CHAPTER IV

SYSTEMATIC PRACTICAL THEOLOGY: A CHRISTIAN-SECULAR DIALOGUE ON SUCCESS, MARRIAGE-FAMILY LIFE AND MASCULINITY RELEVANT TO THREE CHALLENGES IN SINGAPOREAN SOCIETY

Three challenges in Singaporean society will serve as a platform for the Christian-secular dialogue in this chapter. These challenges are deliberately worded to reflect popular, or even propagandistic, opinions in Singaporean society.

4.1 The Challenge to National Prosperity

Being a small nation in terms of land area and population, the success and survival of Singapore rests primarily on her ability to stay ahead of others economically. As international and regional competition increases, Singapore must not ease off in her efforts to excel in order to achieve even greater progress and prosperity. The challenge then is not to be contented with just doing one's best, but to be competitive enough to become the best.

4.1.1 Some secular views on success, economics and competition. These views are noted as they reflect the kinds of ideas that are influencing people's perceptions, values and aspirations at the personal and societal levels in Singapore.

Success: Shiv Khera links success to having a winning edge.[1] This winning edge is the result of excellence, not perfection. In fact, if you try to be perfect in order to taste success, you are being neurotic. On the other hand, when you strive to excel as your approach to

[1] Khera is the founder of Qualified Learning Systems Inc, USA. He is also a noted business consultant and much sought-after speaker on successful entrepreneurship. In April and October 2000, he was in Singapore to conduct seminars organised by the Marketing Institute of Singapore for top executives.

success, you are being progressive because you view that things can always be done better or improved (Khera 1998:36).

In a sense, success is both subjective and objective in that it has to do with both feelings and tangible results - success is the feelings that come from a job well done *and* the visible achievement of some desired objectives. However, the emphasis in success is not on the end, but on the process - it is not measured by your position in life, but by the way you overcome the odds in order to get there. Success can be described this way:

> Success in life is not determined by how we are doing compared with others, but how we are doing compared with what we are capable of doing. Successful people compete against themselves. They better their own record and keep improving constantly (Khera 1998:39).

In order to be successful as an individual or as a people, at least three qualities are indispensable - commitment, hardworking and positive believing. Commitment here has to do with 'playing to win.' To have such a commitment is to function from a position of strength, and thus, to thrive on pressure (Khera 1998:45).

This 'play to win' understanding of success is also espoused by Denis Waitley. He sees winning as first winning over oneself - that is, to cast away self-doubting and recognise the enormous potential in oneself. Such a positive self image will help bring out the best in a person by challenging the self to perform not from bad to good, but from good to better. High expectation, positive self talk and mental visualisation are some of the ways to draw out the fullest potential from within oneself.[2]

Anthony Robbins associates this 'fullest potential' described by Waitley with the 'unlimited power' in a person. If you condition yourself mentally to believe in this inner

[2] See Chapter II, p74.

power, you can get or achieve what you want. There are no failures in life, only outcomes. And each outcome is meant to bring you closer to your desired success.[3]

Khera may agree with Waitley and Robbins in that personal potential and power are advantageous factors in one's commitment to succeed. But he (Khera 1998:49) also maintains that the quality of hardworking is another essential for success. To be hardworking is to recognise that success is not plain luck, but the work of the law of cause and effect. What causes success to be a fruitful effect is the hard work which a person puts in to constantly excel in what is being done.

In Singapore today, there is concern expressed by some people that the value of hard work may be in danger of being carried too far, like in Japan.[4] One such person is John Read, a certified career coach. He says this about Singapore:

> No one can doubt that a small country has to work harder ... and smarter.
>
> At the same time, it is crucial to set the right framework and performance expectations so that other attributes and talents are developed and equally emphasised.
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> Moral development, personal development, non-programmed creativity and play can be expanded to develop a more rounded character, rather than one skewed by performance anxiety towards stress.[5]

Besides commitment and hard work, the quality of positive believing is also important in ensuring success. Positive believing is more than positive thinking. Positive thinking is very much wishful dreaming if the desire to work and prepare hard is absent. On the other hand, positive believing is being convinced that hard work and preparation will result in the fruition of your aspirations. Hence, positive believing is an attitude of confidence that results from a thorough preparation to embark on ambitious undertakings (Khera 1998:53).

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[3] See Chapter II, pp80-81.
[4] The former Prime Minister of Japan, Keizo Obuchi, was said to have died from a stroke brought on by overwork.
[5] *The Straits Times (Executive Appointments)* 10 June 2000. Don't drive me up the wall, p86.

While not neglecting the qualities essential to success, it is equally important to be mindful of the primary objective for wanting to be successful. Success is empty and meaningless if it does not make you feel good. Hence, Khera (1998:127) considers the primary objective for success to be achieving personal happiness through means like knowledge, relationships or wealth, and achieving it without hurting others.

But 'according to the researchers, pursuing goals that reflect genuine human needs, like wanting to feel connected to others, turns out to be more psychologically beneficial than spending one's life trying to impress others or to accumulate trendy clothes, fancy gizmos and the money to keep buying them.'[6]

Dr Richard Ryan, professor of psychology at the University of Rochester, was one of these researchers. His findings have led him to conclude that people whose priority is affluence experience an unusual degree of anxiety and depression as well as a lower level of well-being. But he qualifies that affluence in itself does not necessarily result in an unsatisfying life. The problem arises when affluence becomes the all-consuming focus in life.[7]

This is also very much in line with the opinions of Doris Pozzi and Stephen Williams.[8] They are not in favour of defining success solely in terms of excellence in achieving external things. In fact, they believe that such an emphasis on the external often results in contradictory messages. Two examples of such a contradiction are: people are challenged to work hard in their career for success, yet at the same time, encouraged to spend more time with their family; people are encouraged to stay healthy, but a success-oriented lifestyle is often stressful and pressurising. The limited time you have just do not permit you to achieve and to excel in

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[6] This quote was reprinted from the New York Times in *The Straits Times (LIFE! Section)* 4 February 1999. I am rich, so why am I blue? p3.
[7] Dr Ryan's views were reported in the same *LIFE! Section* article mentioned above.
[8] Pozzi is a registered psychologist and Williams is a management expert. They are partners in an Australia-based management consulting firm that services corporations internationally. Their work involves helping individuals and companies to accelerate personal and organisational success.

everything. When you try to ignore this limitation, 'what can happen in reality is an endless whirlwind of meaningless activity and effort. Instead of being successful, the individual is left feeling worn out and still personally unfulfilled' (Pozzi & Williams 1997:6).

Pozzi and Williams (1997:21-22) lament that mainstream psychology has focused on measurement rather than meaning in seeking to define success. Hence, the soul, which is that 'dimension of ourselves concerned with meaning' is rarely emphasised.[9] What is needed then to make success truly meaningful and fulfilling is to work at having success with soul, and not just success with achievement.

Success with soul first requires that one ascertains his/her personal values and purpose in life. These personal convictions help one to develop and to accept his/her own individuality. But the unfortunate thing is that many have let others define what is important to them, and hence, have sacrificed their own individuality (Pozzi & Williams 1997:53). Without personal values and purpose, it is difficult to clarify what life should demand from you and what you should demand from life. Indeed, the things that are most meaningful to you should not be merely those that others are having or chasing, but those that are in line with your personal values and purpose - that is what success with soul signifies (Pozzi & Williams 1997:141).

While achievement-based success stresses balance as an important factor, success with soul has nothing to do with it. There are two reasons why balance is not an important consideration in success with soul (Pozzi & Williams 1997:63-66):

> - Balance is really a hindrance because success often demands focused energy repeatedly. This means that success often demands that those activities deemed less important be sacrificed. This instantly clashes with the idea of balance which is to try and spread one's energy so that nothing will be sacrificed or neglected.
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> - Balance does not really give meaning in that it is aimed at achieving a condition, not a long-term goal. It merely drives you to spread yourself over a wide range of activities, but does not align you to your personal values and

[9] In so understanding the soul, Pozzi and Williams do not necessarily bring in the idea of God.

> purpose. You really do not find meaning if you are merely doing but not moving toward your personal values and purpose in life. Hence, balance makes success look nothing more than a time-management issue. But success with soul is more than an issue of balancing through time management. It is about knowing what your personal values and pupose are so that you can have a meaningful life, not a balanced life. It is 'uncluttering our lives, and disengaging ourselves from activities which are not about who we really are ....'

The way then to success with soul is not through better balance, but better relationships. While success with achievement stresses much on excellence in the attainment of power, possession and position, success with soul speaks loudly for the improvement of relationships. It redefines success in terms of enhancing relationships with yourself, with others, and with the environment (Pozzi & Williams 1997:80).[10] This relationship model of success enables one to appreciate the need for interdependence rather than competition; for building others up rather than beating them down (Pozzi & Williams 1997:86).

While Shiv Khera describes success in terms of progress rather than perfection, Monica Basco comments that good progress always calls for a healthy measure of perfectionism.[11] This is because perfectionists are excellent workers in that their drive to perform well is internally motivated. Hence, they need little supervision or even encouragement to do a good job, and constantly strive to do their best (Basco 1999:39). The advantage of perfectionism lies, therefore, in the high expectation which a person has of himself/herself. It is this expectation that keeps the person striving to succeed, and pushing harder all the time instead of just settling for being good enough (Basco 1999:47).

However, the appearance of producing one's best all the time may be a means of masking one's fear of losing or looking vulnerable. Thus, doing a 'check-and-balance' is always helpful as shown in the following table:

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[10] It may sound a little odd to speak of enhancing relationship with oneself. What this really means is to create a harmonious relationship among one's mind, body and soul.

[11] Basco is professor of psychology at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Centre, Dallas.

TABLE 10: Modifying Perfectionism (Basco 1999:86)

Perfectionistic Viewpoints	Modifying Counterpoints
1. Losing out is an indication that I am flawed.	1. Losing out is a performance, not a personality flaw.
2. Losing out is not alright.	2. Losing out is a human experience.
3. Losing out is alright for others, but not for me.	3. There is no reason why I should be held to a higher standard than anyone else.
4. It is shameful to let others know that I have lost out.	4. If others cannot handle watching me lose out, then it is they that have a problem.

Khera associates success with achieving excellence in performances while Pozzi and Williams associate it with soul/meaning. A third way to view success is to associate it with prosperity. Michael Fairbanks (2000:270) defines prosperity as 'the ability of an individual, group, or nation to provide shelter, nutrition, and other material goods that enable people to live a good life.'[12] The primary end of prosperity is to help 'create space in people's hearts and minds so that they may develop a healthy emotional and spiritual life, according to their preferences, unfettered by the everyday concern of the material goods they require to survive.'

Fairbanks does not consider the lack of natural resources as a handicap to achieving prosperity. In fact, he argues that over-reliance on these resources in today's globalised economy can even retard the pursuit of prosperity. This is because countries that rely heavily on these resources often compete on the basis of price - that is, the ability to sell these commodities abroad as cheaply as possible. What results from such cheap-selling is the suppression of labour wages. Thus, an over-reliance on selling goods cheaply and paying wages poorly does not help people to compete in order to become prosperous in due time, but to endure poverty for the longest possible time (Fairbanks 2000:273).

In today's globalised economy, the way to attain prosperity is not toward redistributing wealth, but toward creating wealth. A new competitive mindset is needed - that is,

[12] Fairbanks is visiting scholar at Stanford University and member of the World Bank's Committee on Social Development. He is also advisor to government and private sector leaders in Africa, the Middle East and Latin America.

emphasising the urgency to be innovative and productive, besides improving infrastructure and labour skills. This is the opinion of Stace Lindsay (2000:294) who believes that developing nations must adopt this mindset if there is to be human progress in terms of attaining rising standards of living.[13]

Viewing success in terms of material prosperity requires that certain beliefs/attitudes be cultivated. Michael Porter (2000:21-22), a Harvard academic who also serves as strategic advisor to many governments and major corporations, specifies three of these:

> - *The belief in productivity:* The way to achieve lasting prosperity is to increase productivity. The use of control, government favours and military powers can only give a false sense of abundance as these measures really stifle the will to compete in the long run.
>
> - *The belief that wealth is unlimited:* This is so because wealth is created through the creative use of ideas and insights. In this sense, it is not fixed even if resources are scarce.
>
> - *The belief in the good of certain essentials:* Some of these essentials may seem like hard options because they demand a radical change in old thinking. These necessities that can contribute to material prosperity are: innovation, competition, accountability, technology, labour force, merger with others, collaboration with suppliers/customers, global networking, education/skills, and wage increases according to productivity levels.

Economics: George Soros is hailed as a financial wizard today. He heads the powerful Soros Fund Management and has founded a global network of foundations dedicated to supporting open societies. To him, the globalised economy today is a system that channels financial capital to where it is most profitable. This results in a circulatory system that draws capital into the financial markets which in turn send it out to those who need finance. Hence, the financial markets today have collectively become a centre of tremendous power and influence because they are *the* provider of capital. People and countries need capital in order to improve production and innovation, and this in turn increases wealth and freedom.

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[13] Lindsay is adjunct professor at Georgetown University School of Business. He is also advisor in social development to governments in Central America and the Caribbean.

Reflecting on his own experience in the financial markets, Soros (1998:44-45) remarks:

> Managing money requires a single-minded devotion to the cause of making money and all other considerations must be subordinated to it. In contrast to other forms of employment, managing a hedge fund can produce losses as well as profits; you cannot afford to take your eye off of the ball ....

But realising that economic concerns should not be the only priority in life, he (Soros 1998:46) adds:

> ... economic values, on their own, cannot be sufficient to sustain society ... These values presuppose that each participant is a profit centre bent on maximising his or her profits to the exclusion of all other considerations. Although the description may be appropriate to market behaviour, there must be some other values at work to sustain society, indeed, to sustain human life ....

The capitalist system today, is thus, a flawed one because it promotes and encourages the making of money as the all-consuming concern. Soros (1998:101-02) laments that the emergence of a global economy today has not been matched by the emergence of a global society.

In economic sense, money is viewed as a means to an end, not an end in itself. Money only has exchange value rather than intrinsic value. But as it is today, money is often valued for its own sake. This happens when:

> In conditions of rapid change when traditions have lost their sway and people are assailed with suggestions from all sides, exhange values may well come to replace intrinsic values. This is particularly true in a capitalist regime that emphasises competition and measures success in monetary terms. To the extent that other people want money and are willing to do almost anything to get it, money is power, and power can be an end in itself. Those who succeed may not know what to do with their money but at least they can be sure that other people envy their success. This may be enough to keep them going indefinitely despite the lack of any other motivation .... (Soros 1998:113).
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> When everybody is striving for more money, competition becomes so intense that even the most successful are reduced to the position of having to fight for survival .... (Soros 1998:207).

Soros believes that intrinsic values cannot be in monetary terms. To him, 'autonomy is a better measurement because it sees life as more than survival' (Soros 1998:209). And autonomy is the freedom of a person to act in accordance to his/her own values irrespective of what others do. In other words, it has to do with allowing a person to act even in a manner different from the crowd because his/her personal principles are to be respected in society (Soros 1998:213).

Mariano Grondona argues that sustained development needs both intrinsic and instrumental values.[14] Intrinsic values are those that must be upheld regardless of the benefits or costs ('e g' patriotism). On the other hand, instrumental values are those that are directly beneficial only to the person/people concerned ('e g' economic values). In order for growth to be sustained, a rich country needs to change the instrumental nature of economic values to that of intrinsic. This implies that the wealth which has been generated must never be seen to suffice because some other value is always viewed to be wanting ('e g' survival, safety, excellence or prestige). In explaining why some rich countries still act as if they are poor, Grondona (2000:45) has this to say:

> This is only possible when the values pursued, which promote prosperity, do not vanish as prosperity arrives. Thus the values prevailing at the crucial moments of decisions leading to economic development must be intrinsic and not instrumental, since instrumental values are by definition temporary ....[15]

Grondona (2000:49) locates the power of economic wealth in its ability to promote innovation that will bring about what is not yet into actual being. Hence, he looks at wealth

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[14] Grondona is professor of government at the Law Faculty of the National University of Buenos Aires.

[15] For the sake of national survival, Singapore had no choice but to undertake a bold economic development programme immediately after her separation from Malaysia in 1965. Today in Singapore, the concern for national survival as propagated by the government is still just as strong in spite of more than three decades of national prosperity since independence. Lee Kuan Yew, the father of modern Singapore, has written a two-volume memoirs. He said this when asked about his objective in writing: '... to let a younger generation know how we made it the hard way, and that all can still be lost if they do not observe several basic tenets that enabled Singapore to survive and prosper' (*The Straits Times* 13 September 2000. Memoirs are as I saw it, for posterity, p3).

not in terms of what exists, but in terms of what does not yet exist. There is then a high regard for work rather than a high dependence on special power or favour. Such a way of valuing economic wealth stresses the need to always look to the better things which the future promises, not just at the big things which the here and now presents.[16]

In order for better things to come into being, the individual must be allowed and encouraged to take risk and to think/act differently. Economic growth, if it is to be sustained and further developed, must allow people to be entrepreneurs and innovators who are risk-takers and creative thinkers; not only intelligent, but also street-smart. This is the autonomy and trust which economic wealth can afford to give so that a person will not only enhance himself/herself as a unique being, but also enrich the nation even further (Grondona 2000:48).[17]

However, Soros (1998:199) points out that today's globalised capitalist system has only succeeded in making many people think of economic wealth as having intrinsic value in itself - that is, having it is already good enough. This is disturbing because it has created a highly competitive environment in which the ones who are too concerned for others are likely to be overtaken by those who are 'free of all moral scruples.' Moral and social values then become a liability because it is the unscrupulous who often emerge victorious.

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[16] Such a future orientation stimulates a proactive and optimistic mindset in that one views life as not what happens, but as what one makes happen. It makes one resolve to do what is necessary to secure a safe destiny (Grondona 2000:53).

[17] Indeed, entrepreneurship and innovation have been recognised by the leaders of Singapore as key ingredients in the country's quest for future growth. Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong (Mahizhnan & Lee 1998:3-4) has this to say about the future survival of Singapore's economy:

> Entrepreneurship and innovation will be key ingredients of economic success. The more developed we become, the less we can merely follow the path blazed by others. Singaporeans need to venture forth on their own, to grow activities in the region, to create and develop key product and knowledge niches to maintain our competitive edge.

That Soros, who has voiced much concern for moral and social issues, can be such a successful figure in the 'dog-eat-dog' world of financial trading is indeed intriguing. He (Soros 1998:197) discloses the secret of his success with these words:

> If I had to deal with people instead of markets, I could not have avoided moral choices and I could not have been so successful in making money. I blessed the luck that led me to the financial markets and allowed me not to dirty my hands. The fact remains that anonymous market participants are largely exempt from moral choices as long as they play by the rules. In this sense, financial markets are not immoral; they are amoral.[18]

Competition: Shiv Khera maintains that we cannot run away from competing in life, and to compete is to aim at triumphing over others. He (Khera 1998:217) said:

> The reality is that life is a competition and we have to compete. In fact, competition makes competitive people grow. The objective is to win, no question - but to win fairly, squarely, decently and by the rules.

In response, Pozzi and Williams (1997:9) counter that 'defining success in terms of our personal power, money, position or status often creates (conscious or subconscious) competition with others.' This kind of competitive spirit can really erode relationships, including family ties.

