social mission.

Social analysis must be developed along with exposure-immersion and contemplation so that social analysis becomes actualised in pastoral planning. This essential process includes formation and action, deepening and proclaiming faith, dialogue and participation with people as well as the environment. In terms of formation, the church in Vietnam faces the challenge of providing more training in contextual theology including Catholic social teaching for the people of God, particularly the laity. Also in this area, the local church does not have many seminarians, priests and members of religious orders enrolling in social and human science degrees. In terms of action, the church in Vietnam does not have many avenues for exposure-immersion and contemplation in order to help people to internalise Gospel and church teachings. These avenues are the essential requirements for the success of social analysis¹³¹ and they are the characteristics of a

¹²⁸ Sơn, "Cấu trúc văn hóa xã hội của người Việt Nam," *Vietcatholic News* 1 February 2006.

¹²⁹ Dorr, *Mission in Today's World*, 155.

¹³⁰ Sơn, "Toàn cảnh Việt Nam từ năm 2000-2005," 192.

¹³¹ BISA VII, *Final Reflections*, 231-232.

“spirituality of justice and solidarity with the poor”.¹³² People need an immersion experience in living and working with the poor in a period of time in order to recognise “the mystery of God’s preferential presence and activity among the poor”. This work has a great impact on the lifestyle of those involved in the experience.¹³³ Accordingly, it can change the counter-witness of the lifestyle of Vietnamese Catholics, including the local clergy and religious, so that they live as brothers/sisters among their people.

The social mission of the church cannot reach all people without working with organisations of other religions. In this task social analysis could also contribute through surveys and research so that the benefits of working with other religious organisations could be identified and developed. Vietnam has fifty-four different ethnic groups with people belonging to various religions and beliefs and living together in the same country. This factor is the basis for working together in social activities. The Vietnamese bishops have realised that the aims of dialogue are “understanding, respecting and loving one another” which are a “decisive factor” for the future of the nation.¹³⁴ Interreligious dialogue is still a big challenge for the local church, but a dialogue of life through common and concrete activities in the service to the poor should be more promoted in the local church.¹³⁵ In fact, the grounds of this collaboration are that Christians are a minority living together with members of other religious and social groups and that there are some social problems which need a common approach. Therefore collaboration in social mission “is necessary at the local, regional and international level”.¹³⁶

In summary, the social mission of the church reflects an approach to ecclesiology which moves away from “ecclesiocentrism”,¹³⁷ looking not only into itself but also to the outside world, not only to its own members but also to those of various religious and social groups. The reaching out to outsiders must be convincingly expressed and developed in the model of the church as the family of God which is a “regnocentric” model. In the regnocentric ecclesiology the church as the family of God in Vietnam has developed its perspectives on social mission based on Christian anthropology. However, in order to have a fuller implication of the model of the church as family in the area of its social

¹³² Thomas P. Rausch, *Catholicism in the Third Millennium*, 2nd ed. (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2003), 183-184.

¹³³ BISA VII, *Final Reflections*, 231-232; cf. Rausch, *Catholicism*, 184.

¹³⁴ VBC, *Thư chung năm 2001*, no. 2.

¹³⁵ Nguyễn Như Thế, “Grassroots Exchange Will Lead to Useful Dialogue,” *Asian Focus* 7 June 2002, 3.

¹³⁶ FABC IV, *The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World of Asia*, in *FAPA I*, 181.

¹³⁷ Robert Hardawiryana, “Mission in Asia: Theological Perspectives,” in Michael T. Seigel and Leonardo N. Mercado (eds.), *Towards an Asian Theology of Mission* (Manila: Divine Word Publications, 1995), 41.

mission the local church needs to be more aware of its social mission and to identify and overcome some negative values associated with the family as well as the Vietnamese.¹³⁸

7.4 Towards a Church as the Family of God in Its Social Mission

Carrying out its social mission is the nature and the identity of the church in general and the church as the family of God in particular. According to Magesa, in order to fulfil this mission the church needs a visible structure including some basic principles and concrete theological mechanism.¹³⁹ These will help the church to counter some negative aspects of the notion of family according to African and Vietnamese cultures.

7.4.1 The Structure for the Social Mission of the Church as Family

The social mission of the church forms a new perspective in ecclesiology which arises from the *Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World*. The church, which is called to read the signs of the times and to serve the world, must share “the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish” of people today.¹⁴⁰ Therefore its mission is “to establish a political, social and economic order that will be of ever greater service to people and will help individuals and groups to affirm and cultivate their own dignity”.¹⁴¹ In other words, the social mission of the church as family concerns particularly the needs of everyone in society without any exclusion or discrimination like the care of a family for all its members who are equal in God’s family.

The perspective of the church in the conciliar documents has presented an ecclesiology which moved away from “the dominant isolationist and condescending model of church in the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries” and opted for a theology of the church at the service of the world and its people.¹⁴² The social mission in such an ecclesiology is grounded in the social or communitarian nature of human beings which has a certain likeness with the nature of the trinitarian life.¹⁴³ The vocation which Christian anthropology promotes denotes “more than just a natural tendency towards socialization; it represents, rather, humanity’s participation in the divine life itself”.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁸ Cf. Sơn, “Cấu trúc văn hóa xã hội của người Việt Nam,” *Vietcatholic News* 1 February 2006.

¹³⁹ Laurenti Magesa, “Christ’s Spirit as Empowerment of the Church-as-Family,” *Sedos Bulletin* 32 (2000), 294.