Therefore, they (Pozzi & Williams 1997:15) advocate competition with oneself, not with others. Competing with others can make a person become too individualistic with little concern for interpersonal relationships. This in turn can bring about mistrust, defensiveness and envy. Relationships turn empty and meaningless. Competing with others then become damaging to one's soul or meaning of existence (Pozzi & Williams 1997:265).

Pozzi and Williams (1997:86) conclude that when one is in competition, it is to push oneself to achieve personal best, not to reduce the worth of others. Competition in life is not for the purpose of attaining personal fulfilment to the exclusion of others.

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[18] Soros was singularly accused by Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Prime Minister of Malaysia, for committing the 'immoral' act of crashing the Malaysian economy in 1997 with his trading in the financial markets.

In agreement with Pozzi and Williams, Grondona stresses that competition is not an act of 'aggression to equality or cooperation' with others. He (Grondona 2000:49) views competition as healthy in that it is 'a form of cooperation in which both competitors benefit from being forced to do their best.'

Two leading academics in Singapore, Tan Kong Yam and Toh Mun Heng, give a different emphasis to the idea of competition - to compete is to stay ahead, and to keep staying ahead of others.[19] They (Tan & Toh 1998:4) stress that competitiveness is 'the ability to sustain the growth of living standards.' The competitive edge becomes blunt when the sustainability is lost. To guard this sustainability, there must be an ever awareness of new developments so that appropriate measures can be taken to respond to them. In this sense, one's competitiveness is always relative rather than absolute. Hence, the state of technology, human resources, capital, infrastructure and trade policy need to be constantly reviewed in order to remain competitive (Tan & Toh 1998:7-8). In brief, noting and dealing with latest developments so as to continue to stay ahead of others is the way to sustain one's competitiveness.

In assessing the competitive strength of Singapore, both Tan and Toh (1998:23) have this to say:

> It is clear ... that the key competitive strength of Singapore against the regional countries derived directly or indirectly from the quality of the people. In particular, the strong international competitiveness index of Singapore is largely contributed by the people related factors like management, people, science and technology, and government.

William Koh, senior lecturer in organisational behaviour at the National University of Singapore, points out that the World Trade Organisation has succeeded in turning the world

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[19] Tan Kong Yam is Head of Department of Business Policy in the Faculty of Business Administration, National University of Singapore (NUS). He is also economic consultant to Citibank, IBM, ATT, BP, Mobil and the Singapore Government. Toh Mun Heng is Tan's faculty colleague at NUS. He too serves as economic consultant to the Singapore Government.

into a 'borderless economy' with the removal of trade barriers and lowering of tariffs. In view of this new competitive environment, he calls on Singaporeans to sustain their competitiveness by being 'flexible and adaptive.' He comments that a new attitude toward work must be adopted by Singaporeans - that is, to be willing to be deployed worldwide, and be willing to learn and try new things (Koh 1998:320).

In brief, tiny Singapore has no choice but to take up this unenviable, two-fold challenge - sustain her competitive edge over others, and at the same time, sustain her cooperation with others in today's globalised economy. What this implies is that Singapore develops her own economic niches - that is, not to do what others are already doing well, but to do what she can do better in comparison to others. This is the kind of comparative advantage that will make Singapore competitive yet complementing, thereby ensuring the sustainability of her economic growth.

4.1.2 Some Christian views on success, economics and competition. Thus far, success has been largely decribed in terms of one key word - *achieving*. Khera talks of success in terms of achieving excellence; Pozzi and Williams perceive it as achieving soul/meaning; Fairbanks hails it as achieving prosperity.

On the topic of economics, it is obvious that the value of money capital cannot be excluded from the discussion. Soros has insisted that money is not to be desired for its own sake. His own desire is to use money capital to bring about greater autonomy to people around the world at both the personal and societal levels. In other words, Soros believes that money capital is important in economics because it can be instrumental in bringing about social reforms. He also views trading with money capital in the economic system as amoral as long as one plays according to the rules. Hence, Soros argues that money is desirable not for its

intrinsic value, but for the economic power it has to bring about greater autonomy in the lives of people.

Grondona agrees that economic wealth can be instrumental in freeing people from the hold of poverty and control. However, once people have attained that state of autonomy, he warns that there is the danger of easing off into economic complacency which in turn can undo all the positive things. Hence, Grondona feels strongly that economic wealth must be seen as not only having instrumental value, but more importantly, intrinsic worth as well. If national survival, esteem and sovereignty are of intrinsic worth, then economic wealth must be seen to be synonymous with these marks of nationalism. One way to achieve this is to adopt a 'crisis' mentality which constantly reminds people that they have not yet arrived, and they need to keep on striving in order to survive.

Views on the meaning of competition include Khera's call to compete in order to excel. And competitive excellence implies not only striving to do one's best, but also to be the best. In order to compete and win fairly, the emphasis must be on respecting rules rather than relationships.

Presenting a different view, Pozzi and Williams emphasise the need to compete with oneself. Competing with others is only meaningful when one does so in order to achieve his/her best without reducing the worth of others in the process. Hence, respecting relationships is as important as respecting rules. When people compete with one another, they do so in order to spur one another to reach their respective best. In this sense, Pozzi and Williams regard intense competition as some kind of healthy interdependence. This is also the view of Grondona who considers this interdependence in competiton as a way to compete in order to cooperate.

Tan, Toh and Koh represent the pragmatism typical of many Singaporeans very aptly by linking the nation's need to compete to the challenge of sustainability. Singaporeans compete not by doing what others are already doing well, but doing what they can do better in comparison with others. Thus, competition is chosen at a level that is to Singapore's comparative advantage, and for the purpose of sustaining the nation's competitive edge over others and cooperation with them at the same time.

With this review, it is now appropriate to continue the dialogue with a Christian response.

Success: According to Jon Johnston (1985:30), success is often perceived as the state of 'attaining cultural goals that are sure to elevate one's perceived importance within that culture.'[20] This perception is unfortunate as it ties success solely to an elevation of power, privilege and wealth.

Robert Schnase (1993:29), Senior Pastor of The First United Methodist Church in McAllen, Texas, has this to say about such a narrow perception:

> 'Up' is good and 'down' is bad. In a culture that values individualism, the road to appropriate individualism follows these metaphors of ascendancy. We come into our own as individuals by moving up. Promotion, salary increases, rising above others in a hierarchy - these define success, not only in crude media caricatures but in the subtle regions of thought, language and value.
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> If we break free of the 'up is better' metaphor, we realise that other questions should determine whether we make a move. Maybe the operative question is not, Does this move me up? but, Does this move me closer? - closer to the work God is calling me to do ....

Success is to be and do one's best with the opportunities that God has given. The successful person is the one who has allowed God to be the sovereign leader and guide in life. Success is more than just being and doing well in material terms. It has to do with achieving

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[20] Jon Johnston is professor of sociology, anthropology and social psychology at Pepperdine University, and adjunct professor at Fuller Theological Seminary; both of these schools are in California, USA.

the goals that God has for you materially, spiritually and morally. Success is more than just the attainment of material blessings; it also embraces the responsibility to live for God spiritually and morally in the midst of abundance and opportunities.[21]

Johnston echoes the same sentiments when he stresses that success in terms of such metaphors of ascendancy does not necessarily imply that one is also excelling in life. He (Johnston 1985:33) draws up a list of contrasts between success and excellence:

> - Success bases your worth by comparing with others; excellence bases your value by measuring you against your own potential.
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> - Success is the reward of a few though the dream of many; excellence is available to all though rightly understood only by a few.
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> - Success focuses on external things; excellence attends to the internal spirit.
>
> - Success entices you to manipulate others; excellence encourages you to value others as the apex of God's creation.

Johnston (1985:49) is of the opinion that Christians are called more to demonstrate excellence than success in life. He sees an inseparable link between excellence and *agape* love. In fact, excellence is the way of *agape* love (1 Cor 12:31). Such excellence is within the potential of everyone because God Himself is the source and supplier of this excellence (Johnston 1985:51). The motive for excellence in life for the Christian is to grow in *agape* love in order to glorify God, and there are some things to note so as to view such growth in proper perspective (Johnston 1985:63-65):[22]

> - To grow in *agape* love is not to be enslaved by a 'bite-the-bullet' kind of obedience.
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> - To grow in *agape* love is not an ego-inflating legalism which you use to praise yourself for doing what is necessary to be on God's side.
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> - To grow in *agape* love is not to try and outdo others so that you can glorify yourself.

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[21] See Chapter III, p180.
[22] Interestingly, God's glory in Hab 3:3 is described by the Greek word for excellence (*arete)* in the Septuagint.

- To grow in *agape* love is not to be lopsided in life as a result of focusing on one area while neglecting other important aspects.

- To grow in *agape* love is not to love others just to gain their approval.

The way to grow in Christian excellence and to experience God enabling you is to see life itself as a vocation. You strive to develop your talents and maximise your strengths so that you can serve others more effectively and with a greater capacity for love in the whole of life (Johnston 1985:71-72). To excel is to push oneself to a greater height, but at the same time, to be more gracious toward others when you are there. As Johnston (1985:163) puts it:

> As God increases our responsibility and prosperity, we must do more than say thanks and hoard. Our task is not barn-building and amassing a fortune. Rather, we must forever realise that we are given more in order to give more. Our tight fists must relax as we allow their contents to slip through our fingers and land on areas of severe need. These areas are close to the heart of God.

Thus, Johnston does not equate success with excellence. Rather, he prefers to view Christian excellence as using the success you have to express *agape* love to others to the end that God Himself be glorified. To Johnston, success cannot be on equal standing with excellence because the former is very much externally defined while the latter is very much internally defined. Success enriches you with things while excellence enriches you in your relationships using the things you have. Indeed, he places excellence on a higher plane because it is this, not success, that draws one closer to God and others in life's journey.

Agreeing with Johnston and Schnase that success is more than just wealth, power, fame or status, Tom Morris adds that success is very much about 'using our talents and following our hearts; true to ourselves and good to others' (Morris 1994:32).[23]

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[23] Morris is professor of philosophy at the University of Notre Dame, and holds a joint PhD in philosophy and religious studies from Yale University.

In order that success be truly meaningful, one must have goals consistent with one's value system. Morris (1994:51) says this concerning the relationship between one's goals and values:

> One of the worst things that can happen in connection with goal-directed behaviour is for a person to take on goals from other people just to please them, or to benefit from their favour, despite the fact that the values and desires behind those goals are alien to his own value system and destructive for him to embrace ....

However, Morris wisely cautions that to have goals does not mean to have all your desires met. He (Morris 1994:53) argues:

> Drawing a clear distinction between desires and goals has a liberating result. We need not be bullied by our own desires. You can have a desire and not set yourself the goal of satisfying it. Desiring is not always up to us. It is not always within our control. But goal setting is. Once we see this distinction we can clearly see that an unsatisfied desire is not the same thing as a failure. You can be happy with many unsatisfied desires as long as you don't embrace them and set their fulfilment as a goal.

Indeed, the key to genuine contentment is to be happy with what you already have. As far as God is concerned, success is not always having your desires for things fulfilled, but trusting God's goodness in all situations. And you evaluate those things that you desire in accordance to the Lord's values and priorities. He does not fault you for working hard and putting in your best efforts, but for having a wrong order of values and priorities. The right choices guard your time and energies from being tyrannised by pursuits that make you busy, but with the wrong things.[24]

Morris (1994:284) calls on each person to contribute and participate in this life to his/her fullest. And when these become the primary goals in one's life, then things like wealth, power, status, fame and enhanced self-esteem are enjoyed only as secondary consequences of

[24] See Chapter III, p181.

success. Morris (1994:226) contends that success is excellence only if there is a good measure of balance, and he describes his perspective of excellence this way:

> The obligation of excellence ... does not demand *unreasonable* dedication to superior performance in everything we do. It just requires of us that we make the most of our time and talents in a balanced way as we live our lives. We should care about whatever we are doing. We should invest ourselves *wholeheartedly* in anything we choose to do, but that investment should be made *wisely* as well. A healthy human life involves many commitments, many interests, and many values ....

Put briefly, Tom Morris believes that to achieve success in life is to experience meaning by excelling in goals that are consistent with your value system rather than with your desires. And for the Christian, such excellence also strengthens the inner spirit since his/her value system is to be derived from God Himself.

Randy Alcorn (1989:18) suggests that 'there is a powerful relationship between a person's true spiritual condition and his attitude and actions concerning money and possessions.'[25] Can success in terms of achieving material prosperity be congruent with godliness then?

Contrasting Zacchaeus with the rich young ruler in the New Testament, Alcorn points out that the former was willing to let go his wealth while the latter was not. Hence, though Zacchaeus was wealthy, his god was not wealth; this is not so with the rich young ruler (Alcorn 1989:19). Indeed, the Lord accepted Zacchaeus not because he became poor in wealth, but he became poor in spirit, recognising his lack of righteousness in his abundance of wealth.[26] When Jesus says that 'you cannot serve both God and Money' in Mt 6:24, He is not implying that it is wrong to do so, but rather, it is difficult to do so. It is not as if God does not love rich people, but rather, rich people often find it difficult to love God since they already

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[25] Alcorn is pastor of Good Shepherd Community Church in Gresham, Oregon. He had also taught part-time at Western Baptist Seminary and Multnomah School of the Bible.
[26] See Chapter III, p180.

have too much to love materially - therein lies the idolatrous and adulterous nature of material wealth (Alcorn 1989:65).

Elaborating on the idolatrous and adulterous nature of material wealth, Alcorn (1989:54) says:

> Materialism begins with what we believe. Not merely what we *say* we believe, not our doctrinal statement, but the philosophy of life we actually live by. Hence, while any true Christian would deny belief in the philosophical underpinnings of materialism ... he may nonetheless be preoccupied with material rather than spiritual things and therefore in fact be a practicing materialist.
>
> ... A materialist may be rich or poor, own much or own little, be a miser or a spendthrift. Materialism usually surfaces in one's life-style, but it is first and foremost a matter of the heart.[27]

Responding to the teachings of prosperity theology in some Christian circles, Alcorn asserts that the material blessings of the Mosaic Covenant in the Old Testament must always be interpreted in the light of the spiritual blessings of the New Covenant in the New Testament. He (Alcorn 1989:193) warns tersely:

> To arbitrarily pick and choose Old Testament passages that seem to validate modern society's standards of success and to fail to evaluate their present application in the light of clear New Testament teaching, is to irresponsibly handle the Scripture and to take a detour from our true identity and destiny.

He (1989:195) further adds:

> Notice that faith does not mean insisting that we get what we seek now, but believing we will get it later. Once again, this is in stark contrast to the now-centred nature of prosperity theology, which sees faith as a means of claiming immediate blessings, rather than eventual blessing. Following Christ is to see and welcome from a distance our eternal reward - not to expect to get it now. The great people of faith were looking for a country 'of their own,' better than anything earth could offer.

[27] In 1 Tm 6:17-19, Paul challenges the rich not to take a vow of poverty, but a vow of generosity in their life-style (Alcorn 1989:300).

But having so spoken against prosperity theology, Alcorn qualifies that he is not against material success per se. Rather, 'material things are valuable to the pilgrim, but only as they facilitate his mission' (Alcorn 1989:196).

Can success be measured in terms of material prosperity? Randy Alcorn prefers to rephrase the question this way: 'How can we use material prosperity to lead us to real success?' To this, he answers that what is important is to handle material success with a pilgrim's mentality - to own things without being owned by them so that one is always ready to let go and move on. A pilgrim in Christ is not one who is ascetic, but one who enjoys the world only as a 'foretaste of something better to come' (Alcorn 1989:197). The pilgrim's philosophy is not to empty oneself of money and things, but to employ these in one's life to serve God and others here on earth (Alcorn 1989:304).[28]

Economics: Economic well-being in terms of monetary wealth is often said to be just an instrument for more noble ends - to bring more freedom and openness to societies. And for a city-state economy like Singapore, continual economic well-being is perceived to be very crucial because it amounts to national survival. Jacques Ellul, retired professor of the history and sociology of institutions at the University of Bordeaux in France, asserts that money capital today is more than just a measure of economic value. Since it 'allows us to obtain everything material progress offers (in truth, everything our fallen nature desires) ... It has become a moral value and an ethical standard' (Ellul 1984:20). However, Ellul hastens to add that the Bible is not primarily about money and economics. He (Ellul 1984:25) says:

> It is not possible to speak of a Christian doctrine of money, first because that is not why we have been given revelation through the Scriptures, and it is even less why Jesus was born, died and was raised from the dead ... Consequently God's work, which is from the beginning the work of redemption, cannot in

[28] This implies that one should not merely earn enough just for oneself. This is not being non-materialistic, but really, being selfish. Thus, if one can earn more to care for others, it should be done with one's best effort. Also, a pilgrim in Christ does not view savings and life insurances as acts of faithlessness. Such planning for 'rainy days' is good if it is 'only enough not to presume upon God, but never enough to avoid trusting in Him' (Alcorn 1989:352).

> any detail be expressed by social, economic or other worldly organisation. We cannot extract any system from God's revelation without twisting the texts and coming up with unwarranted conclusions because redemption is not a system.

Ellul regards economics as only a field which a Christian plays on so that the world may be directed to God and His redeeming grace. Economic wealth has no intrinsic value and is only a sign to point people to the reality of God's redemption in Jesus Christ (Ellul 1984:68). Failing to understand this will lead one to grant a power to economic wealth that naturally subverts the very action of God's grace in Jesus Christ. When this happens, even clean money can never become consecrated money because one uses it solely to profit himself/herself (Ellul 1984:71-72). Indeed, it is naive to view money as merely neutral because it really has the power to be demonic in character and become a rival god. Money can replace one's trust in God's sufficiency with the fear of material deficiency.[29]

Edward Dayton (1992:46) re-emphasises the concern of Ellul this way:[30]

> In a capitalist society the primarily role of business is seen as making a profit, rather than meeting a need ... This view of making a personal or corporate profit rather than meeting a need for others is soon reflected in the attitudes of all who are involved in the business ....

While Ellul rejects formulating any doctrine on economics using the Bible, Gary North, President of the Institiute for Christian Economics in Texas, firmly believes that sustained economic well-being is based on obedience to God's law. He (North 1984:31) argues:

> The paradox of Deuteronomy 8 is this: Blessings, while inescapable for a godly society, are a great temptation. Blessings are a sign of God's favour, yet ... can result in comprehensive, external, social judgment. Thus, there is no way to determine simply from the existence of great external wealth and success of all kinds - the success listed in Deuteronomy 28:1-14 - that a society is facing either the prospect of continuing positive feedback or imminent negative feedback (namely, destruction). The ethical condition of the people, not their financial condition, is determinative.[31]

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[29] See Chapter III, p180.
[30] Edward Dayton is an aerospace executive and worldwide teacher of management practice. He received his seminary education in midlife and has since written many books on Christian leadership.
[31] The temptation mentioned here is that of people trying to live independent of God after having been blessed by Him.