¹⁴⁰ GS 1-3.

¹⁴¹ Joseph A Komonchak, “The Significance of Vatican Council II for Ecclesiology,” in Phan (ed.), *The Gift of the Church*, 88. Cf. GS 6-9.

¹⁴² Orobator, *The Church as Family*, 113.

¹⁴³ GS 24.

¹⁴⁴ Markey, *Creating Communion*, 88. Cf. GS 24.

The involvement of the church in the social mission supposes that it has something to contribute to social transformation, although its contributions in the world differ from that of social organisations. Indeed, the church does not only communicate divine life to people, but in a certain sense “it casts the reflected light of that life over all the earth, notably in the way it heals and elevates the dignity of the human person”.¹⁴⁵ The model of the involvement of the church in society is that of “contrast-society” or prophetic role which requires the church to keep its identity on the one hand as well as to be open to the world on the other. The church has to work harmoniously in the world in between these two ends. Such a task is not an easy one for the church; therefore it sometimes leaves the task of social transformation to secular organisations. In so doing the church can make a great mistake because, to some extent, the church implicitly legitimizes unjust problems in society.

The outreaching mission of the church becomes significant in the era of globalisation.¹⁴⁶ Recent church documents acknowledged the positive as well as the negative impact of globalisation.¹⁴⁷ Two negative effects of globalisation are marginalisation and exclusion. More people, particularly in developing and poor countries, have become marginalised in the consumerist society and been excluded from the promotion of life due to the impact of economic and cultural globalisation. That is why the church emphasises the need for “globalisation without marginalisation” or “the globalisation of solidarity”.¹⁴⁸ The church insists upon solidarity with all people because all of them, belonging to the same family, are bound together in mutual relationships. Therefore, “Catholic social teaching exposes the unacceptability of any exaltation of class, race, party, or state that would grant favours to some at the expense of others”.¹⁴⁹ The church as family cannot accept inequality and injustice in globalisation but it has to work for equality and justice for all members.

Asian churches acknowledge that the outreaching mission is a new way of being church.¹⁵⁰ Besides the above direct consequences of globalisation, the church in Asia has faced the issue of diversity in cultures, religions and nationalities and of excessive

¹⁴⁵ GS 40.

¹⁴⁶ Avery Dulles, “The Catholicity of the Church and Globalisation,” *Seminarium* 2 (2000), 264-268; cf. Peter De Mey, “Is the Connection of ‘Catholicity’ and ‘Globalisation’ Fruitful?” *Bulletin ET* 13 (2002), 171-172.

¹⁴⁷ EA 7; 39; cf. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in America* 20; 55.

¹⁴⁸ John Paul II, *Message for the World Day of Peace*. OR 7/14 December 1997, 3-4; EA 39; John Paul II, *Ecclesia in America* 55.

¹⁴⁹ Dulles, “The Catholicity of the Church,” 266.

¹⁵⁰ FABC V, *Journeying Together Towards the Third Millennium*, in FAPA I, 287-288; FABC VII, *A Renewed Church in Asia*, in FAPA III, 3-4.

urbanisation.¹⁵¹ Urbanisation causes damage to family values and structure. Such a challenge urges Asian churches to dialogue with their social, economic and religious realities to fulfil their mission of love and service. Local churches, including the Vietnamese church, are compelled to have new forms of family ministry in its social mission to enhance the relationship in the family and the church as family.¹⁵²

In the earlier chapters solidarity and communion are described as the nature of the family of God and the church as God's family. These concepts adhere to the principle of respect for the inalienable rights of an individual or group within the context of the larger community, respect for the human dignity in individuals or in groups of people, and the preservation of the integrity as well as life of the community.¹⁵³ For Magesa, these sociological principles need to be strengthened by some concrete theological and pastoral mechanisms which he identified as the structure of subsidiarity, solidarity and participation/socialisation. The church as family whose aim is to include all people into the church has to revolve around these mechanisms.¹⁵⁴

Subsidiarity was explicitly formulated in the Encyclicals *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), although it could be traced to a principle in the social teaching of the church developed in the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891).¹⁵⁵ It was more explicitly developed in the Encyclical *Centesimus Annus* (1991).¹⁵⁶ Burkhard, using the 1931 Encyclical of Pius XI, identified three meanings of this principle: the primacy of the individual person, the priority of small groups vis-à-vis larger, more complex, state-sponsored organisations, and the necessity of assistance on the part of the state when either an individual or smaller social bodies cannot achieve their functions.¹⁵⁷ In particular, the principle of

¹⁵¹ EA 5.

¹⁵² FABC VII, *A Renewed Church in Asia*, in FAPA III, 8: "As we face the need of the 21st century, we do so with Asian hearts, in solidarity with the poor and the marginalised, in union with all our Christian brothers and sisters, and by joining hands with all men and women of Asia of many different faiths. Inculturation, dialogue, justice and option for the poor are aspects of whatever we do".

¹⁵³ Magesa, "Christ's Spirit as Empowerment," 294-295.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum* (RN) 52. The Encyclical does not yet mention by name a "principle of subsidiarity" but it assumes some such principle, especially in RN 52: "It is not right, as we have said, for either the citizen or the family to be absorbed by the State; it is proper that the individual and the family should be permitted to retain their freedom of action, so far as this is possible without jeopardizing the common good and without injuring anyone". Cf. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004), 113: "Subsidiarity is among the most constant and characteristic directives of the church's social doctrine and has been present since the first great social encyclical".

¹⁵⁶ CA 48: "The principle of subsidiarity must be respected: a community of a higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a community of a lower order, depriving the latter of its functions, but rather should support it in case of need and help to coordinate its activity with the activities of the rest of society, always with a view to the common good". Cf. CCC 1883.

¹⁵⁷ J. Burkhard, "Subsidiarity in the Church," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., ed. Berard L. Marthaler (Detroit: Gale, 2003), 569. Cf. QA 79-80: "Just as it is gravely wrong to take from individuals what they can

subsidiarity also applies to the relationships between the family and the state in which it forbids the state to usurp the functions of the family.¹⁵⁸ Moreover, the principle can be applied within the family in terms of relationships between parents and children. Parents have a greater competence to perform a task but they should leave some of them to their children for the sake of the children and the family as a whole.¹⁵⁹

The social role of the Christian family and the application of the principle of subsidiarity to the family assign the family the right to obtain physical, social, political and economic security for its members.¹⁶⁰ The social task of the family is to form persons who are “open to the community, moved by a sense of justice and concern for others, as well as by a consciousness of responsibility toward the whole of society.”¹⁶¹ In a similar way, the church as family has a significant mission in society for the welfare of people. It has its own right and duty to protect the human dignity of people who are the children of God from social injustice and structures. The social mission of the church as family, particularly its application of subsidiarity, is justified because, according to Magesa, subsidiarity promotes identity which is the recognition of who and what one is before God. This sense of identity helps people exercise their responsibilities and rights. However, the poor and the exploited are often deprived of their own identity because of the abusive power of those in authority.¹⁶² Therefore the church as family needs to exercise the principle of subsidiarity for the benefit of all people who are its brothers and sisters. In so doing, the church follows Jesus’ mission, done with the power of the Holy Spirit, to proclaim the good news to the outcasts of his time (cf. Lk 4:14-19). Indeed,

accomplish by their own initiative and industry and give it to the community, so also it is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do. For every social activity ought of its very nature to furnish help to the members of the body social, and never destroy and absorb them. The supreme authority of the State ought, therefore, to let subordinate groups handle matters and concerns of lesser importance, which would otherwise dissipate its efforts greatly...Therefore, those in power should be sure that the more perfectly a graduated order is kept among the various associations, in observance of the principle of subsidiary function”.

¹⁵⁸ John Paul II, *Letter to Families*, 17: “Whenever the family is self-sufficient, it should be left to act on its own; an excessive intrusiveness on the part of the state would prove detrimental, to say nothing of lacking in due respect, and would constitute an open violation of the rights of the family ... Closely linked to this ‘soul’ is the family, which is connected with the state precisely by reason of the *principle of subsidiarity*”. Cf. FC 45: “The family and society have complementary functions in defending and fostering the good of each and every human being. But society - more specifically the state – must recognise that ‘the family is a society in its own original right,’ and so society is under a grave obligation in its relations with the family to adhere to the *principle of subsidiarity*”.

¹⁵⁹ Christopher Wolfe, “Subsidiarity: The ‘Other’ Ground of Limited Government,” in Kenneth L. Grasso *et al.* (eds.), *Catholicism, Liberalism, and Communitarianism: The Catholic Intellectual Tradition and the Moral Foundations of Democracy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1995), 91-92; Beabout, “The Principle of Subsidiarity,” 130-141.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. FC 44-47.

¹⁶¹ FC 64.

¹⁶² Magesa, “Christ’s Spirit as Empowerment,” 294-295.

Jesus showed solidarity with the marginalised by his presence among them and by his teaching to help them participate in the building up the reign of God.

Accordingly, the practice of subsidiarity facilitates the presence of the church in a given place. The Spirit as the Advocate or the defender of the accused helps the church in carrying out its social mission as happened to Jesus. Jesus went to villages, entered people's houses and ate with them because he considered them his family members. Similarly, the church, including its members, must be present among the marginalised because practical solidarity and presence are not given realities. These realities must be struggled for and achieved through immersion and socialisation with people since as Aguilar argues that "the individual Christian's personal responsibility towards justice, community solidarity and the social outcasts has to be awakened and then channelled through the common solidarity of a larger community by the pastoral agents".¹⁶³ It is through presence among people that the church, by its teaching and training, can help them actively to be involved in the social mission of the church as their responsibilities towards other members in the church as family.

The church relates to people as members united by human and divine relationships. Fundamentally, the church carries out its social mission by solidarity with people as members of one human family. This solidarity leads Christians to find practical and effective ways of living out the commandment of love because all are children of God or belong to God's family. In other words, in the family of God, solidarity with others as brothers and sisters means being with people without any discrimination and dominance. This is Jesus' attitude when he dealt with his disciples and people which the church has to follow.¹⁶⁴

Solidarity with the needy in doing the social mission of the church as family needs to be practised by confronting and denouncing the very structures of society which produce injustice. The Encyclical *Ecclesia in Africa* mentioned the model of the Good Samaritan church in carrying out the social mission.¹⁶⁵ The Good Samaritan could be differently interpreted which has some influence on the image of the church. In an uncritical hermeneutic of the Good Samaritan the church fails the challenge of active participation in the social arena; it prefers "to indulge in 'assistential' and caritative endeavours rather than uncover and confront the structural and root causes of social malaise".¹⁶⁶ On the

¹⁶³ M. I. Aguilar, *Ministry to Social and Religious Outcasts in Africa* (Eldoret: Gaba Publications, 1995), 75.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Jn 13:14; Lk 9:23; 14:11; Mt 10:17-42; 20:25-28.