In response to the connection between biblical law and economics, Christopher Wright (1990:176-79) stresses that Old Testament commandments cannot simply be 'lifted out of their socio-economic context in ancient Israel and transplanted into the industrial twentieth century.'[32] However, he does affirm that the economics embodied in the Old Testament Jubilee has socio-ethical significance for today. Wright suggests that the Jubilee has contemporary relevance in four areas:

> - The Jubilee existed to protect Israel's system of 'multiple ownership of the land based on a relatively equitable division over the whole kinship structure, with the household as the basic unit of ownership.' This is, thus, not strictly quantitative equality. The principle relevant for today then is not to ensure that everyone has the same measure, but everyone should have enough to be economically viable.
>
> - The Jubilee existed to check 'massive private accumulation of landed wealth and also of large-scale forms of collectivism which destroy any meaningful sense of personal ownership.' The principle relevant for today is to ensure that the majority of wealth is not possessed only by a minority upper class.
>
> - The Jubilee existed to encourage families to work toward 'social value and freedom, economic independence, and the opportunity and freedom of spiritual nourishment.' This acknowledges the reality today that it is difficult for family life to be morally healthy if it is not economically healthy as well.
>
> - The Jubilee existed to ensure that the 'insolvency of one generation in a family, for whatever reason, should not mean debt slavery for their descendants forever.' This calls for a 'principle of redemption' in today's context with which the rich are prepared to sacrifice their self-interest from time to time in order to lift the poor out of the poverty pit.[33]

E Calvin Beisner also responded by qualifying that the ethical condition as suggested by North should not be understood as merely being right before God in the way people care for themselves.[34] Rather, this ethical stance includes being right before God in the way they

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[32] Wright is director of studies and lecturer in Old Testament and ethics at All Nations Christian College, England.
[33] For a fuller discussion of the Jubilee, read Part Two of Wright's book *God's People in God's Land.*
[34] Beisner is national chairman of the economics committee of the evangelical Coalition on Revival in the US. He is also a professional writer and speaker on Christian ethics, economic ethics and apologetics.

care for others as well. Beisner (1989a:201) emphatically reminds blessed Christians of their calling as channels of God's grace:

> When the world systems call us to pursue wealth, power, or honour as an end in itself rather than a means of bringing more of this world into submission to God's gracious rule or of acquiring more tools with which to serve others, they tempt us to abuse our princely calling as sons of God. When they call us to serve for the sake of personal advancement rather than as a grateful, loving response to God's grace or as a means of bestowing grace on others, they tempt us to abuse our calling to serve as priests.

Success in the worldly realms of wealth and power is to be used by one to advance God's Kingdom as he/she advances himself/herself. It must bring one to a higher level of awareness and action - to grieve and care for the less fortunate around him/her.[35]

Indeed, God's concern for people goes far beyond their economic well-being. Created in His image, God wants every person to find his/her worth not in economics, but in redemption. While diligence grants one a virtue, the grace of God in Jesus Christ grants one the ultimate victory. But many Christians still look to performance, possession and position for their sense of significance. Thus, they need to uphold values that will reinforce the truth that their worth before God rests in His grace for them in Jesus Christ.[36]

Lee Soo Ann (April/1999:8), a noted economist and General Secretary of the Bible Society of Singapore, believes that Christians need to cultivate some inner core values that will always help them see their true selves as being created in God's image. He laments that the emphasis on economic well-being in Singapore has resulted in many living with a hollow spiritual core. People are told to work hard to increase the nation's wealth, yet they are not encouraged to fully enjoy the fruits of their labour lest they succumb to the pleasures of materialism. Consequently, people seem to drive themselves just to 'achieve for the sake of achievement' (Lee April/1999:1).

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[35] See Chapter III, p180.
[36] See Chapter III, p181.

Exhorting Christians in Singapore to view a good life as multi-dimensional and more than just economic well-being, Lee (April/1999:11) urges:

> ... Today we need to pay even more attention to what God is saying than what manna God is providing, in order to give God's words their appropriate attention. One of God's words is food for the body, but there are other words of God which are stimulus for the mind, inspiration for the imagination and satisfaction for the soul, to which we need pay appropriate attention.

Indeed, Lee sounds this timely note to Christians in Singapore - life is not just about being professional and innovative; it is also about being personal and intimate with God and people.

Competition: Shiv Khera has espoused that it is definitely good to compete with others because of two possible outcomes - it can spur one not only to do his/her best, but also to be the best in so doing. Of course, Khera adds that one must attempt to win fairly by playing to the rules. Commenting on Khera's perspective, Edward Dayton (1992:150) counters that Christians should not compete with one another as if they are against 'flesh and blood.' Rather, they should bear in mind that they are citizens of God's Kingdom, thereby constantly reminding themselves that their fight is against Satanic 'principalities and powers,' and not against one another. Cautioning against the selfish quest for personal glory, he (Dayton 1992:103) says:

> Competitiveness pits one person against another. It puts high value on winning, on acquiring, on being 'better' than someone else. Success is measured by comparing myself with how others are doing. It doesn't have to be so ... the good of the company (community) is more crucial than the good of the individual.

Dayton also makes an important distinction between individuality and individualism. Individuality has to do with our uniqueness in God's sight as a person; individualism has to do with our pride of wanting to be above others. In individuality, a person competes as an integral part of a bigger whole and success is viewed in a corporate sense. On the other hand, in

individualism, a person competes as a differentiated part on his/her own and success is viewed as standing above all others. Hence, competition is desirable only if it promotes individuality, not individualism. The reality today is that much of the competition tend to breed individualism rather than to promote individuality. Hence, much of today's competition is unhealthy because it is often motivated by the desire for personal gains (Dayton 1992:100).

Agreeing with Dayton is Robert Schnase who attributes man's self-serving propensity to his fallen nature. It is because of this that people seek more to embrace individualism than to enjoy communalism (Schnase 1993:23). Schnase believes that what is really needed in social interactions is not so much to compete with one another, but to complement one another. Since what you want to do may not be what you are capable of doing, what you really need then is *koinonia* (fellowship), not competition. Such a culture of *koinonia* assures one that 'we are not alone but we complete and depend on one another in order to be competent persons' (Schnase 1993:103).

Sounding a somewhat different note is Kirk Russell who considers competition, even for personal rewards, as desirable. He notes:

> If a society is deprived of competition, it is forced to rely either upon altruism, the unselfish efforts of men and women who work without reward; or upon compulsion, force employed to make people work without reward. Now the number of utterly unselfish men and women always is very small - insufficient to provide the wants of the mass of society. And the use of compulsion to enforce work and a semblance of industry, thrift, honesty, and ingeniousness is slavery - incompatible with a free society and the concept of the dignity of man. Therefore a society without economic competition either falls into a dismal decay, because there are not enough unselfish people to do the world's work; or else it falls into slavery, the degradation of human nature and civilisation.
>
> ... In essence, it is not competition which is ruthless; rather, it is the lack of competition that makes a society ruthless; because in a competitive economy people work voluntarily for decent rewards, while in a non-competitive economy a few harsh masters employ the stick to get the world's work done (Beisner 1989b:177).[37]

[37] Beisner was quoting Russell, and he (Beisner) was also endorsing the biblical validity of expecting rewards (see Lv 26; Dt 6-8; Pr 2:9-10; Pr 5:1-2; Mt 6:1-4).

In the light of these words, one should have no qualms about competing for rewards in an honest and diligent manner. In fact, one should not even try to shortchange himself/herself unfairly by giving way to others, but to receive and enjoy his/her due rewards without guilt or shame.[38]

Is competition among individuals desirable then? Perhaps, Tom Morris brings this discussion to an apt closure. He terms the excellence that stems from competition as competitive excellence, and this is distinct from personal excellence. Competitive excellence is the 'quality of rising out from the crowd' while personal excellence is that 'quality rising out from one's own potential' (Morris 1994:224). Morris further stresses that 'adversarial win is not the real good - it's the personal win.' Put in another way, it is not good to try and win competitvely at all costs, even at the price of losing at a personal level (Morris 1994:227).[39]

Morris suggests that each person has the ethical obligation to excel in what he/she is doing. This obligation is not to be better than all others, but to be the best that one personally can be. In this light, he (Morris 1994:226) makes this connection between competitive excellence and personal excellence:

> Any goal of competitive excellence should ultimately be for us just a means to pursue personal excellence. We benchmark against others in competitive situations. We push them to push us to become the best that we're capable of being. But if we're pushing them properly, than they are being pressed to become the best that they're capable of being ....[40]

4.1.3 An evaluation of views. Shiv Khera does well to say that successful people compete against themselves by trying to improve on their personal best all the time. But what

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[38] See Chapter III, p180.

[39] Examples of such personal losses are sportsmen who were penalised after winning a competition for knowingly taking performance-enhancing drugs. They suffered personal loss not only in terms of having their victory nullified, but also in terms of losing their integrity of true sportsmanship.

[40] Thus, Morris echoes the secular wisdom of Pozzi and Williams who advocate that competition is primarily for one to push toward achieving one's best without reducing the worth of others. Morris also repeats the view of Grondona who sees competition as a way of cooperation, implying that we spur one another in competition in order to bring out one another's best.

is problematic is that he also asserts that successful people have a commitment to 'play to win.' By this, Khera implies that winning over others is an important commitment in one's quest for success. Perhaps, Paul's words will provide us with an appropriate insight:

> Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not run like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize (1 Cor 9:24-27, NIV).

Here, Paul likens his ministry for the Lord as running in a race. Only one will eventually get the prize as the winner, and Paul pushes himself to be that person. However, he qualifies in v 27 that what is of utmost importance to him is not so much to win the prize, but 'not be disqualified for the prize.' In other words, Paul considers doing well as not necessarily in terms of winning though it is a valid motivation, but more importantly, in terms of finishing well. And to finish well may well mean winning over the odds and pressing on with integrity to complete what one has first set out to do.

The ideas of positive self image, fullest potential and unlimited power as advocated by Denis Waitley and Anthony Robbins also trivialise the truth that the image of God in man has been tarnished, and all the best that he can do with his potential and power is still short of God's glory. Man is indeed limited and finite, and he is to realise his fullest potential not in his own strength, but in the power of God.

Robbins may have meant well when he asserts that there are no failures in life, only outcomes. But the fallacious element here lies in the subtle denial of failure. This is rooted in the stress on the indomitable human spirit - you can do anything you want if you put your mind to it. This denial of failure stems from the false belief that you can win and have things your way all the time. It pushes you to fight stubbornly rather than permits you to fail

gracefully. However, there are times when the best thing you can do to yourself is to honestly and unashamedly admit to God that you have failed.

Perhaps, one can learn a lesson from what the Lord has told Noah in Gn 8:21 that after all the great waters and after almost wiping out all things on earth, the Flood has *failed* to cleanse the evil in man's heart. But the Lord also assures that He will never again curse and destroy as He has done in the Flood. Essentially, what this means is this - something may have failed but the situation is not hopeless because of the Lord's grace. Hence, the belief that you can never fail because the Lord wants you to always win is contrary to the gospel. Such a myth influences one to expect his/her spiritual life to be always exciting and victorious. However, the gospel truth teaches one that his/her spiritual life is a journey of ups and downs, but always with the Lord by one's side. Hence, while popular psychology inspires one to believe that he/she can never fail because he/she can do all things in Jesus Christ, and his/her failure disgraces the power of the Lord, gospel truth reassures one that he/she can fail, and yet be worthy before God because his/her failure glorifies the truth of God's grace and love.

Khera, Waitley and Robbins are only three of the many who propagate positive thinking or believing as a hallmark of success-oriented behaviour. Again, such an attitude is another kind of denial - the denial of reality. In Ec 3:1-8, one is told to acknowledge that there are both positive and negative times of reality. Thus, to pretend that the positive is negative, and vice versa, can be emotionally and spiritually harmful because such a denial traps people in a world of illusions and make-beliefs. What one then needs to do is not to deny reality but to respond to it appropriately, recognising that there is a time for everything in life. Also implied in this recognition is that making happiness the primary objective in life, as suggested by Khera, can result in some kind of idolatrous hedonism. In fact, if there is to be any primary objective in life for man, it must be holiness for Ec 12:13 reminds one to 'fear God and keep

his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.' This pursuit for holiness can bring no happiness as one grieves over wickedness, but it can also make one grateful as he/she appreciates even more deeply God's unconditional love.

While many have attempted to define success in terms of achievement, especially in the material sense, some like Pozzi and Williams contend for success with soul/meaning. They argue that the things that are most meaningful to one should not be merely those that others are having or chasing. Rather, they should be those that are in line with one's personal values and purpose. This is a good perspective except for their insistence that success with soul/meaning has nothing to do with balancing life's many demands. They view balance as trying to spread everything out evenly without sacrificing anything. This is a rather limited view since balance can also mean eliminating, not just spreading, that which is tilting the scale. And for the Christian, such a balancing act of cutting down and cutting out is to be done in line with God's values and purpose.

Also, Pozzi and Williams place a higher value on people (that is, relationships) than on possessions. They have rightly concluded that this relationship model of success enables one to appreciate the need for interdependence rather than competition; for building up others rather than beating them down.

Commenting on success as excelling in one's performance, Monica Basco is right to advise that a perfectionistic tendency be modified. But to say that this implies that one should not be held to a higher standard than anyone else can tempt one into human rationalisation. For the Christian, God's standard is indeed high (even perfect), and those who want to please Him are indeed called to commit themselves to a high standard of obedience.

As far as secular economics is concerned, the primary focus has been on the making of money. George Soros has rightly observed that even the successful ones ironically view

themselves as fighting for survival because of this competition for money. He laments that the emergence of a global economy has not resulted in a global society. The capitalist system today shows greater concern for money than for mankind. But in spite of this admission, it is rather puzzling that Soros still claims that he indulges in financial trading with the aim of bringing more openness and autonomy into societies.

Hence, is he nobly fighting a losing battle? By his own admission, Soros says that in his forays into the money markets, he sees himself as not dealing with people, but with market forces and plain luck. As such, he considers his activities as amoral as long as he plays by the rules. However, he fails to realise that what is legal in the eyes of man may not necessarily be morally right in the sight of God. Here then is a disclosure of the deceitfulness of the human heart - rationalising one's love for money by waxing lyrical about one's concern for man.

Mariano Grondona has pinpointed that the key to wealth creation today lies in innovation - the creative dare to bring about what is not to what is. This calls for a high regard for work in order to go for better things in the future, and not be contented with even the big things today. But what Grondona fails to point out is that this drive to work hard for economic well-being inevitably has a down side - people are in a hurry working for a living that they are in no mood slowing down to live a life.

This attitude does not reflect well how God works in the creation account in Genesis - He is working toward better things over six days, and never in a hurry to finish everything in one day even though that should not be a problem with Him.[41] As the Creator, God works in such a way that He pauses at appropriate intervals to enjoy and appreciate the present by saying, 'It is good.' Yet, He has better things in mind, and in the eventual creation of man, God exclaims, 'It is very good!' Indeed, God does not seem to hold back His enjoyment till a

[41] The debate on whether each day in creation refers literally to a 24-hour day will not be discussed here. It is suffice to say that each day represents a significant duration of time.

later time; He enjoys the 'good' present as He works toward the 'very good' future. He is in no hurry to complete everything in double quick time. For those success-driven people who have the tendency to work hard and feel guilty when they relax, perhaps God is saying to them: 'A better tomorrow is worth working hard for. But equally important is to slow down from time to time so as to enjoy and appreciate the present. Life is not a rat race but a pilgrim's journey.'

But in Singapore today, many people scorn this philosophy of life as belonging to the world of myths, not realities. As Lee Soo Ann has pointed out, economic power in Singapore is more in terms of the ability to save than the ability to spend. It is feared that free spending will tempt people to succumb to the pleasures of materialism. What Lee fails to emphasise is that this restraint on spending has actually resulted in an irony - people have become more materialistic in that there is always this fear of not having enough for the future. Hence, God's sufficiency is no welcomed comfort because many Christians believe that 'God will dump those who do not help themselves.'

In dealing with the reality of competition, it is heartening to note that people like Pozzi and Williams believe that competition is for one to reach one's personal best without reducing the worth of others. Competition is not for personal fulfilment to the exclusion of others.

However, the remarks of Tan, Toh and Koh on how to sustain Singapore's competitiveness are quite disturbing. For one thing, they argue that Singapore needs to depend heavily on technology in order to be a worthy competitor on the world stage. As evident in the computer culture, the latest is never the latest for long; the best is never the best for long. The key word here is 'upgrade' and it can unwittingly bring about at least two ill effects - enough is never enough because there is always something better; the desire to move into newer things

often tempts one to despise the need for depth and permanence in life. This lack of depth and permanence is not only limited to the things which a person possesses. Even more unfortunate is that it can extend to one's relationships with people.

A second comment about the Singapore situation is that 'the key competitive strength of Singapore against the regional countries derived directly or indirectly from the quality of the people' (see p197). Along with this is the suggestion that Singapore must identify her comparative advantage so that she will compete in areas where she can do better than others. But this only implies that she must move into areas where the competition is only small in numbers, but stiff in intensity. What this really amounts to is to aim at emerging top of the pile; at being the best of the best in the field. This is disturbing from a Christian perspective in that people may be 'devalued' to become mere digits of production, without a sense of being in God's image.

Many of the secular perspectives that have been highlighted are affirmed in the Christian response of the dialogue. For example, it is repeatedly stated that success is more than just the attainment of material blessings; it also embraces the responsibility to live for God spiritually and morally in the midst of abundance and opportunities. One expression of this embracement is to regard excellence in terms of growing in *agape* love as asserted by Jon Johnston. His call is worth noting as it challenges one to pursue excellence with an other-centred focus - that is, with the aim of glorifying God and serving others. Indeed, to succeed in excelling, one not only pushes oneself to reach greater heights, but also to be more gracious toward others. However, Johnston needs to be qualified in that this graciousness toward others is not to condescend to them, but to empower them. To condescend to people is really to act in a way that indicates that one considers oneself as superior to them. This is really a subtle way of lording over others in the fashion of the world. On the other hand, to empower

others is to share God's *agape* love by giving part of what one has been blessed so that others too can be similarly blessed.[42]

Tom Morris does well to remind that success is only meaningful if it is in terms of attaining goals that are consistent with one's own values and purpose, and not what others have imposed upon him/her. But the big question for the Christian here is: 'How do I know my values and purpose are any better than that of others?' Hence, just like Johnston, Morris needs to be qualified in that the Christian must choose values and purpose that are in accordance to the teachings of Scripture. In this sense, one is quite assured of a balance - that is, excellence in mind, body and spirit so that 'whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God' (1 Cor 10:31). Indeed, it is true that God does not fault one for working hard and putting in one's best efforts, but for having a wrong order of values and priorities. The right order of concerns will allow one to enjoy success in gaining wealth and esteem as by-products, and not embrace them as all-consuming goals. Robert Schnase reinforces Morris here by saying that the motive to upgrade in anyway must be tested by this question: 'Does moving up makes me higher before others, or does it draw me closer to God?'

Morris is also right to suggest that competitive excellence is desirable if it is viewed as a way which people employ to bring the best out of one another. After all, Paul does encourage Christians in Heb 10:24 to 'spur one another on toward love and good deeds.'