¹⁶⁵ *EIA* 41. Cf. *DCE* 31; Lk 10:30-37.

¹⁶⁶ Orobator, *The Church as Family*, 144.

contrary, in a critical hermeneutic, the Samaritan stands as an active agent who seeks to redress the unjust violence happened to the traveller.¹⁶⁷ Charitable work is admirable, but it is not an adequate remedy. Therefore the church as family is challenged to carry out a ministry of active involvement and participation in order to address social issues for the sake of the needy.¹⁶⁸ This active solidarity with people is essential because they are family members with the pastoral agents. This characteristic makes the social mission of the church as family distinctive and meaningful.

The social mission becomes more challenging to the church as the family of God because the aim of the church as family “is oriented towards the building of society which she seeks to inspire by the spirit of the Beatitudes”.¹⁶⁹ Indeed, the church as family does promote communion in which Christians are encouraged to commit themselves to love, justice and service of other people because all belong to “the same family redeemed by Christ’s blood”.¹⁷⁰ Communion among family members excludes any discrimination of race, tribe and class. Christians are called to be involved in social activities, particularly in the political field, in the spirit of the gospel.¹⁷¹ In addition to communion, the church as family also needs to show its solidarity with all peoples in their spiritual and material needs. Such a solidarity is a test for communion because without concrete sharing communion is worthless. Involvement in society and solidarity with people are the tests for a genuine church as family because “[a]s God’s family on earth, the church should be the living sign and efficacious instrument of universal solidarity for building a world-wide community of justice and peace”.¹⁷² In other words, “the closer the church moves towards universal solidarity, the more it becomes genuinely a family. The further away it moves from solidarity, the less it can claim the right to be called a family of God”.¹⁷³

Orobator puts the church as the family in Africa under the pressure of carrying out its social mission as follows:

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 13.

¹⁶⁸ Orobator, *The Church as Family*, 145.

¹⁶⁹ Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for Africa, *MOS 57*. Cf. James and Kathleen McGinnis, “Family as Domestic Church,” in John A. Coleman (ed.), *One Hundred Years of Catholic Social Thought* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 120-121. These two authors studied the need for a link between the family and its social action. According to them, “family has been used as an excuse for not being involved in social action”.

¹⁷⁰ *EIA* 114.

¹⁷¹ Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for Africa, *MOS 33*.

¹⁷² *EIA* 114.

¹⁷³ Magesa, “Christ’s Spirit as Empowerment,” 294.

If the church in Africa understands itself as family, its message or mission cannot become relevant and credible without addressing the social context of the African family, that is, of Africans. Given this social context, the church-as-family at the service of society embodies a community of solidarity at the service of life. This church can lay claim to credibility and relevance only when it become attentive, sensitive and responsive to the predicament of Africans and contributes concretely to the transformation and renewal of the African society.¹⁷⁴

This challenge to the African church is relevant to any church promoting the model of family of God. The requirement of carrying out the social mission in the church as God's family is very apparent and significant because solidarity with people forms "the difference between family as a merely human institution and the church as a church-as-family".¹⁷⁵ The church as family must embrace everyone irrespective of class, gender, race or ability. It also has the social obligation to serve people in society.¹⁷⁶ This requirement comes from the nature as well as the meaning and structure of the family, particularly God's family. However, the family structure itself implies some shortcomings that the church as family needs to overcome.

7.4.2 Challenges of Descendency, Nepotism and Parasitism

The structure of family or clan in some peoples fosters the concept of descendency, nepotism and parasitism. These concepts have a positive and negative impact on the family and the church as the family of God in the area of social mission.

Descendency is the vertical ties of members of a family or clan with a common ancestor. It is a family value to keep close relationships among family members. However, it becomes a counter-value when it is used to limit family members to those who are immediate ones in order to exclude others who do not belong to a common ancestor. According to Sankey,¹⁷⁷ ecclesiologically, descendency means "the encounter between church members and their spiritual ancestors" which "promotes a deepening quality of spiritual life". The purpose of this encounter is to seek blessings for church members only which can be questioned because the goal of the church is not to "restrict itself to the benefit of existing members" but to become "a channel of God's love for the wider

¹⁷⁴ Orobator, *The Church as Family*, 13.

¹⁷⁵ Magesa, "Christ's Spirit as Empowerment," 294-295.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. WCC, *The Nature and Purpose of the Church* 112: "The church is the community of people called by God who, through the Holy Spirit, are united with Jesus Christ and sent as disciples to bear witness to God's reconciliation, healing and transformation of creation. The church's relation to Christ entails that faith and community require discipleship in the sense of moral commitment".

world”.¹⁷⁸ In other words, ecclesiology “must not be limited to the good of the Christian community but seek to engage in action to fulfil God’s larger purposes”.¹⁷⁹

Hospitality and solidarity are also other traditional family values. However, they can be misunderstood, abused and transformed into nepotism and parasitism. In ecclesiology, these problems can turn the church into a self-oriented and dependent church which damages or destroys initiatives or responsibility of its members. The danger of nepotism in the model of family could lead to a church turned in on itself.¹⁸⁰ Parasitism is more obviously a danger for local churches. Christians might be concerned only about the needs of their own church and of its members, but not of society and other people. They might be willing to attend religious services but refuse to accept any responsibilities, particularly in the area of justice and social activities. Apart from that, local churches might live in a mentality of dependence from other churches, organisations and people. Consequently, the church and Christians might find it hard to develop and carry out their social activities. Moreover, a patriarchal or paternalistic dominance, which is another negative characteristic of the family model, often leads to authoritarian attitudes. Such attitudes might lead Christians to be not in sympathy with the marginalised.