Morris also tries to draw a distinction between goals and desires. He says that while goal setting is within one's personal control, desires are not. This assertion does not seem to be true. In fact, it does seem that goal setting, which is often an external activity, can easily be imposed upon a person by others. On the other hand, desiring, which is very much an internal

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[42] Robert Schnase calls the mutual show of *agape* love as the expression of the *koinonia* spirit among Christians. This spirit encourages them to complement and depend on one another to become competent persons.

yearning, is often controlled by the stirring in one's heart. It is important for the Christian to note this lest he/she thinks that it is all right to have all kinds of desires since they are beyond one's control. Also, Morris argues that since one cannot control his/her desires, it is all right to desire just about anything as long as one is prudent with his/her goal setting. In fact, he says that this will spare a person unnecessary disappointment and pain since he/she will not be hurt by an unfulfilled desire if he/she has not made its fulfilment as his/her goal in the first place. This thinking is certainly against Jesus' radical teachings in Mt 5. For example, Jesus teaches in that chapter that the one who is angry enough to desire the death of someone, has already committed a sin even though he has not made actual murder his goal. Also, in Ja 1:14-15, one is told that man is tempted by 'his own evil desire' and this desire 'gives birth to sin.' The implication here is that desires are within one's control, and he/she indeed must learn to control them because desires cannot remain passive in a person. Desires that are unchecked often seek out their own fulfilment by arousing one to act in response to them. Thus, self-control is embodied in the fruit of the Spirit in Gl 5:22-23, and one exercises it to check the desires in him/her.

Randy Alcorn exhorts Christians to handle material success with a pilgrim's mentality - that is, possessing things without being possessed by them. This is good advice as it challenges people to empty themselves materially not in terms of renouncing things, but in terms of releasing things for others' sake. However, Alcorn needs to address those who with a 'holier-than-thou' attitude insist that such releasing must always be seen as a privilege, not a sacrifice. In this regard, Paul's words offer good counsel:

> But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish .... (Phlp 3:7-8, NIV).

In turning from a persecutor of the church to an apostle of the church, Paul had to turn his back on many 'profitable' things. These would probably include a promising career as a well-respected rabbi and its accompanying material rewards. In Paul's own words, he did indeed suffer loss when he chose to serve Christ. Such a loss could be regarded as a sacrifice in the sense that he had to forego some earthly profit in order to follow his choice. But such a loss or sacrifice is no pain at all for Paul. In fact, he considered it a relief because he likened what he had lost as unwanted rubbish. Thus, what is needed is not to deny the reality of loss or sacrifice, but to affirm that the loss of unnecessary baggages is a relief as it helps one to travel better as a pilgrim in Christ.

Lastly, Christopher Wright comments that the Jubilee principle ensures that everyone does not need to have the same measure, but enough to be economically viable. This is worth noting. It is especially relevant in reminding people that there is no need to compare and keep up with others economically. In fact, God's concern for them is much more than in economic terms. Though economic health is important to the dignity of human lives, people are to ultimately find their worth not in economic power, but in God's redemptive grace.

The dialogue will now continue, using another challenge in Singaporean society as a talking point.

4.2 The Challenge to Family Stability

The small population of Singapore necessitates the need for men and women to be in the labour force for as long as possible in order to sustain economic growth. With the costs of living ever rising, coupled with better education and skills, it makes good economic sense for both spouses to work. After all, there are good services and facilities available to assist parents in the care of their children. And economic power is commonly regarded as the key to the

good things in life and at home. The challenge then is not to neglect emotional stability in the home, but to use economic security to foster strong family relationships.

4.2.1 Some secular views on spousal intimacy and child nurturing. At the Family Forum 2000 held in May, Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong admitted that the need for Singapore to remain economically competitive is not going to make balancing between work and family easy. He sounded out this concern:

> Where Singaporeans place their priorities is their personal decision. But I would like to urge them to sit back periodically and think about what they are doing. My concern is that the balance between work and family is tilting away from the family. A judicious balance needs to be found.[43]

Not long after this frank admission, Goh Chok Tong went on to announce that married men in the civil service could look forward to three days' paternity leave for their first three children. Stating the rationale behind this leave scheme, Goh said: 'With the dual-income family becoming the norm, fathers must share more in the responsibilities of bringing up the children.'[44]

This concern for family life in Singapore at the top political level was also expressed by Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong. He stressed that a strong family is 'our emotional raft, providing stability and support in difficult times.' However, while encouraging both the public and private sectors to help their staff balance between family and work, Lee qualified: 'In the current business environment, talent commands a high premium. In this talent war, innovative family-friendly practices can be a useful strategic weapon.'[45] Again, the priority of

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[43] *The Sunday Times* 28 May 2000. Tilt balance towards the family, says PM, p1.

[44] This is only one of many pro-family measures proposed by the government-commissioned Working Committee on Marriage and Procreation. The task of this committee is to encourage married couples to have more children in view of the falling birth rate in the country. This new leave scheme for married men serves to enhance the 'Government's drive to bring about a pro-family environment, which includes a Baby Bonus and paid maternity leave for third-time mothers' (*The Straits Times* 28 August 2000. Three days' paternity leave for civil servants, p1).

[45] *The Straits Times* 30 September 2000. Boost for family-friendly work practices, p3.

economics is never far from the Government's mind, and a strong family is desirable only because it is a means to achieving economic objectives.

Speaking from his own experience, the man who is responsible for Singapore's emergence from poverty to prosperity, Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew, has this to say about the present generation:

> My wife and I belong to a different generation. We regard marriage as a lifelong commitment, crucial for the stability of the family.
>
> The present generation of two-income families emphasises individual fulfilment more than family stability.
>
> My work was important. My family was the nest I went back to for rest and restoration. When my children were young, every year we would go together on holiday for two weeks. In the days before the Internet and when long-distance telephone calls were expensive, vacations meant a cut-off from work.
>
> In between, we spent long weekends at Changi. The family met every day, at lunch or dinner. When I went on political mass activities, like political picnics, my wife and children would come with me. When I went touring the constituencies, my son, Loong, followed me when he was free. In this way, we kept in touch. They knew what I was doing and shared a part of it.[46]

How then do people respond to these pro-family sentiments voiced by the nation's top political leaders? Perhaps, three examples will underscore the complexity of the matter. The Singapore Civil Service (SCS) has adopted a number of pro-family measures proposed by the Working Committee on Marriage and Procreation. This committee is headed by Eddie Teo, Permanent Secretary to the Prime Minister's Office. Proposals adopted by the SCS include allowing staff to work flexible hours and from home. Commenting on why flexible hours are proposed instead of a five-day week, Teo argues that the latter may send 'the wrong signal that Singapore has arrived, and it is okay for workers to switch to a less intense pace.'[47]

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[46] *The Straits Times* 30 September 2000. On Mee Siam, Marriage And Missed Medals, p71.
[47] *The Straits Times* 29 August 2000. Flexi-hours, marriage leave for civil servants, p1.

Responding tersely to this comment, Anthony Yeo, Clinical Director of Singapore Counselling and Care Centre, says:

> People need more time, not necessarily more money, to care for children.
>
> The Government should stop telling people that a shorter work-week might send the wrong signal that we are relaxing. The signal sent is: Family life does not matter as much as economic growth.[48]

Perhaps, the unhappiness in this family debate is best expressed by Livia Chua, a copy-writer-turned-housewife:

> Women are being told to be superhuman. Get educated, get a job, get married, raise a family and get your children educated and excel at all of it. No compromises. Be the best that we can be.
>
> Singaporeans have been told to live by a set of values that have become as practically impossible to live by as The Ten Commandments.[49]

With this public interest in the state of the family in Singapore as the backdrop, we will now consider how some secular sources attempt to address the topic of family stability.

Spousal intimacy: In recent years, there seems to be a shift of emphasis concerning how spouses can communicate and relate better in their marriage. Instead of going straight into techniques, the new emphasis focuses on first understanding differences between the genders. John Gray (1993:2), a prominent advocate of this emphasis today, believes that 'unconditional love is not possible without recognition and acceptance of differences.' In fact, it is in recognising differences that people free themselves from the act of judging one another (Gray 1993:4).

Gray (1993:14-16) claims that failing to acknowledge that man and woman are indeed different would bring about the following negative effects:

> - When you expect the other person to act/react as you would, frustration creeps in when that person does not. When you assume that this person should think and feel like you, it is very difficult to care and understand if he/she does

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[48] *The Straits Times* 23 September 2000. The Great Baby Debate: Too loud, too little, too late? p83.
[49] Her comment appeared in the same newspaper report mentioned above.

not. Instead, you may end up not only frustrated, but also judgmental toward that person.

- When you treat the other person as you would want to be treated, you may offend rather than please. What is good for you may not necessarily be so for the other party.

- When you evaluate the other person by your yardstick, you often end up misinterpreting and overlooking the real needs of the other person. In turn, that person finds it hard to appreciate and trust you.

Elaborating on why spousal intimacy can be so elusive to some couples, Gray (1993:23) points out that woman has a tendency to give more if she is receiving less, hoping to deserve more in return from the man. On the other hand, man has a tendency to give less in return if he is receiving more, thinking that he has done enough to deserve it (Gray 1993:25). 'This is one of the reasons why, after winning or earning the love of a woman, men may become lazy in the relationship. As long as she continues to give with a smile on her face, he assumes that he is giving enough. He doesn't feel motivated to give more' (Gray 1993:25-26). In view of this difference in gender behaviour, it is easy to see how intimacy in relationship can be hindered - the woman pursues by giving more to signal that things are not all right, but the man unintentionally distances himself by not responding with more because he thinks that everything is all right.

Perhaps, one good way to help couples better communicate and relate with each other is to have an understanding of how man and woman react to stress. The following table aims to give a broad overview of gender differences in this aspect:

TABLE 11: Gender Differences in Reactions to Stress (Gray 1993:178-213)

Male	Female
1. Withdraws: The man becomes preoccupied and distant. He can be here in body but not in spirit.	1. Becomes overwhelmed: The woman feels pulled in many directions. The man may feel helpless/being blamed, but the woman only wants him to listen.
2. Grumbles: The man finds it difficult to shift his focus to other things/people when he is stressed. Hence, when the woman tries to redirect his attention, he grumbles. The man wants to hide in his 'cave' during this time.	2. Overreacts: The woman becomes emotional. She wants the man to empathise without trying to fix her or defend himself. She needs to share outside of herself.
3. Shuts down: The man becomes unfeeling and cold. He is signalling that he needs space, but the woman may take it as rejection. While woman shuts down to give up, man does so to focus.	3. Becomes exhausted: The woman feels helpless and wants to give up. She needs to be reassured that she is not alone. The man will do well to listen and relieve her of some responsibilities for the time being.

Studies on gender differences are often in the form of meta-analysis. It is a way of summarising data gathered from several studies which have examined a particular topic in about the the same fashion. This then permits an estimate to be made concerning the various aspects of gender differences.

But Carol McGuinness, Senior Lecturer in Psychology at The Queen's University of Belfast, cautions against casting man and woman into set behavioural patterns too hastily. She (McGuinness 1998:70) has this to say about the cognitive differences between man and woman:

> No single study can hope to provide a definitive answer to the question of gender similarities and differences in cognition. Instead, there is a need to survey and review existing studies in order to gain a sense of prevailing trends.

In a similar vein, Agneta Fischer (1998:84) draws attention to the fact that 'biological or physiological factors cannot account for all gender differences in emotions.'[50] They are only useful in explaining some differences in emotional reactions between man and woman - for example, why man tends to be aggressive and woman tends to be weepy.

[50] Agneta Fischer is Senior Lecturer in Social Psychology at the Universiteit van Amsterdam, Holland.

In fact, Fischer believes that gender differences in emotions are more sociological than biological/physiological in origin. She (Fischer 1998:89) says:

> ... there is no evidence that only women and few men experience emotions; instead it should be stressed that there are many similarities in the reported emotions of men and women. However, there are also differences which seem to derive from the fact that women more often report emotions that imply powerlessness, vulnerability or the encouragement of social cohesion. This difference may be explained by the fact that because of the different roles into which men and women are socialised, and the different statures which they have ....

Child nurturing: This role is traditionally assigned to women. But in view of the intent of this dissertation, it will be discussed in terms of its relevance for men.

There is a new phenomenon in America - that is, some couples are struggling to redefine roles in families where women earn more than men, or the men decide to be homemakers. Sensitive issues related to identity, gender roles and balance of power have to be addressed in these families. Moreover, these couples have to face the disdain of a society which generally does not expect women to overshadow their husbands. But according to a recent University of Missouri-St Louis study, 'about one in five married women has an annual salary that tops her husband's.' This finding brings a dilemma on the part of the woman into the open - she is caught in a bind in that while doing something personally rewarding, she is at the same time, threatening the self-esteem of her stay-at-home husband. On the other hand, it seems that who is staying at home is not of much concern to the children. To them, gender is not an issue because a stay-at-home father is still very much a father.[51]

Another comprehensive, multi-year study has also been done in America by Elisabeth Harvey of the University of Massachusetts. Her findings certainly allay the fear of many working mothers. Some important conclusions drawn from this study are:

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[51] This is based on a *Washington Post* article carried in: *The Straits Times (Life! Section)* 18 October 1999. Honey, I need money to buy shoes, p5.

- There are no lasting psychological scars in children whose mothers work outside the home.

- In fact, these children may even be helped by the extra income.

- What is important to the children psychologically is the quality of family life, and mental stability and maturity of both parents.

In reporting the findings of Elisabeth Harvey, the *Washington Post* has this to say:

> Overall, Ms Harvey found that children, whose mothers worked during the first three years after giving birth, were not significantly different from those with unemployed mothers.
>
> Though she found that three- and four-year-olds whose mothers stayed at home longer after birth were slightly more compliant, the differences were slight and disappeared when the children hit age five and six.
>
> Children whose mothers worked more hours scored slightly lower on academic achievement.
>
> But the differences disappeared by the time the children turned seven.[52]

The dilemma faced by successful, working women is not experienced in America only. In fact, it is this very issue that has discouraged some women in Singapore from getting married. Lenore Lyons-Lee is a sociologist at the University of Wollongong in New South Wales, Australia. She has done a study on why some graduate women in Singapore have chosen to remain single in spite of pressures from family and society to tie the nuptial knot. In her study, she interviewed some graduate single ladies who were members of the Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE). Majority of AWARE's membership identify themselves as middle-class or upper middle-class based on their occupation, income and education. As a conclusion to her study, Lyons-Lee (1998:324) has this to say:

> The majority of single women I spoke to had not rejected marriage or childrearing but merely traditional construction of gendered roles within the family. They wanted husbands who shared a similar outlook on life, were not afraid of their wives' success and independence, and were committed to equality within the home, but were finding these hard to attain or realise. In the

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[52] This *Washington Post* report was reproduced in: *The Straits Times* 3 March 1999. Children of working mums suffer no long-term scars, p13.

> mean time, singlehood was for them a compromised position. Their financial independence provided them with the opportunity to remain committed to the promise of equality. Yet, for many, independence was bitter-sweet.

And for those Singapore women who have decided to plunge into marriage, the experience is not all sweet as well. A study done by Dr Joseph Ozawa, Head of Psychological-Services Unit at the Ministry of Community and Sports, reveals that much of the problem with delinquency today can be attributed to a 'bad father' at home. His study of delinquent youths at the Singapore Boys' Home reveals the following findings:

> - More than a third of the boys interviewed indicated that their fathers were too strict, negligent or cold toward them.
>
> - Only a third of the older boys indicated that they would ever go to their fathers for advice. For the younger boys, about half indicated that they would do so.
>
> - All the boys indicated that they would turn first to their friends for advice when they encountered problems.

Ozawa attributes the father-child gap to the fact that fathers often see their role as primarily money-making and wielding the cane. He further comments:

> We need to give mothers a break and save them from the unfair accusations of in-laws and fathers when children stray from the straight and narrow.
>
> Fathers need to listen to what their children are telling them and not just lecture them or put them down.
>
> Their first step begins with admitting to their own shortcomings as fathers.[53]

The official granting of paternity leave in the civil service, as announced by Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong on 27 August 2000, has sent a strong signal that the Government of Singapore wants working husbands to be more participative in child-rearing. In the light of this announcement, sociologist Paulin Tay Straughan so responds:

> Traditionally, the father has been the breadwinner and the distant disciplinarian while the mother was the nurturer and homemaker.

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[53] *The Sunday Times* 16 April 2000. 'Just be there for me, daddy,' p35.

> Currently, for Singaporean men, I feel they want to be better fathers and husbands, but face constraints due to work and time.
>
> Organisations don't always understand that, just like their female employees, men have families to go home to as well.[54]

Commenting on the American scene, David Blankenhorn sees the rise in popularity of the New Father image today.[55] This is also known as the androgynous father, and it presents fatherhood as 'close and nurturing, not distant and authoritarian ... as more than breadwinning ... unafraid of feelings ... without sexism ... as fifty-fifty parenthood, undistorted by arbitrary gender divisions or stifling social roles' (Blankenhorn 1995:100).

While the traditional model holds up the father as the breadwinner of the family, the New Father model plays down the breadwinning role of the father because it is viewed as eroding true fatherhood (Blankenhorn 1995:110). If we allow breadwinning to be the key role in defining fatherhood, it will lead to men fathering 'not by presence, but by paying,' and resulting in 'not lack of male income, but lack of male image' at home (Blankenhorn 1995:127).[56]

Blankenhorn does not view the New Father image favourably because he sees it as stripping fatherhood naked of its masculinity. He (Blankenhorn 1995:116-17) has these strong words to say:

> Paternal attachment to breadwinning is neither arbitrary nor anachronistic. Historically and currently, the breadwinner role matches quite well with core aspects of masculine identity ... the provider role permits men to serve their families through competition with other men. In this sense, the ideal of paternal breadwinning encultures male aggression by directing it toward a prosocial purpose.
>
> The New Father model does not merely unburden men of breadwinning as a special obligation. Ultimately, it unburdens them of fatherhood itself. For, as the example of breadwinning demonstrates, the essence of the New Father

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[54] *The Straits Times* 29 August 2000. More men involved in kids' upbringing, p43.
[55] Blankenhorn is founder and president of the Institute for American Values which is devoted to the publication, research and public education on family issues.
[56] Blankenhorn calls this the Deadbeat Father image.

> model is a repudiation of general social roles. But fatherhood, by definition, is a gendered social role. To ungender fatherhood - to deny males any gender-based role in family life - is to deny fatherhood as a social activity. What remains may be New. But there is no more Father.

The Good Family Man is Blankenhorn's alternative to the New Father image. In this model of fatherhood, the man never sees male income as more important than male image in his family. In fact, he considers the two as tightly fused and though acknowledging that he is not perfect, he still regards his own fathering role as irreplaceable (Blankenhorn 1995:201).

Blankenhorn adds that there is an important function of the Good Family Man besides the duties to provide, protect and nurture. It is the function of paternal sponsorship. In this role, the father gives attention in grooming the character of the child. The qualities of independence and risk-taking are desirable outcomes of this character development process. In other words, the responsible father will empower his child not only to survive outside the home, but also to be a responsible member of society. This function of paternal sponsorship implies that the father can never be replaced by a mother. In fact, it is this function that makes a father's love 'more expectant, more instrumental, and significantly less unconditional' when compared to that of a mother (Blankenhorn 1995:219).

Sigmund Freud was the first person to present a theory of gendered development which emphasises the primacy of sexuality and gender identity. He stood apart from the thinking of others in his time because he viewed sexuality more as a developmental process than as an instinct; more a result of nurture than of nature (Quiery 1998:130).

Freud's construction of the Oedipal (phallic) stage for boys between age three to five was an attempt to explain how the male identity was developed.[57] Freud theorised that 'the mother thus becomes the object of the child's sexual drive and libidinal energy during the

[57] In Greek legend, Oedipus murdered his father , married his mother and had children by her. The son was in competition with his father for the love of his own mother.