The negative aspect of family or clan, which affects the model of the church as family in Africa, also applies to Vietnam. According to Thê, ¹⁸¹ a Vietnamese researcher, the characteristics of Vietnamese people and villages are ambivalent or dualistic in character in terms of communality and autonomy. The Vietnamese value solidarity as well as independence, or extraversion as well as introversion. These two characteristics have been culturally, historically and geographically conditioned for thousands of years. They have positive and negative expressions which have great impact on the structure of society, the family and in the daily life of the Vietnamese. Some of the negative tendencies among the Vietnamese are egotism, regionalism, parasitism and nepotism.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁷ Sankey, “The Church as Clan,” 443. Cf. C. Nyamiti, “The Church as Christ’s Ancestral Mediation: An Essay in African Ecclesiology,” in J.N.K. Mugambi and Laurenti Magesa (eds), *The Church in African Christianity. Innovative Essays in Ecclesiology* (Nairobi: Initiative Ltd, 1990), 129-177.

¹⁷⁸ Sankey, “The Church as Clan,” 443.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 444; cf. Msafiri, “The Church as Family Model,” 311-315.

¹⁸⁰ Sankey, “The Church as Clan,” 444-446. Family or clan as a self-centred system or closed system can also contribute to the development of these two abuses. While nepotism means “the abuse of power for the preferment of one’s family” at the expense of outsiders, parasitism is a lifestyle which is totally dependent on others and does not develop its own potentials.

¹⁸¹ Thê, *Tìm về bản sắc*, 213-233. In Footnote 12, the author remarked that the practice of twin villages was not popular in Vietnam.

¹⁸² Descendency might also exist among the Vietnamese due to the concept of biological family or homogeneity of the family lineage in Confucian culture. One of the indications of descendency might be the

The above negative practices have affected the Christian life of members of the church in Vietnam. The spirit of sharing of resources among dioceses and parishes or all sectors of the people of God is an immediate challenge since the influence of regionalism is quite strong in some parts of Vietnam. Dependence on overseas financial aid is often emphasised and local contributions seem to be limited and less developed. These negative practices have challenged the local church in its social mission.

In particular, the authoritarian or paternalistic attitude of some clergy and laity is a challenge for the church in Vietnam as the family. They do not consider the marginalised as people whom they have to serve or to look after with love and sympathy. In return, the marginalised feel left behind and find it difficult to approach the former. Consequently, such a distorted apostolate with the marginalised does not express the genuine mission of the church.¹⁸³

It is true that descendancy, hospitality and solidarity come from the family tradition that everything has to be concentrated on the good of the family/clan/community. However, such a tradition does not exclude people to show their relationship or their assistance to others outside their family/clan. In order to correct some of the above shortcomings of family or clan the social mission of the church needs to be developed in the spirit of the new Christian family as mentioned in the gospels. Jesus as the Proto-Ancestor in the family of God has founded a new Christian family/clan whose members are brothers and sisters because they are born of the will of God, neither of human blood nor human will (Jn 1:12-13). On the one hand, this development will supplement the weaknesses arising from the negative aspects of family or clan. On the other hand, it will maximize the many positive aspects of family in terms of communal dimension, such as network relationships, mutual help and sharing.

Confucian influences on the Vietnamese family are often considered as the challenges for the promotion of universalism or equality which is one of the bases for doing social work in society.¹⁸⁴ However, according to some contemporary scholars, these criticisms cannot be totally justified when one understands Confucian love and global ethics in their own context or in the whole Confucian principles. According to Küng, "in both

practice of considering an adopted child as a real birth-child of the family by hiding the origin of the adopted child for the sake of homogeneity of the family lineage.

¹⁸³ Cf. Vũ Khởi Phụng, "Linh mục, con nợ đặc biệt của người nghèo và người yếu đuối," [Priests: special debtors for the poor and the sick] in *Bốn mươi năm sau Vatican hai nhìn lại* (Ủy ban Giám mục về văn hóa: 2002), 69-72.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. de Bary, *The Trouble with Confucianism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991); Nuyen, "Confucianism and the Idea of Equality," 61-71; Sơn, "Cấu trúc văn hóa xã hội của người Việt Nam," *Vietcatholic News* 1 February 2006.

Confucianism and Christianity, the ethic of humanity culminates in the *love of the fellow human being*".¹⁸⁵ Huang still went further when he argued that Confucianism makes a unique contribution to the emerging global ethics.¹⁸⁶ For Nuyen, this philosophical system is "neither a villain blocking the progress of universal justice, a necessary condition for conflict-free globalisation, nor a helpless victim of that progress".¹⁸⁷ Therefore, the Vietnamese church which has been influenced by Confucian culture needs to have critical studies on Confucianism in order to overcome its possible negative impact on the social mission on the one hand, and on the other to develop the idea of universalism in Confucianism for the purpose of its charitable activity.

In summary, the negative impact of some family values might challenge the model of the church as the family of God as well as its social mission. However, one should know that the church as the family of God is called to model on the characteristics of the Trinity or God's family which transcend those of the human family. On the one hand, the church as the family of God has to take into account the negative impact of the family structure in order to overcome the danger of egocentrism in the church as family. On the other hand, the church as the family of God needs to develop and carry out its social mission with a greater emphasis in order to prove the relevance and the credibility of the model of the church as the family of God to society and people with whom members of the church as family are living. Indeed, the church as the family of God has much to say about the communal aspect of the church in terms of mutual help, sharing and participation. Therefore, it needs to develop the family ministry in order to enhance the human and Christian values of the family for the purpose of the social mission of the church.