Oedipal stage, and the father becomes the son's rival for the mother's attention and affection. The son, threatened by this power figure, and fearing castration, ultimately relinquishes his claim to an exclusive relationship with his mother by identifying with the father. In this way he adopts a male identity' (Quiery 1998:131). And to develop this male identity in the son, a male image in the form of fatherhood is needed at home.

The portrayal of the male tendency to be distant and the female tendency to be intimate is also Freudian in origin. However, in affirming Blankenhorn's claim that the androgynous image has become contemporarily popular, Nuala Quiery (1998:136) says:[58]

> ... Recent work in the theory and research of gender identity concludes that it is the psychologically androgynous individual who enjoys the greatest well-being in our culture. In this view, female and male psychological characteristics are no longer the two poles of one continuum, but rather are attributes and aspects of identity which can and do coexist within an individual ....

Without trying to make a case for androgynous fatherhood, Ken Canfield argues that what is needed today is really involved fatherhood.[59] He (Canfield 1999:88) stresses the non-substitutionary nature of fatherhood this way:

> A father's involvement with his children is unique. We could, of course, also compare a list of the benefits of mother involvement. But we would be mistaken if we believed those lists of benefits would be the same. Even if you could arrange for your wife to be with your children 168 hours a week, even if you could afford to hire a couple of private teachers and coaches and clergymen, and even if you were allowed to lavish your children with the best educational tools and self-esteem strategies ... A father's role in the lives of his children is unique; a mother cannot do what he does.

Canfield also points out that the workplace is where a man meets 'the most resistance to his fathering commitment.' Apparently, taking time off for one's children is not well taken by many employers. Hence, the man unwittingly chooses to seek his worth and identity in the workplace instead of the home. Moreover, rewards at the workplace are fairly immediate -

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[58] Quiery is a practising psychologist in Belfast.
[59] Canfield is the founder and president of the American National Centre for Fathering.

such as, bonuses, raises and promotions. Besides the extra money, the man is also drawn more readily to work than home because the accompanying rewards 'fulfil deeper needs for power, recognition, achievement and identity' (Canfield 1999:97).

In spite of the less than friendly attitude toward the family in the workplace, Canfield calls on fathers to be involved in the lives of their children; to turn their heart toward home. He (Canfield 1999:93-94) suggests that fathers spend time with their children in three ways:

> - Engage the child by doing things or playing together. Through these activities, the father can nurture even by touch.
>
> - Give access to the child by being available or near even if not immediately together. This ensures that the communication line is open. The father can nurture by words of affirmation and attentive listening.[60]
>
> - Accept responsibilities by meeting the needs of the child. In fact, there may be a time when the need of the child is to be disciplined and the responsibility of the father is to nurture by meting out discipline.[61]

Canfield sums up his views of involved fatherhood by stressing that a father nurtures by becoming a model to his boy and showing affection to his girl. When the father engages his son in meaningful conversations, he is showing the lad how to be a boy. When the father expresses his emotions in an appropriate manner before his son, he is showing him how to be a man. When the father treats his wife and daughter in an appropriate manner before his son, he is showing him how to be a husband and father (Canfield 1999:138).

Turning his attention to nurturing girls, Canfield observes that most fathers are uncomfortable with showing affection to their daughters when they become adolescents. He (Canfield 1999:139-40) considers this paternal withdrawal as unfortunate and has this to advise fathers:

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[60] Since words are powerful, it is especially important for fathers with high expectations to sincerely affirm their children even when they have not succeeded (Canfield 1999:136).

[61] It seems that a child is most receptive to nurturing after being disciplined. This is when the father takes time to talk through things with the child. It is a time when the 'child will learn to respect guidelines; regard discipline as correction, not punishment; recognise your devotion to him' (Canfield 1999:141).

> ... You're actually just being careful, but your daughter thinks you don't care, or that something's wrong with her. She's trying to figure out men, and you're her closest and best example of one ... As her father, you act as a kind of first boyfriend, and you play a large role in showing her what a proper, respectful response sounds and feels like. If you fail to affirm your daughter's femininity by showing her physical and verbal affection, she may very likely discover it on her own, in unhealthy relationships with the men in her life.

To better bring up children, John Gray has suggested that parents relearn some skills in his book *Children Are From Heaven*. Two of these 'new' skills are particularly relevant to fathers in view of their masculine tendency. The first of these is the skill to communicate. The important stress here is to take time to listen to a child's resistance. Gray argues that positive parenting aims at nurturing a cooperative child, rather than a merely obedient one. He (Gray 1999:93) says:

> ... By raising our children to simply be obedient, we fail to give them the winning edge they need to compete and succeed in the world today.
>
> Success in life doesn't come from following rules; it comes from thinking for oneself and following one's heart and inner will. This natural ability is first nurtured by strengthening the child's willingness to cooperate ... When children get the message that it is okay to resist, but remember mom and dad are the bosses, they have the opportunity to keep their mind and heart open and nurture the ability to know their own will and wish in life.

Gray believes that many parents fall into the trap of giving too many choices to their children. This may lessen a child's resistance, but certainly does not bring cooperation out of the child. In fact, it gives the child too much power and weakens the parent's authority. Gray suggests that a child does not need choices until the age of nine. Rather, 'they need strong parents who know what is best for them, but who are also open to hearing their resistance and discovering their wants and wishes.' A parent must then use the insight gained from such a discovery to decide to change or stay firm, thereby continuing to be in charge (Gray 1999:95).

Gray asserts that it is only when the child is around the age of twelve that he/she be challenged to think and make decisions for himself/herself. However, it is important to

reassure the child that it is alright to fail or make mistakes. In fact, the child must get the message that parents themselves are not always right and they do not always know the best (Gray 1999:97).

This skill in communicating to listen, not to give in, is especially for fathers. If they try to compensate for their absence with choices of good things, the warning is that they will misread the child's resistance. Instead of giving the child choices which he/she is not ready to handle, the nurturing father should exercise his authority in drawing the boundaries and listening to the child's resistance at the same time. And Gray (1999:99) considers this good nurturing because when a father asserts his authority in the face of the child's resistance, he teaches him/her to express and then release resistance, thereby learning to accept what has to be. It is a way of learning how to delay gratification; to say 'enough is enough.'

Another 'new' skill which Gray has suggested is the skill to command. A father who sees himself as the authority figure in the family, and demands that the child be seen and not heard may think that to yell is to command. But Gray (1999:143) reckons that this only weakens the father's authority because 'a clear and firm command repeated over and over without the tone of emotional distress is most effective.'

While a father may be tempted to resort immediately to commanding, Gray advocates otherwise. Instead, he suggests that the resisting child be asked to cooperate as a first step. Failing which, the child be listened to. If this still proves to be unsuccessful, the child be promised a reward for his cooperation. It is only when these three steps have failed that the child be commanded to do as told. This marks the end of negotiation time and the parent persists in his command in spite of the child's resistance. It is also not a time to explain or give reasons as this will undermine the authority behind the command (Gray 1999:155-56).[62]

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[62] In fact, Gray (1999:153) even suggests that the best response to the child's challenge as to why he/she has to obey a command is to say: 'Because I am the parent, that's why.' This is to be said without explaining or

4.2.2 Some Christian views on spousal intimacy and child nurturing. We now turn our attention to the responses expressed by some Christian experts.

Spousal intimacy: Christian sociologists, Jack and Judy Balswick, claim that the social sciences have indicated that gender differences are the results of cultural conditioning rather than natural development.[63] The advent of the technological age attests to this claim. For example, 'before the machine age, the physiological differences between the sexes determined one's work role. Being larger and stronger than women, men were expected to do most of the heavy work. Since women give birth to babies and nurse them during infancy, they were more involved in child care. With the emergence of electronics and computers, however, the most valued work is no longer manual labour, but rather work that demands the development of the mind' (Balswick & Balswick 1991:154).

Furthermore, the Balswicks (1991:162) assert that culture, rather than biology, is instrumental in moulding men to be generally domineering and rational in character, and women to be generally submissive and emotional.

In cautioning against reading our cultural images into the biblical portrait of the family, they (Balswick & Balswick 1991:286) comment:

> Christians commonly fall into the trap of assuming that the particular family form existing in their culture is God's deal. They read their own cultural standards into Scripture and accept all biblical accounts of family life as if they were normative. But some of the accounts of how the family was organised during biblical times were never intended to dictate how it should be organised in all cultures at all times.

Also, they argue that Jesus was a perfect man on earth not because he was distinctively masculine, but he was distinctively human. He demonstrated the temperaments of a whole person which integrated the masculine and feminine traits of compassion, meekness and anger

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getting upset. Gray further suggests that the child be given 'time outs' if he/she has resisted a command three times. 'Giving time outs replaces the need to punish or spank children' (Gray 1999:166).

[63] The Balswicks are professors in family studies at Fuller Theological Seminary in California, USA.

(Balswick & Balswick 1991:163). Thus, the Balswicks (1991:168-69) maintain that 'secure Christian manhood means that one is mature enough that he doesn't need to confirm his masculinity at a woman's expense ... Within the family he will be willing to be equally involved in household chores and child care.'

In fact, a theology of family relationships can be constructed by using God's covenant with Israel as a basis. This approach features the following sequences which will eventually result in intimacy (Balswick & Balswick 1991:23-32):

> - *Covenant:* going back to the times of Noah and Abraham, God's covenants with them were based on His commitments regardless of their acceptance or rejection. However, the potential benefits/blessings were conditional in that they had to fulfil their due responsibilities. Thus, God desired that His unconditional commitment (unilateral covenant) was to be reciprocated by man. In the same way, spousal relationship is covenantal in that it starts with a person's unconditional commitment to the other party. In the case of parent-child relationship, it is to mature from the unconditional commitment of the parent to the reciprocal commitment of the child.
>
> - *Grace:* family relationships with covenant as a basis will lead to grace and forgiveness. This in turn will lead to the exercise of love, responsibility and consideration toward one another. 'Although the covenant of grace rules out law as a basis for family relationships, family members living in grace will accept law in the form of patterns, order, and responsibility in relationships.' Thus, male headship and female submission in the family become the outworking of grace, not of law, between the spouses.
>
> - *Empowering:* spouses empower by encouraging each other to use their strengths and develop their potential. This allows the empowered to grow by doing rather than by depending. In a parent-child relationship, the parental authority lies not so much in the external control over the child, but in the internal control (discipline of self-control) which the parent has nurtured into the child's personhood.
>
> - *Intimacy:* God demonstrates the desire for intimacy by knowing a person and wanting to be known by that person. After the Fall, Adam and Eve experienced shame. They were afraid of being known intimately, and thus, they covered and hid. This then points to the key in establishing intimacy - the need to communicate freely and openly. Indeed, the marks of spousal intimacy are honest sharing without the fear of rejection, and forgiving and being forgiven. All these again point back to the covenantal concept of unconditional love and commitment.

Using this theological basis, the Balswicks (1991:81-85) suggest two important actions to strengthen family relationships, especially that between the spouses:

- *Commit:* in the book of Hosea, one sees God's commitment to Israel as He endures, renews, forgives and restores the nation of her faithlessness and unfaithfulness. In the same way, marriage partners are to commit themselves - not only to the institution, but more importantly, to the relationship and to each other.

- *Adapt:* segregation of spousal roles only came about when the Industrial Revolution sent the men from their home farms to the city factories for work. Before that, both spouses worked on the farm and shared in parenting their children. Segregation of roles was the result of the urbanisation of families. With the emergence of the urban family, home life and work life became divided with the man working outside the home and the woman inside it. While segregation tends to label tasks as either *male* or *female,* differentiation allows room for interchange in that 'husbands and wives agree to serve one another by taking on assigned tasks which contribute to the maintenance of the household.' Adaptability is the quality of allowing spousal roles to be differentiated rather than to be segregated, and basing it on scriptural teachings about order, harmony, consideration and love.

Diana Garland (1999:244-47), Director of Graduate Social Work Education at Baylor University in Texas, USA, adds that working toward the following goals can strengthen family relationships in general and spousal intimacy in particular:

- *Commitment to one another:* this imparts a sense of connectedness, priority and endurance in the relationship.

- *Adequate time together:* this is for the purpose of meeting needs, working together and enjoying recreation. It recognises that there is no quality time without quantity time.

- *Effective communication and conflict management:* this stresses the need to solve problems confidently rather than to avoid them.

- *Sufficient appreciation and encouragement:* this acknowledges the good and delight in one another.

- *Agreement on family roles and responsibilities:* this calls for mutual support in order to help one another fulfil the assigned tasks.

- *Shared spiritual life:* this adds a spiritual purpose and meaning to the total family life.

- *Community involvement:* this can take the form of voluntarism whereby family members come together to contribute to the well-being of the larger world.

- *Positive family identity:* this is the building of a heritage of family rituals and experiences that tell the life story of the family.

- *Ability to cope:* this is the challenge to help one another in times of crises and developmental changes so that family resilience can be fostered.

While the Balswicks place covenant as the beginning point of relationship building, Garland contends that love and commitment should come first. She argues that God had been showing love and commitment to Israel long before He covenanted Himself at Mt Sinai. Hence, God's covenants with Israel in biblical history are really 'marker events in growing relationships.' Covenant then is the result rather than the origin of love and faithfulness in a relationship (Garland 1999:335).

Gary Collins, a clinical psychologist who once taught at the Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in USA, considers spousal intimacy as much more than sexual closeness. He describes intimacy as a 'connectedness that a couple feels, an ongoing ability to share interests, activities, hopes for the future, joys, values, feelings, pains, mutual trust, openness, and sexual affection.' In the context of a Christian marriage, he adds that it is a relationship in which the couple first turn to Christ and then to each other 'in mutual commitment to a partnership that allows them to develop their unique gifts but draws them together in a sense of oneness' (Collins 1996:109). Thus, Collins recognises that intimacy can come about when the husband and wife allow each other the freedom to extend one's potential without feeling stifled or boxed in.

Agreeing with Collins, Les and Leslie Parrott assert that both spouses must accept that there are gender differences in their psychological being.[64] Husbands and wives must consider 'what their spouses need, then providing it' if there is to be intimacy or connectedness between them (Parrott & Parrott 1995:98).

Elaborating on what these gender differences are psychologically, they (Parrott & Parrott 1995:99) suggest that a woman's most basic needs in marriage are:

> - *To be cherished:* a woman likes to hear from the man that she holds a prime position in his life; that she is remembered fondly by him. Hence, words like 'I love you' mean much to her though the man may already be tired of verbalising them.
>
> - *To be known:* a woman wishes to be listened to and have her feelings validated by the man. What she really wants is to be accepted by the man, not to be advised or fixed by him.
>
> - *To be respected:* a woman wants the man to take her views seriously. She wants him to seek her opinions and to let her be a part of the decision-making process. Also, she wants the man to be supportive of her dreams and aspirations in life.

On the other hand, man has a diffferent set of most basic needs in marriage. Les and Leslie Parrott (1995:104) identify them as:

> - *To be admired:* the male ego makes a man desire not flattery, but sincere praise and appreciation from his wife.
>
> - *To be autonomous:* this is the man's preference for space in order to be focused, especially during times of stress. He needs time to be alone so as to regroup himself . This may make him look cold and distant to his wife.
>
> - *To have shared activity:* instead of talking about things, man prefers doing things with others, especially in some recreational or fun activities. For example, playing a tennis game with someone is already a great time for the man even if hardly anything is talked about.

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[64] Les and Leslie Parrott are co-directors of the Centre for Relationship Development at the Seattle Pacific University (SPU), USA. Les is also a professor in clinical pyschology at SPU while Leslie is a marriage family therapist at the same institution.

Gregg Johnson , associate professor of biology at Bethel College, USA, adds that gender-specific behaviours can also be explained using a biological/physiological basis. Man and woman can develop intimacy by accepting this basis, thereby maximising each other's potentials. Johnson says:

> ... we have some fundamental physiological and neural differences that are present at birth and predispose us toward certain behaviours dependent on gender. We should not conclude automatically that because men and women may have different gifts, traditional roles are the only way they may be expressed. Yet it seems very significant that these different gifts correspond very well to the different roles given to men and women in Scripture ....
>
> Our culture has changed, and the demands for traditional roles may have varied, yet our basic, God-given physiological differences have not. We excel at different gifts, and all the gifts are needed. Let us hope that, by recognising the existence of gender differences, we can better understand each other and help to maximise each other's potentials. Likewise, by accepting our God-given gifts, we can resist cultural pressures to become what we are not and to seek to master gifts we don't possess.[65]

Don Browning considers this maximising of each other's potentials in a marital relationship as an attempt to achieve mutuality or equal regard.[66] In fact, he (Browning et al 1997:273) asserts that the core of Christian love is equal regard rather than self-sacrifice. The Golden Rule in Mt 7:12 which states that 'in everything do to others as you would have them do to you,' and the mutual submission in Eph 5:21 which calls for spouses to 'be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ' are just two examples of love as equal regard.

To understand why there was resistance to mutual submission within the family setting in Jesus' time, Don Browning points out that the Jewish family then was like a patriarchal clan.[67] Hence, the man had great control and powers over relations, freedmen and slaves in the

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[65] Johnson, Gregg 1991. The Biological Basis for Gender-Specific Behaviour, in Piper, John & Grudem, Wayne (ed), *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood,* 280-293. Wheaton: Crossway Books.
[66] Don Browning is professor of religion and psychological studies at the Divinity School, University of Chicago.
[67] *Family* is *familia* in Latin, *oikos* in Greek and *mispaha* in Hebrew.

family structure. This pattern was very similar to the Greco-Roman household code whereby master, husband and father ruled over slave, wife and children (Browning et al 1997:132-33).

Browning and others (1997:134) also explain that when Jesus says that He is turning a person against his family members in Mt 10:34-35, it is not an attack on the family, but on the clan structure which gives the patriarchal figure even the power and control to stop family members from being a part of God's family. In this sense, Jesus was not anti-family, but calling people to a higher code of living and relating, that is, to submit to the code of God's Kingdom rather than the code of family clans.

Besides, the honour-shame code in the ancient Mediterranean world and Greco-Roman thinking had greatly reinforced male dominance and female compliance. In that time and culture, a man's honour was in protecting his private sphere from being intruded or insulted by others. Included in his private sphere were his wife, children, mother and sister. The man would avoid shame - thereby keeping his honour - by protecting, controlling and guiding these people in his private sphere. On the other hand, a woman was to keep her shame as it was a positive thing for her. She would be shameless if she lost her shame - that is, if she had refused to submit to the man's protection, control or guidance (Browning et al 1997:142).

In Eph 5:25, Paul calls on husbands to love their wives 'just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.' Browning believes that this Pauline teaching retains the essence of male headship but challenges the Greco-Roman code of male dominance in the family. He (Browning et al 1997:144-45) highlights three differences between this Pauline call and the Greco-Roman code (as represented in Aristotelian thinking):

> - Before v 25, Paul has already called family members to 'be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ' in v 21. This is an equality expressed through mutual submission. On the other hand, Aristotelian thinking only advocates 'proportional friendship,' not full equality. The greater person - that is, the patriarchal male - should be 'more equal' than the rest in the family. Hence, it is never in Aristotelian thinking that husband and wife should submit

to each other on equal terms. Rather, this 'proportional submission' is to be on the husband's terms.

- To 'be subject' (*hypotassomai*) in v 21 implies that husband and wife are to regard each other as capable of leading. Hence, there will be times when it is necessary and fitting for the wife to take the leading role. On the other hand, Aristotle confers this right to rule or lead only to the husband.