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the characteristics of the social mission of the church and some practical means for this mission in the church as the family of God. It also analysed the social mission of the church as the family of God in Vietnam and the required effort for the church as the family of God in carrying out its social mission.

The rationale of the social mission of the church was found mainly in interconnection of the divine, human and ecclesial family in communion and solidarity. It can be concluded that reaching out to others is the nature of the trinitarian family to bring life to people. In

¹⁸⁵ Hans Küng, "Confucianism: Ethical Humanism as Religion? A Christian Response" in Hans Küng and J. Ching, *Christianity and Chinese Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 118.

¹⁸⁶ Huang, "Confucian Love and Global Ethics: How the Cheng Brothers Would Help Respond to Christian Criticism," 35-60.

¹⁸⁷ Nuyen, "Confucianism, Globalism," 75.

particular, Jesus and the Holy Spirit who were the agents in this mission become the ideal examples for the church in carrying out its mission to the marginalised. The positive values of the concept of human family need to be emphasised and strengthened by the divine family so that it will be beneficial to the church as family.

In order to carry out effectively the social mission of the church there is a need to develop some practical tools appropriate for local churches. Four means were identified: social analysis, contextual theology, formation in the social teaching of the church and working together with other groups. It was shown that there have been two approaches in developing social analysis. Therefore, the Vietnamese church should choose the appropriate ones for itself. Besides social analysis, contextual theology is also needed for the church in Vietnam in order to integrate the social context into the thinking and the carrying out of the mission of the church in the world. These tools are important because, according to FABC documents, socio-cultural and religious situations must be considered as essential resources for today's theology.

It was argued that there has been a great need for formation in the social teaching of the church. Catholic social teaching must be taught or provided for priests and laity together in order to help them be more committed to the social mission. In addition, it was also shown that some forms of collaboration among religious groups of different denominations on local issues must be promoted because social activity is a broad area that needs the involvement of many social and religious groups. The limitations of this thesis would only allow for the mentioning of a few of the main tools which emphasise the communality of the family. From this starting point, the local church needs to explore more tools to assist it in carrying out its mission as the family of God.

The social apostolate of the church in Vietnam was reviewed to identify the local church perspectives on social mission and the challenges facing this church as a family. In general, the local church followed the social teaching of the Catholic Church and was concerned for its call to become the church of the poor. In order to achieve this concern social analysis has been a necessary means and a significant challenge for the local church in carrying out its social mission. It was found that social analysis makes many contributions to helping the local church become the church of the poor. So social analysis could be a great help for the clergy and the laity in identifying the needs and the challenges of a church in its social apostolate. It could also be a support in reflecting on their mission in the church as well as in the world. Therefore, the Vietnamese church needs to make use of its available human resource in developing social analysis for pastoral planning.

The social mission of the church is integral to its nature but it becomes significant for the church as the family of God because of the very nature of the divine and human family. It was shown that the nature of the divine family as well as of the church is to reach out to provide life to others. To some extent this characteristic is also implied in the Vietnamese family. However, the family structure includes some ambivalent values which can be considered as hindrances for the social mission of the church as family. In order to counteract the negative values of the Vietnamese family the local church should have critical studies of family values on the one hand, and on the other, it needs to find ways to promote its social mission. Indeed, the Vietnamese church as the family of God needs to encourage all the people of God to be involved in and to carry out the social mission in order to justify the nature of the church as the family of God.

The negative family values should not discourage the Vietnamese church from adopting the family model as all models have their strengths and weaknesses. The family is not a univocal concept. Therefore when it is applied to the church it needs to be deconstructed to get rid of its negative accretions, and then re-constructed in such a way that it embodies and exemplifies the values of its anthropological referent, the Vietnamese family, and its ecclesiological reality, the church as family.¹⁸⁸ Moreover, the family of God is also the model for the local church. So the church in Vietnam should learn the characteristics of the Trinity or the trinitarian family and apply them in its social mission so that the charitable activity of local church becomes a manifestation of trinitarian love.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ Orobator, *The Church as Family*, 164.

¹⁸⁹ Cf. *DCE* 19.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

This thesis studied the development and the implications of the ecclesiological concept/model of the church as the family of God, with special reference to the church in Vietnam. The development of this ecclesiological concept was addressed through the examination of the understanding and the foundations of the concept in scripture, in patristic and theological writings including church documents and in ecclesiology. The implications flowed from the description of the Vietnamese family as a background for the understanding of the model of the church as the family of God. Based on the biblical, theological and cultural understanding of the concept of the family of God, the thesis also explored the applications of this ecclesiological model in the past and, in particular, its further implications for the future in the area of the participation in the church and the social mission of the church in Vietnam. It can be concluded that these implications will strengthen the model of the family of God for the Vietnamese church so that this ecclesiological model is not only the *model of*, but also the *model for*, the church in Vietnam. In this regard, the local church needs to call the contribution and the effort of many people so that it will not only learn something from the community characteristic of this model, but also will be able to contribute some theological understanding and pastoral implications to the model of the church as the family of God. The second task is more challenging than the first one. However, the Vietnamese church can fulfil it thanks to its local culture which values the family as well as the experiences of modelling church structures on the institution and the spirit of the family since the beginning of evangelisation in Vietnam in the seventeenth century.