- When husband and wife submit to one another out of reverence for Christ (v 21), Paul implies that both spouses have trust in each other's leadership because each leads in the spirit of Christ's love. Again, this does not correspond with Aristotelian thinking which views man as having better rational capacity than woman, and thus, should be given the responsibility to lead.

Browning asserts that the male headship passages in the New Testament ('e g' Eph 5:23; Col 3:18; 1 Pt 3:1) must be interpreted in the historical context of first-century Mediterranean culture and the Greco-Roman world. In fact, he claims that advances in the study of families in the first-century Mediterranean areas reveal that early Christianity has progressively influenced the male role in family life in that it brings about 'heightened degrees of female equality ... and less of a double standard in sexual ethics' (Browning at al 1997:131). Both the husband and the wife are to shortchange neither oneself nor the other. Thus, pertaining to mutual submission between husband and wife, the arrived conclusion is this: equal regard is to be achieved through mutual decision between the spouses, and not only as dictated by just one party (Browning et al 1997:153).

What is implied is that Christian love in general, and marital love in particular, does not demand an 'other regard' whereby self-love, self-regard or self-fulfilment is excluded. However, equal regard does demand that we take the other's good as seriously as our own. There is a place for personal ambition, but never at the expense of the other (Browning et al 1997:275). In other words, the Bible supports an ordinate love for self. In fact, self-sacrifice stems out of self-love, that is, giving is done with an ordinate expectation of getting. Jesus' own sacrifice is an example - His willingness to die on the Cross stems out of His desire to be

accepted as Saviour and Lord by sinful people. This, in a nutshell, exemplifies the principle of equal regard or mutuality that binds people together.

Thus, self-giving is to empower equal regard in the marital relationship and not an end in itself. When equal regard is the intended end, there is endurance in the relationship even if no immediate gain is in sight - this is the basis of marital commitment and covenant (Browning et al 1997:290). Such marital commitment endures not only the pain of hard times, but also endures for the joy of mutuality to come.

The headship of the man over his wife is one of authority as ordained by God, and not as a result of the Fall. And this authority is to be exercised with love and respect because it is over one who is man's equal in creation and redemption. Thus, man seeks to reach mutually agreeable decisions with his wife as much as possible. On the other hand, the wife's submission to the man does not mean that she stops thinking and acting out of her own initiative and creativity. Rather, in her submission to the man, she is willing to share her thinking and acting with him. Such an understanding of mutuality is foundational to spousal intimacy.[68]

Child nurturing: In the equal-regard family, man and woman are to have equal access to the benefits of paid employment. At the same time, both need to guard against 'materialism and market idolatry' (Browning et al 1997:318).

Collins (1996:144) also points out this danger by commenting that paid employment has often tired out working parents when they reach home. Consequently, time spent with children are often 'rushed and distracted,' and this can bring forth 'adverse effects on the well-being and the emotional and intellectual development of the children.'

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[68] See Chapter III, p182.

In fact, concerning the roles of man and woman at home, including that of child nurturing, Van Leeuwen (1998:80) argues that the input of both father and mother is essential.[69] And how best for man and woman to participate in the domestic arena 'depends more on individual differences within families at different stages of the family life cycle than on some unchanging essence of "womanliness," "manliness," or "ideal family life" ....' In other words, she considers many household responsibilities, including child nurturing, as gender neutral, and man should be as responsible as woman in performing these functions.

However, worthy parents maintain in focus their primary calling from God. For the man, his primary calling is that of breadwinner and provider (Gn 3:17-19). He is also called to 'manage his own household' (1 Tm 3:4-5), and to instruct and oversee his children (Eph 6:4). This implies that the man must actively engage himself not only at work, but also at home. For the woman, her primary calling is to care for the children and the home (Pr 31:26-27; 1 Tm 5:14; Tt 2:5). But this does not mean that she cannot work outside the home, especially if this can genuinely benefit her family and others without undermining her role at home (Pr 31:10-31).[70]

The willingness of man and woman to exercise mutual dependence and cooperation in home management demonstrates that they do not fight for equity in order to elevate their own self. Rather, they desire an other-centred, loving life in all that they do without compromising their own dignity at the same time.[71]

Speaking specifically on the role of fathering, Theodore Stoneberg (1998:72), professor of pastoral care and counselling at the Anderson School of Theology in USA, lists out five dimensions of Christian fatherhood:

- breadwinning

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[69] Mary S Van Leeuwen is professor of psychology and philosophy at Eastern College, USA.
[70] See Chapter III, p182.
[71] See Chapter III, p183.

- nurturing

- community building

- helping family find its place in time and history

- sharing life with family.[72]

Responding to these dimensions of fatherhood, Browning and others (1997:297) remind fathers that their sacrifices in parenting are only transitional in that the goal is to help their children to reciprocate later on with equal regard. Indeed, parents are there for their children so that in time to come, these young ones will grow up to be there for their parents. It is this that makes child nurturing potentially challenging and rewarding.

4.2.3 An evaluation of views. What can be gathered from the public interest generated by the Singapore government on being a pro-family society is that a strong family is only a means to economic ends. In fact, Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong has openly admitted that pro-family practices are desirable as a 'useful strategic weapon' to compete for world-class talents to settle down in Singapore and help further the nation's progress and prosperity. Even Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong himself sounds tentative when he says that though a 'judicious balance' between work and family is needed, such priorities are best left as personal decisions. He has also stressed that men should be willing to share more in home responsibilties since the dual-income family is becoming the norm. However, Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew has observed that the 'present generation of two-income families emphasises individual fulfilment more than family stability.'

In spite of all these pro-family comments by some of the most authoritative voices in Singapore, the key message from the top echelon of government is this: 'Put more emphasis on the family, but do not work at a less intense pace.' Hence, the Singapore Civil Service has

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[72] Stoneberg says that these correspond to five anthropological dimensions of fatherhood: provision, caretaking, protection, endowment and formation.

decided against a five-day work week in order to reinforce this key message. This stance has in turn resulted in people responding to the government's pro-family calls with little enthusiasm, and even with some confusion. In fact, 'despite calls from the Government to the private sector, many companies have few family-friendly benefits.'[73]

A recent survey by the National University of Singapore discloses that 'a working woman's marital happiness depended a lot on her husband's involvement in household work and how much time he spent with the family.' Dr Paulin Straughan, one of the researchers, points out that 'work affects family because the same people who play work roles also play family roles.' The same survey also reveals that 67.6 % of the women agreed that 'the wife's job is just as important as the husband's job.'[74] This implies that women work as hard as men, especially in a driven economic environment. Evidently, this preoccupation makes it difficult for spouses to satisfactorily fulfil their family responsibilities, or even to sustain intimacy between themselves. And unless family stability is emphasised as 'significant welfare' rather than 'strategic weapon' in Singapore, the family-friendly enthusiasm is going to be mild. Until then, the Christian family must be bold and decisive enough to turn to the Bible for some emphatic directives and principles in home life.

John Gray's call to first understand gender differences rather than to implement techniques in enhancing spousal intimacy is commendable. While sexual differences relate to biology, gender differences relate to psychology. If God created man and woman with biological differences, it then follows that He also created them with psychological differences.[75] And the differences in the way they think and respond are just expressions with

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[73] *The Straits Times* 25 October 2000. Only a few firms here are family-friendly, p54.
[74] *The Straits Times (Home Section)* 13 November 2000. Household chores factor in marital bliss, pH2.
[75] Clincal psychologist, Les Parrott III (Parrott & Parrott 1995:92), has pointed out that biological differences do bring about psychological differences. He gives the example that unlike men biologically, women have larger connections between the two hemispheres of their brain. This gives women an edge in verbal ability over men. On the other hand, men's greater brain hemisphere separation makes them better in abstract reasoning. Translated into psychological responses, women tend to connect and talk about their problems, and men tend

which man and woman complement each other in their relationship. These differences are meant to enable man and woman to establish interrelatedness instead of disconnectedness. Gray is right to point out that a recognition of these differences can free man and woman from judging each other. This awareness of the differences help them to accept each other's thinking and action as different, and not necessarily wrong.

However, to respond maturely in everyday relationships and situations, we need more than Gray's psychology to help explain the male and female natures. More importantly, we need a theology to help express the Christ-like nature. Expectedly, it must transcend whatever set patterns that psychology has imposed on human behaviour so that the mature person is not merely more man or woman, but more Christlike.

One catches a glimpse of this in the Gethsemane scene in Mk 14:32-42. Jesus, knowing that His death was near, went to Gethsemane with Peter, James and John. He was 'deeply distressed and troubled' and 'overwhelmed with sorrow.' He shared His heaviness with Peter, James and John who belonged to His inner circle of disciples. Then, He withdrew away from them. From a psychological standpoint, how Jesus responded during this time of distress was mostly natural and human - He felt sorrow; He shared it with others; He isolated Himself. However, what makes His response transcendent of psychological explanations is that He *prayed* while the disciples *slept.* Psychologically speaking, it is the act of the human nature to isolate oneself and sleep away one's sorrow in times of distress. But Jesus here did not demonstrate the human nature but the Christ-nature when He turned to praying instead of sleeping. Perhaps, the Lord's praying and the disciples' sleeping are deliberately highlighted so

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to isolate and reason out things. Hence, these psychological tendencies are not due to socialisation factors, but to biological differences between men and women. If biological differences are real and created by God, it follows that psychological differences are also real and created by Him.

that the behaviour of the Christ-nature and that of the human nature can be sharply contrasted.[76]

Hence, psychology is helpful in that it enables us to better understand humankind as created men and women. However, the quest for mature personhood transcends psychology because it is not to be more man or more woman, but to be more Christlike. Jack and Judy Balswick sum up well when they say that Jesus demonstrated that He was the perfect person by integrating in Himself the traits of manhood and womanhood. This then is the key to spousal intimacy - helping each other to be a mature person with the Christ-nature. And for the Christian man, the Balswicks are right in extolling him to find his manhood not by proving his masculine superiority over his wife, but by his willingness to be equally involved with her in their life together.

Terese Hall, adjunct professor of spiritual formation at Oral Roberts University and Northeastern State University in USA, says it well when she notes that 'the Christlike personality is one characterised by balance - by an ability to be strong, weak, loving, and assertive, as the situation warrants. To the extent the women and men are encouraged to develop some aspects of the Christlike personality and discouraged from developing others, their spiritual formation is hindered.' We see this balance in Jesus' personality very clearly in His life. He was powerful and assertive at certain times, yet at other times, He was gentle and emotional. And for spousal intimacy to grow, both man and woman are called into spiritual formation - that is into the process of being conformed to the image of Christ for each other's sake. This implies that the masculine and feminine aspects in each of them represent features of a Christ-like personality, and 'neither alone fully reflects the image of Christ.' Hall stresses this point as it signifies that 'masculinity or femininity can be separated from gender roles' -

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[76] This insight was shared by the Rev Michael Shen, Principal of Singapore Bible College, in his sermon at the Evangel Baptist Church on 5 November 2000.

that is, child nurturing and housework do not necessarily make a man less masculine; earning big money and holding a high-position job do not necessarily make a woman less feminine.[77]

The Balswicks have also pointed out that spousal intimacy is not a contractual obligation but a covenantal action. That is, this state of relationship is to be arrived at by working on it, and not be demanded without any effort. Diana Garland has asserted that a marital relationship begins with love and faithfulness, not covenant, because God Himself was already loving and faithful to Israel long before He made any covenant with them at Mt Sinai. But what Garland fails to note is that God had covenanted Himself not at Mt Sinai, but long before that. God had said to Moses *before* the Exodus: 'I am the LORD. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name the LORD I did not make myself known to them. I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, where they lived as aliens. Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered my covenant' (Ex 6:2-5, NIV). Hence, Garland is wrong to say that God's covenants with Israel in biblical history are the result of His love and faithfulness. Rather, the reverse is true - God's love and faithfulness to the Israelites in biblical history is the result of His covenants with them.

Hence, the Balswicks are right to affirm that love and faithfulness in a marital relationship are expressions of a covenantal commitment. Out of these expressions, male headship and female submission become the outworking of grace, and freedom to develop one's potential becomes an outworking of empowerment. Indeed, as suggested by the Balswicks, spousal intimacy is enhanced when there is adaptability.

In the case of the man, he can initiate this enhancement by reminding himself that he is covenanted to exercise accountability, and not only authority. 1 Tm 2:13-14 in the NIV reads:

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[77] Hall, Terese A Fall/1997. Gender Differences: Implications for Spiritual Formation and Community Life. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 16, 222-232.

'For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.' This passage has often been used to emphasise man's authority over woman. But what is often overlooked is the emphasis on man's accountability before God in this passage. In saying that Adam was formed first, Paul is here indicating that the first person answerable to God was Adam, not Eve. And in saying that Adam was not the one deceived, Paul is here indicating that Adam was deliberate. Unlike Eve who was a deceived sinner, Adam was a deliberate sinner, and that made him more accountable before God.

Thus, man is not to be so focused on his authority that he forgets about his accountability. While authority may make him adamant on law and power in the family, accountability will make him adaptable to the outworking of grace and empowerment for the good of the woman. Gary Collins puts it aptly when he says that intimacy comes about when a spouse - in particular, the man - allows the partner to extend his/her potential without feeling threatened by him/her.

Don Browning calls this an attempt to achieve mutuality or equal regard. It is to uphold the other's interest in order to uphold one's own interest. Such a basis of mutuality grants a sense of hope and purpose in any relationship building. In the case of a marital relationship, it challenges the spouses to persevere in ironing out their problems even if no immediate progress is in sight.

In his argument for equal regard, Browning suggests that love for the other and love for self are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In fact, it does seem that there is biblical support to show that self-sacrifice and self-love can go hand-in-hand. Jesus' own death on the Cross has the intention of drawing others to believe in Him. Without this intention to be believed by others - this self-love - His death would be a meaningless self-sacrifice. Of course,

not all will believe in Him, and this is the risk inherent in any attempt toward equal regard in a relationship.

Also, the Bible does not teach that we should love others but hate ourselves. Rather, we are to love others as we love ourselves (see Lv 19:18 and Mk 12:31). Again, love for others and love for self are not viewed as mutually exclusive.

When applied to a married couple, the man then is to love and respect his wife by seeking to achieve equal regard in their relationship. This implies that he works at empowering her to extend her potential, at sharing rather than segregating family tasks, and at reaching mutually agreeable decisions as much as possible. This basis of mutuality or equal regard is good not only for the woman, but also for the man. It enables him to exercise his God-given authority and accountability without undermining the worth of his partner as one equal to him in creation and redemption.

Attention is now turned to the issue of family responsibilities, especially that of child nurturing. One finding in the recent University of Missouri-St Louis study is particularly relevant to Singapore. It is the conclusion that children are not too concerned about gender in that a stay-at-home father is still very much a father. This is relevant to Singapore because women in this nation are generally well educated with good earning power. In fact, the government had not too long ago urged these women to be open to marry downward - that is, to be open to marry men with lower education, and by implication, lower earning power. Though women who are married downward may not be in the majority in Singapore today, what is increasingly evident is that many are married on par - that is, many women are equal to their husbands in terms of education and earning power.

Also worth noting is the study by Elisabeth Harvey of the University of Massachusetts. Her findings include the conclusion that what is crucial to children is not whether their

mothers work outside the home or not, but the mental stability and maturity of their parents. This conclusion is quite plausible because women too need space to experience life outside the home, especially if they are well educated and skilled. Such a woman who is denied of this space may find herself stifled and unfulfilled. And if Harvey is right with her conclusion, the mental stability and maturity of this woman will be negativey affected. This in turn will affect negatively the quality of family life.

This possible scenario has led to the following comments in a recent debate in the Singapore Parliament:[78]

> It is no more just the concern of fathers alone who used to be the main providers of families.
>
> Singapore women do contribute substantially to our economy, considering that the share of women in the labour force was 42 per cent last year. Now, more than ever, women are required to be in partnership with men to bring the economy to new heights.
>
> This partnership should embrace a wider field ... like parenting, household chores, economic contributions and so on (Lily Neo, Elected Member of Parliament).
>
> I think we must not be patriarchal. Even if most Singaporeans still believe that the woman must be the primary caregiver to the family, we must be flexible enough to give men the option.
>
> A few men may want to become house-husbands and the primary caregiver to the children ... Even if the norm is otherwise, our system must be flexible enough to allow for this (Simon Tay, Nominated Member of Parliament).

However, David Blankenhorn is especially concerned that downplaying the breadwinning role of the father will result in man devoid of masculinity. To him, providing for the family and toughening the child for challenges outside the home are essential functions of fatherhood. Downplaying these will result in the redundancy of fatherhood.

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[78] *The Straits Times (Home Section)* 15 November 2000. Make bold moves for the family, urge MPs, pH13.

Blankenhorn is right to say that the fathering role is irreplaceable because the best mother is still not the father. Thus, the child needs both male and female figures at home in order to be balanced in his/her character development. However, Blankenhorn seems to have overstated his case when he claims that the de-emphasising of the breadwinning role of man will lead to fathering without masculinity. In today's language, Blankenhorn is saying this: 'If a father does not involved himself primarily in making money for the family, he is no man at all.' But the changing socio-economic climate of today warrants a rethink of this assertion unless he can prove that it is indeed a timeless, universal feature of manhood.

One significant change taking place in today's socio-economic climate is the advent and advance of technology. Though not without inherent dangers, it is no denying that technology has enhanced and enriched the lives of people. Christian experts in family life, Jack and Judy Balswick, have well pointed out that men in the past were expected to do the heavy work outside the home because of their greater physical strength, while women cared for the child at home. But technology has made this division unnecessary because the most valued work outside the home today demands not the functioning of muscles, but of the mind.[79]

The Balswicks must also be commended for cautioning against imposing cultural images onto the biblical portrait of the family. And it does seem that to insist that man is the sole provider of the home is more cultural than biblical. Even the demand placed upon Adam to toil the ground and upon Eve to bear child-birth pain after the Fall cannot be interpreted as biblical ground for man to be the sole provider at home. What one may assert is that the Garden of Eden represents an agricultural economy whereby manual labour, not technology, is

[79] The Balswicks also add that the culture which emphasises that man works outside the home is responsible for the generally domineering character in man because he has to brave the challenges in the outside world. On the other hand, this same culture makes the stay-at-home woman generally tender because of the need for family warmth and comfort.

the means of livelihood. This explains why in Gn 3:17-19, God makes the physically stronger Adam to toil the ground.

In fact, if cooking is the traditional task of a woman, then it can be argued that she is also a provider at home - while the man provides the means to buy food, she provides by laying cooked food on the table. Using the example of cooking again, if it is the domain of women only, then it seems strange that the top chefs in the world are men, not women. In fact, these top male cooks receive much adulation rather than ridicule. Why? The reason lies very much in the dictates of culture. When cooking is work done outside the home, today's culture respects it as a culinary skill. Hence, the man who excels in it is hailed because he is seen to have attained a certain achievement or status. One the other hand, if a man cooks well at home, cultural opinions may ridicule him as being domesticated.

By the same reasoning, the dictates of culture tend to respect the man who provides by working more outside the home, and ridicule the man who provides by working more at home. But the biblical portrait of man's headship implies that he is to be the primary provider, not the sole provider, and as the 'point person' in the family, his provision extends beyond the material to include leadership and security. For example, in Pr 1:18, the son is exhorted to listen to his father's instruction and to keep his mother's teaching. Both the man and woman are named as providers of nurturance for the child though the man is mentioned first so as to stress his position as head of the family.