The family of God is a cultural, biblical, theological and pastoral concept for the church. Although the biblical concept of the family of God was developed on the basis of Jewish, Hellenistic and Roman cultures it surpassed the human family. Both divine and human foundations of the concept influence and complement each other. However, it is important to emphasise that the family of God originated in the Trinity. The leading characteristic of the family of God which is a perichoretic communion must become the model for the human family and the church as family. Thus a theological meaning in this ecclesiological model, rather than a sociological one, must be emphasised. The Trinity becomes an ideal model of, and for, the church. The church as the family of God needs to embrace the model of the divine family and apply it to the relationships within the church as well as with the world in order to concretise the invisible and ideal characteristics of the Trinity in church and human life. To put it in another way, a relevant understanding of the concept “the church as the family God” needs to focus on the

trinitarian family without disregarding the socio-cultural meaning of the human family. The acknowledgment of the priority of as well as the contributions of both the Trinity and the human family are essential in the understanding and the implications of the concept.

The theological meaning of the concept/model of the church as the family or the household of God provided benefits as well as challenges to the early church. Therefore the church today, in particular the Vietnamese church, needs to study critically and further develop the practices of the church in the first centuries, particularly the participatory leadership, the loving relationships with and concern for people in the church as well as in society. The local church, at the same time, needs to avoid some negative practices of the household model such as patriarchy, authoritarianism and gender discrimination. These problematic issues still exist in modern families and in Vietnamese culture. The model of the church as the family of God only benefits the local church when the church finds ways to overcome these disadvantages. Moreover, the church as family needs to work for the promotion of the community aspect of the family, such as network of vertical and horizontal relations, mutual help and service for the benefit of all people in the church as in society in order to counteract its negative values and practices.

The discussion of the African, Latin American and Vietnamese churches demonstrated their preference for the model of the church as the family of God as their ecclesiological model because of its familiarity with local people. This familiarity, which shows the cultural aspect and meaning of the concept “the family of God”, has advantages as well as disadvantages in the development of the family model. It makes people appreciate communion in the church, but it can also make them misunderstand the model of the church as family. The reason for this problem is because some family values are ambivalent. Therefore there is a need to have critical studies of family values so that they will be developed in relation to gospel values. This is a two-way process of inculturation of Christianity into the socio-cultural context of Vietnam. Vietnamese family values need to be Christianised by the gospel, but the gospel also needs to be contextualised in the local culture of the contemporary Vietnamese for the sake of a contextualised ecclesiology.

Inculturation is one of the reasons for the promotion of the model of the church as the family of God in Vietnam. This effort is not only beneficial for the church and its members but also for society and all people because the family of God includes all people. Therefore the church in Vietnam has to work for the development of communion and participation in the church but also for the promotion of social transformation through its social mission.

The concept of the church as the family of God provides new ecclesiologies in terms of content and methodology. It could develop an interrelated ecclesiology of trinitarian communion, Basic Ecclesial Communities, ancestral veneration and liberation. The construction of such an ecclesiology is necessary because of the dissatisfaction or the limitation of the concept of the human family which cannot describe the mystery of the church. In other words, no model/concept can exhaustively present any aspect of divine revelation about the church. The family of God is a substantial concept in which the trinitarian ecclesiology is the most essential because it facilitates vertical, horizontal, ecclesial and organic communion. Indeed, the characteristic of the family model which particularly emphasises both horizontal and vertical relationships as in the Vietnamese family model will be relevant to contemporary people and it will be enhanced by the trinitarian communion. It was thus concluded that without trinitarian ecclesiology the three other ecclesiologies would not be able to develop harmonious and effective communion in the church and with the world. Moreover, for the sake of a fruitful inculturation this inter-related ecclesiology must take seriously the contemporary socio-cultural context of the Vietnamese in order to be able to generate a transformation of church and society life in the light of the gospel.

The analysis of the trinitarian ecclesiology in the conciliar and post-conciliar church documents led to the conclusion that this ecclesiology still needs to be developed further and taught to the people of God, particularly the clergy and its candidates because they have much influence on ordinary people. The promotion of the church as the family of God must give greater emphasis to the development and the practice of trinitarian ecclesiology in the local church. Such an ecclesiology is essential for the change of the structures as well as for the mission of the church to become a communion church within itself and with the world. The change of the understanding or the mind-set of the people of God will lead gradually to the practice of a participatory and collaborative church at all levels and in all areas in and outside the church.

The ecclesiology of the church as the family of God opens new horizons for ecclesiology in terms of resources and methodology. It makes use of culture and living conditions as resources and social sciences as a methodology in studying theology. Such a methodology and inter-disciplinary resource as particularly discussed in Chapter Seven will bring theology closer to local people and promote evangelisation among them. Such a benefit is meaningful to contemporary people for living out their faith in ordinary life. The fact that the Vietnamese can understand and realise their relationship with God as the Father and with Jesus as their Brother, the mystery of the church by their own culture, and the implications of the divine mystery and relationships in concrete

applications will certainly benefit their Christian life. Indeed, the ecclesiology of the church as the family of God provides many possibilities for a communion ecclesiology: communion among the different sectors of the people of God following the model of service of Jesus as the Ancestor and the Eldest Brother for the welfare of all people. The trinitarian, Basic Ecclesial Communities, ancestral veneration and liberation ecclesiologies are new to the Vietnamese church although some elements of these ecclesiologies could be found in Vietnamese culture. The local church needs to explore and develop these ecclesiologies in order to strengthen the model of the church as the family of God in Vietnam.