While it is important not to allow today's culture to erode biblical foundations, it is also equally important not to turn description of family life in Bible times into biblical prescription for family life. Three Christian scholars alert us to socio-cultural influences on family life in Bible times.

S Scott Bartchy (1998:284) on families in Greco-Roman culture:[80]

> Both Greek and Roman philosophers and rhetoricians nurtured a sharp distinction between the private sphere of the household and the public sphere of the city. All males and most females in these cultures regarded the public realm as superior to the household and linked public life with civilisation, freedom, mobility, and acquired honour ....
>
> The male householder, then, functioned both as the representative of his *domus/oikos* in the eyes of his fellow citizens and as the agent of his household's subordination to the loftier goals of the city. In these roles, men were to demonstrate self-mastery, wisdom, and courage. In contrast, women, with inferior household business as their domain, were to demonstrate obedience, chastity, and silence ....

Carolyn Osiek (1998:290) on families in early Christianity:

> ... early Christianity witnesses to the many forms that family can take. While our popular image is the nuclear family, the ancient Christian family more often included a much larger group of people. 'Family' normally meant not the nuclear blood family, though they may have lived together as a unit, but the extended intergenerational network of relationships, as well as all those who shared one roof, whether related by blood or legal ties, as in the case of slaves, freedmen, and freedwomen ....
>
> Thus early Chritianity shows us the many ways in which family was understood and lived. It teaches that the forms and concepts often considered essential by one age are really historically relative and that the family will continue to evolve into new forms as our awareness of human needs and abilities develops.

Don Browning (1998:298) comments that we must not uncritically support the family patterns of the nineteenth century industrial era whereby the man earned wages and the woman stayed at home. He calls for a *critical familism* that '... promotes preparation for and support of the stable, egalitarian husband-wife partnership in which both partners have equal access to the privileges and responsibilities of the public and the private-domestic world.'

Turning to the child-nurturing culture in Singapore today, Joseph Ozawa attributes the father-child gap as a key contributing factor to juvenile delinquency. He discovers that the Singaporean father is primarily interested in making money and disciplining as far as child

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[80] Bartchy is Director of Centre for the Study of Religion, and Adjunct Professor of Christian Origins and History of Religions at University of California in Los Angeles.

nurturing is concerned. Ozawa is probably right as this best reflects traditional Asian fatherhood whereby the father deliberately remains distant and aloof in order to uphold his image as the family head. Hence, the Singaporean father is more likely to dictate choices rather than to allow the child make choices. One result is that the child will tend to be more dependent rather than independent in personality. Another possibility is that the child may feel so stifled or misunderstood that he/she rebels in protest.

Thus, John Gray's fear that parents will have their authority undermined if they give too many choices to their children may not be true for fathers in Singapore. But his suggestion that fathers draw out clear boundaries for their children and take time to listen to them is indeed helpful advice. The Christian man in Singapore needs to acknowledge the importance of active fatherhood - that is, his influence and input are just as needed at home as they are needed in his workplace.

On this note, a third challenge in Singaporean society will now be discussed as the final segment of this dialogue in the present chapter.

4.3 The Challenge to Masculine Enterprise

Singapore is thriving today because her leaders put their hearts together to fight the early difficulties of nation building. This experience points to one important lesson about being enterprising, especially for the man - the world does not owe one a living; he is to be the master of his own destiny. The challenge then is for him to be pragmatically ambitious by being steely in his determination, and nimble in his navigation through circumstances so that he changes as he finds the world in order to realise the goals of his own conviction.

4.3.1 Some secular views on man and his work. The focus here will be on the Singapore scene. Perhaps, one good way to discuss the changing scenario that man

experiences in his workplace is to first look at how the role of women has evolved in Singapore. The following quotes will help capture this change.

Anamah Tan, lawyer and President of Singapore Council of Women's Organisations:[81]

> In what I've seen over the last 30 years, the role of women has certainly become more complex. In my grandmother's or even my mother's day, when a young girl grew up, she was taught how to cook, clean, sew and look after the home. She then got married and had children - that was her life.
>
> With the advent of education and industrialisation, women went into factories, professions and business. That's when the complexity of the role slowly creeps in.
>
> She becomes the supplementary breadwinner, earns money and spends more time outside the home. That complexity is continuing even more. Except that now, women are more entrepreneurial and many are starting up their own companies.
>
> To say that we've evolved stops short of what's truly happening out there. I think the word 'revolution' would be more apt.

Dr Audrey Chia, Assistant Professor of Organisational Behaviour, National University of Singapore:[82]

> For all women, I wish for increased access to education and progressively higher levels of education, to give them greater self-confidence and independence.
>
> With education, women will be better able to manage their finances and health, and to assume more important positions in the international economy. I also hope women will come to exert increasing influence on management norms and practices.
>
> I hope employers will consider how they can become more family-friendly. How can they improve job design and work practices to allow both men and women to effectively balance work and family?
>
> As we embark on a new century, let us leave our old gender stereotypes behind and try to appreciate each person for what he or she is.

Noor Quek, banker and Co-Founder of Singapore Breast Cancer Foundation:[83]

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[81] *The Straits Times (Recruit Section)* 9 March 2000. Women of substance, p40.
[82] *The Straits Times (Recruit Section)* 10 March 2000. Millennium women, p53.
[83] *The Straits Times (Recruit Section)* 10 March 2000. The 21st century woman, p54.

> Women do play very important roles, particularly at home, as a wife and mother. If things are not right at home, the man will not be able to perform at work, and the children don't grow up properly.
>
> I'm not saying that the woman has to stay home. If she can run the home as a stabilised unit and still have a successful career, by all means.
>
> I am a firm believer that a woman's first priority is still to the family. But somewhere down the line, these gender issues have got mixed up. That has happened because we're trying to compare ourselves with men, trying to think that we can take on men's roles. We can never and vice versa.
>
> We should try to complement each other, not compete. My advice: Stop trying to be the opposite sex. Be yourself. Build up and nurture those strengths given to you by nature.

Major Lim Sok Bee, Commanding Officer of 21st Singapore Artillery Battalion, and first woman to hold the appointment:[84]

> It is a misconception that all combat officers have to always run around. The job of an artillery officer involves calculations, to come up with firing data. We also have to apply tactics and analysis of battle situations.
>
> My greatest challenge is man management, or how to handle your people. Only then can other things fall into place.
>
> You have to get the respect of not only your commanders and peers, but also your subordinates as well.
>
> When women first started as combat officers, there were some reservations, as male officers did not know how we will perform.
>
> But, after having worked together with them, we are now accepted as their equals.

We see then a slow but sure change in how women want to be treated and how they are treated in the workplace. There is a general desire on the part of women to be as capable as men in work, and to be accepted and respected as such. This then is the emergent challenge which men in Singapore have to deal with in the course of their work.

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[84] *The Straits Times* 20 September 2000. Army's 1st - a woman commanding officer, p52.

Perhaps, one of the most esteemed men in Singapore whose voice carries the authority to influence how people should work must be Lee Kuan Yew, the nation's founding Prime Minister and now Senior Minister. He is a man of strong convictions yet pragmatic enough to change in order to realise them. In fact, experience has taught Lee to be a realist rather than to remain an idealist. His call to the country to be willing to change in order to realise higher convictions or ambitions is reflected in his own personal style of working in his political life. This call can be heard in his own words in the following quotes.[85]

On the Great Marriage Debate in 1983:

> ... Our best women were not reproducing themselves because men who were their educational equals did not want to marry them ....
>
> This lopsided marriage and procreation pattern could not be allowed to remain unmentioned and unchecked. I decided to shock the young men out of their stupid, old-fashioned, and damaging prejudices.
>
> I urged them to marry their educational equals, and encouraged educated women to have two or more children. Graduate women were upset that I had spotlighted their plight. Non-graduate women and their parents were angry with me for dissuading graduate men from marrying them. I was attacked in a flood of comments and letters to the press for being an elitist because I believed intelligence was inherited and not the result of education, food, and training.
>
> The open discussion made some difference. [But] it would take many years to reverse the trend. By 1997, 63 % of graduate men married fellow graduates, as against 38 % in 1982. Also, more graduate women were marrying non-graduates rather than remaining single. It is difficult to override a deep-rooted cultural bias.

On immigration changes in 1999:

> A new phenomenon is the increasing number of Caucasian men marrying our women, especially the tertiary-educated. Singapore graduate men were fearful of marrying them but the Caucasian graduates were not. Many of these women were forced to emigrate by our rules that allowed a Singapore male citizen to bring in a foreign bride, but not the other way round. We gave that permission only if the foreign husband had regular employment. We changed this policy in January 1999: This will add to the cosmopolitan atmosphere of Singapore. Furthermore, quite a number of our men who were educated abroad have married Caucasian, Japanese, and other Asian girls they met at university. Their

[85] Lee, Kuan-Yew 2000. In His Words. *Asiaweek* (22 September), pp56-63.

> children are invaluable additions to our talent pool. We have to change our attitudes and take advantage of what was once considered foreign and not assimilable talent.

On the embracing of technology:

> But while I spearheaded the early drive for computerisation and payments by electronic transfer, I did not myself use a PC although they had become common. When they (*sic*) younger ministers e-mailed each other in the mid-1990s, I had my e-mail printed out and responded by fax.
>
> Left 'out of the loop,' I decided at the age of 72 to take instructions. For the graying generation, it was not easy. It was many months before I could work my MS Word and e-mail without help every now and again from my secretaries ... Now I would not travel without my laptop to access my e-mail.

On the revamping of banks in 1997:

> I decided in 1997 to break the old mould [of inward-looking domestic banks]. Singapore banks needed an infusion of foreign talent and a different mindset. If these three big banks would not move, then the DBS Bank, in which the government had a stake, should set the pace.
>
> ... Now I believed the time had come for the tough international players to force our Big Four to upgrade their services or lose market share. There was a real risk that they may not be able to compete, in which case we may end up with no Singapore-owned and managed banks to depend on in a financial crisis.
>
> ... Major financial centres such as New York and London concentrated on protecting not the different market players or the individual investors, but the system itself.
>
> As I did not want to revamp the MAS myself, early in 1997, with the prime minister's permission, I involved Loong in the work. He began meeting bankers and fund managers and mastered the workings of our financial sector. On January 1, 1998, when the prime minister appointed him chairman of the MAS, he was ready to move.[86]

Indeed, Lee Kuan Yew's working style certainly makes him well respected, though not necessarily well liked. His call is this - be bold enough to change so that you can remain in a position of power to control your own destiny.

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[86] 'Loong' refers to Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong. He is the elder son of Lee Kuan Yew.

Such a desire for power and control can lead to what Steve Smith (1996:8) describes as *threat power.*[87] It is to get what is desired by controlling or even coercing others in some ways. And it is often this desire on the part of the male in his working style that causes him to neglect developing a second kind of power - *integrative power.* This is the power to care for and love others. Smith (1996:16) believes that it rests with a person essentially and morally 'to replace threat power with integrative power and fear with love, without endangering fundamental human goods of life, health safety, compassion, and human flourishing.'

Robert Weiss (1991:210) comments that men work hard not so much for income power, but because work itself is valued as it makes them feel adequate as a person in society and at home.[88] Work itself is more important than income to a man because the latter can only sustain him materially, but not socially. To be without work is to be marginalised and valued less by others. Indeed, for men, 'worklessness leads to feelings of worthlessness' (Weiss 1991:213). Thus, the power of work for men lies not in income, but in self-esteem.

This quest for self-esteem leads man to develop and sharpen his ability to self-listen in the workplace as a skill to gain success in a dog-eat-dog world. This is the ability to mentally rehearse and hear what you will say in order to make yourself look good and your colleague look bad.[89]

Also, man's tendency to be focused in his awareness locks him in to view things sequentially as his way of building up a complete picture for himself. He tends to follow the order of planning, organising, controlling, coordinating and evaluating. Such a sequence is his way of ensuring results, goals, efficiency and competitiveness in his work.[90]

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[87] Steve Smith is professor of philosophy at Claremont McKenna College, USA.
[88] Robert Weiss is research professor at the University of Massachusetts where he specialises in work and family research.
[89] Chapter II, p95.
[90] Chapter II, p97.

This typical working style of man has to do with him being more action-empathetic than emotional-empathetic. Being action-empathetic, man is good at doing things that will encourage the predicted response to reach a desired goal. He is good at reading the mind and then acting out his plans. But being not emotional-empathetic, he is weak in identifying feelings; he is not good at reading the heart. The challenge then is for him to sharpen his emotional-empathetic skills - to read the heart, to understand feelings, and to lift up the worth of another.[91]

However, whether man works more out of a desire for self-esteem or for big money is debatable. But it is interesting to note that though Lee Kuan Yew has committed his life to govern Singapore out of a consuming sense of nationalism, he now views this sense of duty as an ideal lacking in the younger set of Singaporeans. In fact, Lee believes that he must be realistic enough to attract the brightest brains into government by paying them well. This is to ensure that the government is corruption-free and continues to be run by the most able people in the land. Hence, he proposed in Parliament as Senior Minister in 1994 for hefty increases in the salaries of ministers, judges and top civil servants. This proposal was eventually approved with the salaries of ministers and senior public officers 'pegged at two-thirds of the earnings of their private sector equivalents.' This caused an enormous uproar from the professional circles as they consider these salaries 'completely out of proportion to what ministers were paid in advanced countries' (Lee 2000:195).

Lee (2000:196) argues:

> ... I was able to help the prime minister justify this change and rebut the arguments that ministers were more than adequately compensated by the honour of high office and the power they wielded, and that public service should entail sacrifice of income. I believed this high-minded approach was unrealistic and the surest way to make ministers serve only briefly, whereas continuity in office and the experience thus gained have been a great advantage and strength in the Singapore government. Our ministers have provided the

[91] Chapter II, p101.

> experience and judgement the government has shown in its decisions, the result of their ability to think and plan long-term.

With these words, Lee asserts that while serving the country out of a sense of duty is a noble ideal, the reality is that for Singapore to continue to have a clean and strong government, the best people must be attracted to serve by paying them well. In pragmatic Singapore, capable men are called to work with diligence and honour - for country and for money.

4.3.2 Some Christian views on man and his work. Robert Schnase contends that ambitions are not wrong for men. In fact, he asserts that a positive ambition is one that challenges a man to turn outward so that he can live for others. He uses his God-given energies to serve and to grow so that he can be true to God and himself (Schnase 1993:15).

On the other hand, a man who works without any sense of ambition opens himself to the temptation of sloth. If he falls to it, he avoids the harder work and thereby diminishes his life. Sloth holds him back in inertia. He lacks the faith and courage to engage the world with all his God-given gifts and talents. In the end, he denies himself the fulfilment of his own individuality and that of God's will for his life (Schnase 1993:57).

However, Schnase (1993:15-17) also speaks of the negative effects of ambitions in the life of a man:

> - *Drivenness:* this is especially harmful if it pushes the man toward unrealistic goals. The failure to achieve them will lead to great personal unhappiness, risking mental and family health.
>
> - *Unsettling lifestyle:* ambitions can distress a man when he is always wanting more recognition. Hence, he is seldom happy at one place for long, and is always looking for 'greener pastures.'
>
> - *Uncooperative attitude:* ambitions can isolate a man from others when he views them as rivals rather than as partners.

Schnase comments further on ambitions in one's work by highlighting two closely-related dangers - pride and envy. On the concern about pride, he (Schnase 1993:44-45) says:

> In pride's grasp, we lose the Christian sense of empathy and compassion because we are too focused on our own needs to pay attention to what goes on inside someone else. When I am consumed with myself, our mutuality is undermined, for I find joy only in *my* accomplishment and not yours, *my* work and not yours. Pride pushes away any suggestion that the work is *ours* together.
>
> Pride corrupts our ambitions by steering us toward activities that serve ourselves. All actions are evaluated by their effect, positive or negative, on ourselves, rather than on promoting God's will. Therefore, it points us toward the wrong things - position for sake of being above others, salary for sake of making more than others. It feeds that temporary sense of euphoria that comes with outdoing, outranking, outperforming someone else ....
>
> When James and John decided to move closer to Jesus, it was a commendable and inspired ambition. But when they desired to sit *closest* to Jesus, their focus changed. Rather than looking to Jesus, they glanced furtively over their shoulders at the other disciples, anticipating that their own spiritual accomplishments had markedly overshadowed everyone else's. Pride misdirects ambitions.

And speaking against the ambition to keep up with others all the time, Schnase (1993:47) says this of envy:

> ... Drilled by the urge to acquire or achieve what someone else has, we pursue goals that recede with every step, until we pass the recognised borders of propriety. There is always someone somewhere who has more, who does better. Insatiability is the essence of envy, and envy is a sorrow we feel. It is the opposite of charity, since charity rejoices at a neighbour's good fortune, but envy grieves over it.

In spite of these dangers, man is to work with a sense of ambition. Indeed, many men have not only worked ambitiously, but have done so in order to demonstrate their mature masculinity. What then is mature masculinity? John Piper (1991:35), Senior Pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, defines it this way: 'At the heart of mature masculinity is a sense of benevolent responsibility to lead, provide for and protect women in ways appropriate to a man's differing relationships.'

This is interesting because Piper defines masculinity not primarily in terms of success in a man's work life, but in terms of success in his home life, and with special reference to his wife. He (Piper 1991:38-40) goes on to comment further on what mature masculinity is not:

> - It is not demanding to be served, but to serve and to sacrifice for the good of woman. After all, in Eph 5:23-25, Christ is described as giving Himself up for His bride - the church.
>
> - It does not presume superiority, but mobilises the strengths of others. This means that the ideas and desires of others are given regard. In the marital relationship, a mature man loves rather than controls his wife. In so doing, he is really loving himself since she is a part of his own body (Eph 5:28-29).
>
> - It does not have to initiate all the time, but to set a general pattern of leadership. This implies that he feels secured enough to delegate specific functions to another.
>
> - It does not shirk the burden of the final say. But this does not imply there is no place for disagreement. In his relationship with his wife, a mature man will value his wife's views, even if she is not always in agreement with him, because she is his equal in creation and redemption.

Man feels much pride in himself if his work enables him to provide well for his family. Recognising this part of the male ego, Piper (1991:42) advises:

> ... where there is no bread on the table it is the man who should feel the main pressure to do something to get it there. It does not mean his wife can't help ... But a man will feel his personhood compromised if he, through sloth or folly or lack of discipline, becomes dependent over the long haul on his wife's income.