As a cultural concept the family of God benefits or has much influence on people. The discussion of the Vietnamese family as a cultural and human institution, which is undergoing change, led to some further conclusions. To some extent the family relationships have become less cohesive in Vietnamese society today. However, there have been some positive changes in the modern Vietnamese family which have made its structure more participatory or collaborative. Therefore it is essential to have studies on the Vietnamese family in all its aspects. It is maintained that the Vietnamese church needs to have its own studies as well as to take into account the outcome of other studies from scholars of various disciplines in order to strengthen the advantages of the Vietnamese family and to overcome or eliminate its disadvantages. The fact that the church works with other institutions and people in these studies highlights the communal characteristic of the church as family. These studies, it can be said with conviction, will contribute to the theological understanding of the model of the church as family and also to the rationale of the promotion of this model for the local church.

The study of the applications of the family model in the Catholic Church in Vietnam showed that the local church made some effort to apply this model in the area of church structures and organisations. Such implications have provided some advantages for the local church; however, they also showed some limitations, such as over-emphasis on hierarchy and obstacles to a full participation in the church. These limitations could be overcome with the assistance of critical studies or analyses of the situation of the local church and of the characteristics of the Vietnamese. The present studies of the model of the church as family, it was found, are minimal although the Vietnamese Bishop's Conference has strongly promoted this model. For the moment, the church of Vietnam should make use of the documents and the studies of other regional and local churches in order to develop its own studies on the model of the church as the family of God. However, in the long-term plan, the Vietnamese church, through local theologians and scholars, needs to do more research in different theological disciplines in order to

provide the foundations and the concrete implications of the model of the church as family to the Vietnamese church. It is believed that inter-disciplinary studies will particularly help the local church develop the ecclesiological model as well as correct the limitations of this model as they occurred in the past.

Unless the implications of the ecclesiological model are lived out, the model itself becomes worthless. Therefore the model of the church as the family of God needs to be reflected upon and to become reality in today's church, particularly in the structures and the mission of the church, in order to show the strengths of this model. In this thesis, participation by the people of God in ecclesial life and involvement in the social mission of the church were chosen as worthwhile implications since they are the emphases of the local bishops for the Vietnamese church. They are also the values or characteristics of the divine as well as the human family which the church as family has to live out to prove the authenticity of this model.

These implications, however, have provided challenges for the Vietnamese church mainly because of its distinctive socio-cultural context. One significant challenge is that the Vietnamese family is a potential source for the development of ambivalent values such as hierarchy, nepotism and descendancy which could, in turn, lead to clericalism and exclusiveness. The ecclesiology of the church as the family of God and its implications in the area of participation as discussed in Chapters Three and Five provided some theological and pastoral suggestions for the local church by way of overcoming the negative aspects of the natural family. The most important challenge is the need for developing the trinitarian ecclesiology in Vietnam in order to facilitate a holistic understanding of ministry in the church as well as in society. Ministry, as was seen, is service and is also given to all Christians to promote the reign of God or the family of God. Thus, it was concluded that, the Vietnamese clergy need to imitate the example of Jesus who acts along with the Spirit to give an abundant life to all. It has also found that the ecclesiology of ancestral veneration provided some challenge for the promotion the common priesthood. Therefore the clergy also need to acknowledge the priesthood of all Christians and to help lay and religious people realise their own vocation and charism in order to become responsible members in the church as in society for the benefit of other members.

Regarding the social mission of the Vietnamese church, more effort is required from the local church. On the one hand, the local church needs to develop a contextual theology in terms of content and methodology and to emphasise formation in Catholic social teaching for all members. In this area social analysis must be given priority because it underpins all other practical tools in carrying out the social mission of the church. On the

other hand, the local church has to study carefully and critically the characteristics of the Vietnamese and their family in the capacity of doing social and charitable activities so that the church can overcome their limitations and strengthen family values which certainly help the church carry out its social mission effectively.

The conclusion was reached that social analysis is so important that it is one of the determinant factors in the effectiveness of the Vietnamese church regarding its social mission. Indeed, social analysis, correctly understood and developed, will contribute significantly to the positions of the local church concerning some urgent social issues which have affected marginalised members in society and in the church who are brothers and sisters in God's family. The local church cannot neglect the use of social analysis if it wants to become more conversant with the dynamics of the context of Vietnam society. Accordingly, it needs to invest its available human resources for the development of social analysis in order to support its mission in the church and in society.¹

It is believed that this study provides a better understanding as well as the effective implications of the family model to the Vietnamese church. The analyses and the applications of this model in this thesis are the first steps in studying the model of the church as the family of God. The local church needs to encourage people to do further studies and to support them so that the church will benefit from this model. This kind of encouragement and support in working together mirror the spirit of the family. For many reasons as discussed in this thesis it can be concluded that the promotion of this ecclesiological model is a correct choice for the fruitful development of evangelisation in Vietnam. However, the fruitfulness of this model as well as of evangelisation in Vietnam will depend on the development of the implications of this model. This challenge should not discourage the local church in its effort to promote this model. On the contrary, it encourages the Vietnamese church to work harder through theological and pastoral studies with people in the community/family spirit so that the local church will become an authentic expression of the model of the church as the family of God.

¹ Cf. See the discussion of the need for social analysis in the Vietnamese church in Chapter Seven. It is noted that the local church needs to conduct and rely on its own social analysis as well as human resources because it works in a communist country.

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