Indeed, man generally views his work seriously in that he seeks his worth by achieving and performing as a worker. While it is not wrong to have achievement-oriented and performance-based ambitions, mature masculinity in God's sight must include:

> - *Faith:* to release things that symbolise one's control in life so that one is obedient and submissive to God's way, and dependent upon Him.
>
> - *Sense of eternity:* to use all the opportunities to build not one's earthly kingdom, but that of God - that is, to make a difference for the Lord with one's position and possessions in life. It is not to be career-minded, but to be mission-minded; not to live only for this life, but for God's eternity.
>
> - *Integrity in faithfulness:* to do one's honest best and accept what God deems best. The smarter, shortest and easiest way to success may not be right in the

> sight of God. Hence, fruitfulness in one's labour is not success in God's sight if integrity is compromised. A man works hard in order to be faithful, and he prays hard for God to make him fruitful.
>
> - *Servanthood:* to see greatness as not being served, but to serve and empower others so that they can reach their best potentials. In coming down to earth, Jesus turned His position of status into a posture of servanthood. He died in order to serve and empower mankind - that they may believe in Him and become children of God.
>
> - *Sense of God's grace:* to find one's esteem in God's grace. Man is not to work himself restlessly to prove his worth, but to restfully accept that worth which is bestowed upon him by God's grace in Jesus Christ.[92]

4.3.3 An evaluation of views. The candid sentiments expressed by the named women reflect the desire of the generally well-educated female in Singapore today. She values work and family; and if married, she desires a healthy balance between work and family. Most of all, she wants her spouse not only to allow her to do that, but also to help her to do that. In other words, as far as the married woman is concerned, she wants her spouse to strike a healthy balance between work and family as well. She is prepared to be a co-breadwinner with him as she is confident of her own ability to contribute significantly in financial terms. Hence, she is not trying to replace the man in the workplace, or to get the man to replace her at home. It does seem that women today generally expect their spouses to be more of a family partner rather than a family breadwinner. Many factors point to this as a reasonable expectation - acquired skills/training, employment opportunities, rising costs of living, availability of child care facilities, and the need to reinforce the nation's small labour force.

The latest statistics in Singapore show that 15 % of the population confessed to be Christians in 2000 as compared to 13 % in 1990. Also, Christians still form the largest

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[92] See Chapter III, pp183-84.

religious group among those with higher education, and 'seemed to go hand in hand with the English-speaking.'[93]

What this implies is that many Christian women in Singapore are well-educated. Hence, men who have married them, instead of expecting them to want to be domestically bound, must be prepared to give them space to be professionally mobile. These women are looking for a family partner, not a family breadwinner. When applied to a situation whereby the wife earns more in her work than her husband, this partnering mentality implies that the man does not insist that she deliberately scales down her work because of his bruised ego. Rather, he is to acknowledge and accept his wife's ability, and be a supportive partner by contributing more in areas where his wife is weaker than him.

As for the situation at the workplace, well-qualified women want to be respected as capable as men in what they have been assigned to do. It does seem that they are not wanting to outdo men, but for men to realise that their masculinity is in no way undermined if they happen to have women as their equals or superiors at the workplace.

In this regard, John Piper has given good opinions concerning mature masculinity. Two of them are worth reiterating here. Firstly, Piper says that the mature man does not presume superiority over a woman, or feel threatened by her. Rather, he chooses to mobilise her strengths, desiring to promote rather than to control so that she can become a fulfilled person. Secondly, the mature man does not shirk his responsibility of the final say at home. He does not leave all family decisions to his wife by being diligent at work, but negligent at home. This kind of absence or non-involvement amounts to shirking a man's headship role at home. And Piper does well to stress that mature masculinity is not primarily in terms of success in a man's work life, but in terms of success in his home life. Indeed, often times, what contributes

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[93] *The Straits Times (Home Section)* 18 November 2000. Christianity popular among Chinese here, pH7. The term 'Christian' officially refers to either a Roman Catholic or Protestant believer in Singapore.

to a stronger family is not so much the man's extra money, but the man's extended presence at home.

The workplace in Singapore is also where people are called to be pragmatically ambitious - that is, to be flexible and realistic to change so that the desired outcomes can be achieved. This emphasis will unwittingly place the intended end as more important than the means to it. Though dishonesty and corrutpion are never tolerated in society, the pressure to succeed makes these temptations ever present - that is, to tempt one either to give or receive favours in order to achieve something.

The pragmatic environment makes the Christian man especially vulnerable because of his tendency to get results and achieve goals. Integrity is often challenged because this temptation is always there - to work hard not merely to do one's best, but to outperform others to be the best. Ability, rather than integrity, seems to be the distinguishing mark of a successful man.

In 1 Tm 3:3, Paul counsels Timothy to look for church leaders who are 'not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome.' This is the mark of emotional stability in a leader. Indeed, leadership can be emotionally demanding because much is expected but not much is appreciated by others. Thus, leadership can be a very lonely experience. It is no surprise that Paul calls on Timothy to look for emotional stability in a leader.

In 1 Tm 3:2, Paul also adds that a church leader is to be 'husband of one wife.' In v 4, he expects this leader to 'manage his children and household well.' In v 12, Paul asks this pointed question concerning the church leader: 'If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?' In sum, Paul is here calling for the mark of family stability in the leader's home. He is not to be so diligent in shepherding the church (his work) that he becomes so negligent in heading his family.

Now, if emotional and family stability are the two marks of a godly leader, then godly leadership is first about character rather than control; about integrity rather than ability. Since success today is often measured in terms of ability, the temptation to undermine one's integrity in order to appear successful is ever present. But when Paul says in 1 Tm 3:10 that before any man can be accepted into church leadership, he must 'first be tested,' he is not referring to a test of performance, but of personhood; not a test of ability, but of integrity. This is apt counsel for the Christian man who aspires to achieve certain ambition in life - that he is to do his honest best and accept what God deems best for him with contentment.

Pragmatism as an approach of achieving the intended end stems from the desire to have the power to decide one's life and steer one's direction in the sea of changing circumstances. To be pragmatic is to maintain power to master one's fate and destiny. The belief in human power is strong, and thus, gentleness is often viewed with disdain. But gentleness is well emphasised in the Bible. In fact, it is an aspect of the fruit of the Spirit in Gl 5:22-23. The word in Greek (*praus*) describes an untamed horse which has been disciplined to control its wild energy. The horse still retains all its power, but it has learned to put its strength under control; to be gentle. In this sense, man is not to regard gentleness as a weakness in personality, but as a witness of maturity.

Norm Wakefield and Jody Brolsma (2000:112-14) point out four ways in which a man can demonstrate strength in gentleness:[94]

> - Gentleness enables him to lead others without them fearing his strength. He does not use his position to beat them down, but to bring them up.
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> - Gentleness nurtures in others the sense of trust and confidence in him. He works at earning their support rather than demanding it.
>
> - Gentleness draws others to him. On the other hand, a harsh spirit drives them away.

[94] Wakefield is professor of pastoral theology at Phoenix Seminary, USA. Brolsma is his daughter and she works as a writer-cum-editor.

- Gentleness defuses anger or hostility (Pr 15:1). It has the power to turn an enemy into a friend.

In a competitive society, people are constantly told that in order to get things done or to move a step faster, they need to be assertive and demanding. However, the Christian man does well to remember that there is an appropriate place for gentleness without being less masculine. The Bible teaches gentleness not as a feminine trait, but as an expression of the fruit of the Spirit which all Christians, male and female, are to demonstrate.

The fact of the matter is that in an affluent society, even the rich go all out to compete for more wealth; more income. Why? Because wealth imparts a sense of self-esteem, and together these two elements grant power to the man who possesses them. Hence, Robert Weiss is not quite right when he says that the power of work for men lies not in income, but in self-esteem. In actual fact, such power comes from having both income and the accompanying self-esteem. This quest for power through income and its accompanying esteem then becomes the basic reason why even the rich are seeking to accumulate more wealth.

The Bible teaches that the accumulation of wealth for hoarding or personal power has inherent dangers: love of money and lack of love for God ('e g' Pr 11:28; Pr 23:4-5; Mt 6:19-21; Mt 6:24; 1 Tm 6:10; 1 Tm 6:17). The Bible also teaches much about contentment and sharing one's wealth ('e g' Pr 30:7-9; Ac 2:42-47; Rm 12-13; 1 Cor 16:1-3; 2 Cor 8-9; 1 Tm 6:6-8).

What this means is that the Bible does not support the accumulation of wealth for the purpose of hoarding or personal power because it only brings up a materialistic man. Rather, the scriptural teachings exhort one to live modestly with contentment, save as an act of responsible stewardship, and give generously to those in need. These teachings have a moderating effect on the influences of globalisation that stresses on wealth creation rather than

distribution, and aim at bringing up a mature man who finds his worth and esteem in God's grace bestowed upon him in Jesus Christ.

Another tendency of people in a competitive society is to constantly aspire toward high ambitions. And the pragmatic approach to achieving one's ambition tends to direct one's interest only onto oneself - do what works in order to reach one's goal, even if it means at the expense of another's interest. However, as Robert Schnase has asserted, it is not intrinsically wrong for men to have ambitions. But ambition must not lead a man to turn inward and focus only on himself. Schnase says it well when he mentions that a man with a positive ambition uses his God-given energies to serve others, and to grow so that he can be true to God and himself. Indeed, ambition can claim a rightful place in a man's life - he is to be positively ambitious rather than to be pragmatically ambitious. If dividuality is the maturity of a man's unique potential, then a positive ambition acts as a challenge to that end. On the other hand, if individualism is the idolatry of a man's own self, then a pragmatic ambition often lures him to enthrone self-interest as all-consuming.

In Singapore where people are conditioned in many ways by the 'fear-of-losing' (*kiasu*) mentality, the desire to outdo, outrank or outperform others creates just that right environment to breed individualism. It is a drivenness that leads a man to think that he is a lesser person if he has failed to be the best or if he has less than another. It is a mindset that devalues the virtue of doing one's personal best or of striving toward one's unique potential because the goal is to outdo others, and not just to do well.

To counteract this mindset, the example of John the Baptist in Jn 1:19-28 is worth noting. He has done so well as a 'forerunner' of Jesus Christ that many people are attracted to him, giving him titles that reflect their Jewish messianic expectations. But John answers that he is neither the Christ, Elijah nor the Prophet. Instead, he calls himself as 'the voice of one

calling in the desert' who 'makes straight the way for the Lord' (Jn 1:23, NIV). He further says this about Christ: 'He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie' (Jn 1:27, NIV).

This answer best sums up how John sees himself as a person. It is believed in John's time, slaves carried their master's sandals. John considers himself as not even worthy to be Christ's slave (Keener 1993:266). Hence, what John is saying in essence is this: 'You have put me on a pedestal by thinking that I may be the Christ, or Elijah, or the Prophet to come. But I am nothing compared to the Lord. I am not even worthy enough to untie the laces of his sandals.'

Indeed, John has done his utmost to be a faithful 'forerunner' of the Lord - that is his ambition. He also knows that no matter how well he has done, he can never be the Christ; he can only play 'second fiddle' to the Lord. But knowing that he has done his best to fulfil his unique role is good enough for him. John the Baptist does not regard himself as a lesser man even if he cannot be the Christ; even if he cannot be the Number One in spite of his utmost best. This then is John's counsel for the ambitious man: 'You are not a lesser person before God if you have done your best but still lose out to another.'

The reason for being a realist - being pragmatically ambitious - is to achieve one's goal by responding appropriately to changes yet without compromising one's basic convictions. In other words, the aim is to remain in control of one's destiny. Again, it is an emphasis on faith in one's own power rather than in God. Therefore, the self-made man who is admired by many may not be a good example of mature masculinity. Why? Because he wants to be so much in control of his life that he finds it hard to submit to God's way. When a man diminishes himself before God, he is no small man. Rather, he is a big man in that his faith in God is bigger than his faith in himself.

4.4 Chapter Summary

In the light of the three challenges in Singaporean society identified in this chapter, a dialogue between secular and Christian voices has been attempted. This section will now sum up the chapter by articulating some implications or principles based on the evaluative responses to the many views expressed in the dialogue.

4.4.1 Redefining success. In facing the challenge to national prosperity in Singapore, the idea of success is often articulated in terms of competing for economic or material well-being. A more biblical-theological redefinition of success requires that the following be embodied in it:

> - *Success has to do with a man pushing himself to do his honest best, but not necessarily to end up as the best.* It is not about winning over others though this can be a valid motivation. More importantly, it is about finishing well with integrity and dignity. Competition is for one to reach his personal best without reducing the worth of others. Competition is desirable if it is a way of bringing the best out of one another; of spurring one another unto love and good works.
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> - *The best from fallen man is still short of God's standard, and hence, he is to depend on divine power to realise his God-given potential.* The stress on the indomitable human spirit is fallacious in that it pushes one to fight stubbornly rather than to fail gracefully. There are times when the best thing a man can do to himself is to honestly and unashamedly admit to God that he has indeed failed. The gospel truth reassures him that he can fail, and yet be worthy before God because his failure glorifies the truth of God's grace and love.
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> - *The realisation of a man's potential does not only mean that he has achieved something materially because what he has achieved relationally is just as important.* This emphasis on both the material and relational implies that a man must balance his pursuits in life so that these are in line with God's values and purpose. The relational dimension further implies that a man's potential is not so much about his independence of others, but his interdependence with others.
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> - *Hard work toward a better future is not wrong in itself, but it must not be at the expense of enjoying the good present.* The drive to work hard for economic well-being can result in a man always working restlessly for the future, but not relaxing restfully in the present. When he is always working so hard for the future, contentment becomes elusive because of the constant fear that there is not enough for the future. Hence, the so-called virtue of saving more and spending less may ironically be turned into a subtle form of materialism.

- *Enjoyment is not only personal as it also embraces the responsibility to love God and others with one's material blessings.* The materially successful man has the spiritual responsibility to be godly before the Almighty and the moral responsibility to be gracious to the less fortunate.

- *A pilgrim's mentality toward material blessings enables a man to find his worth not in economic power, but in God's redemptive grace.* This mentality challenges him not to empty himself materially by renouncing things, but by releasing things for others' sake. A pilgrim does not see the need to compare and keep up with others materially. He only wishes to be economically viable, not economically superior, while he is still on this pilgrimage.

4.4.2 Reprioritising marriage-family life. The challenge to family stability comes about in Singapore because dual-income families are fast becoming the norm. There are various reasons why it makes good economic sense for both husband and wife to work - the small labour force; good employment opportunities; increasing costs of living; better education/skills; availability of good child care facilities. The challenge then is to balance the demands of work and family. And the need to have economic security without upsetting family stability often calls for a reprioritisation in marriage-family life. Such an attempt warrants the following considerations:

- *Husband and wife work at developing relational intimacy by affirming rather than judging each other's psychological differences.* The differences in the way they think and respond are just expressions with which they complement, not contradict, each other. Hence, they are to use these differences to establish connectedness rather than contention.

- *Husband and wife work at empowering each other not to be more like a man or more like a woman, but to be more like Christ.* Hence, they need more than just good psychology, but sound theology to help each other to be mature with the Christ-nature. For the man, he is not to find his manhood by proving his masculine superiority over his wife, but by his willingness to be equally involved with her in their life together.

- *Since the Christ-like personality embodies both masculine and feminine traits, taking up certain roles may just make us more Christlike rather than less masculine or less feminine.* For example, child nurturing and housework do not necessarily make a man less masculine. On the other hand, earning big money and holding a high-position job do not necessarily make a woman less feminine. In fact, such endeavours by the man and woman may well be their way of serving each other, and the family with Christ-like love and faithfulness.

- *Christ-like love and faithfulness between husband and wife are not optional, but covenantal expressions.* This means that both man and woman must keep working at expressing male headship and female submission as an outworking of grace in their relationship. Also, with this outworking of grace, they are to work at giving freedom to each other to develop one's potential as an outworking of empowerment.

- *The husband is to constantly remind himself that he is covenanted to exercise not only authority, but also accountability in the marital relationship.* As Adam was created first, man is the one made to be answerable to God first. He is not to be so focused on his authority that he forgets about his accountability. While authority makes him adamant on law and power in the family, accountability makes him adaptable to grace and empowering for the good of his wife and children.

- *Mutuality or equal regard toward his wife reflects the husband's accountability in his duty to love one who is equal to him in creation and redemption.* The man loves his wife as a way of expressing his love for himself. Love for others and love for self are not mutually exclusive. To uphold the other's interest can be a way to uphold one's own interest as well. God wants us to love others as we love ourselves, and the man who loves his wife is really loving himself. In the home, what this can mean is that the man chooses to share rather than to segregate family tasks in order to empower his wife to extend her potential. Such equal regard seeks to reach mutually agreeable decisions as much as possible.

- *Man as sole provider is a cultural rather than a biblical assertion.* Eden was an agricultural setting whereby manual labour, not technology, was the means of livelihood. Hence, the physically stronger Adam was told by God to work the ground, and Eve to care for children and home. But the age of technology has made such division unnecessary because the most valued work outside the home today demands more brain than muscles. Advances in the study of families in Bible times have also indicated that many of the passages pertaining to family life are descriptive rather than prescriptive in purpose. In fact, the family structure in those days was more like a clan, and thus, more extended and very unlike the structure of the contemporary nuclear family.[95]

- *Equal regard means that both man and woman, as partners in life, are to have equal access to the privileges and responsibilities of the workplace and the home.* The man is to accept the fact that his wife can be as good as, if not better than, him in providing for the family economically. Instead of feeling threatened and trying to stop her from so providing, the man does well to complement her in areas where she is lacking, even if it means taking on more home tasks.

- *Man's role as a provider is more than material as it includes the provision of the final say and his presence at home.* This means that the man must not see

[95] But for the purpose of this dissertation, the *family* of concern here refers to the contemporary nuclear family.

his role as only bringing money back home. It includes taking the responsibility of the final say in certain family matters when the need arises. It also includes being at home with his wife and children in order to give necessary emotional support and guidance. A man who is so busy working to bring money back home that he has no time for the family is a 'ghost' provider rather than a good one.

4.4.3 Rethinking masculinity. People in Singapore today are challenged to extend themselves beyond their comfort zone and adopt an entrepreneurial spirit. The enterprising man is challenged to use his creativity to change or adapt to changes so that he can realise the goals of his own conviction. The true man is one who is not an idealist but a realist - he is pragmatically ambitious in that he adapts himself to changing times in order to remain the master of his own destiny. To answer this challenge of pragmatic ambitions, a rethink of masculinity should affirm the following:

- *The mature man does not presume superiority over the woman, but empowers her to be fulfilled rather than to be controlled.* He treats the capable woman as a valued person and partner, realising that his masculinity is in no way undermined if he happens to have a woman as his equal or superior.

- *The mature man always puts in his best, but he also recognises that without integrity, his ability amounts to nothing.* He is open enough to admit his mistakes or inadequacies without shifting blame or pretending to be what he is not. He aspires to do his honest best and accepts whatever God deems best for him with contentment rather than with contention.

- *The mature man does not regard gentleness as a trait of the lesser man, but demonstrates it in order to influence others positively.* While power is often associated with masculinity, gentleness is often frowned as unmanly. But gentleness is not weakness but an aspect of the fruit of the Spirit. Thus, to exercise gentleness is to demonstrate the power of the Spirit.

- *The mature man does not accumulate wealth for its own sake, but chooses to live modestly in contentment with the little or much he has.* He does not hoard what he has. Rather, he lives modestly, saves responsibly and gives generously.

- *The mature man is positively rather than pragmatically ambitious in that his goals are for the glory of God, and for the good of himself and others.* To this end, he works hard to develop the individuality inherent in his own potential.

- *The mature man does not have to win all the time.* He does not see himself as a lesser person if he fails to be Number One or loses to another in some way. He does not devalue the virtue of doing his best or striving toward his unique

> potential even if he has failed to outdo others. His faith does not rest in his ability, but in the power of God to bring about that which is good, even if it means he has to lose or play 'second fiddle' to someone else.

The success culture in Singapore has posed some challenges to the building of strong families as men and women try to balance the demands of work and home. In the next chapter, an attempt will be undertaken to formulate some strategic considerations to help Christian men and the Church build healthy homes in Singapore's meritocratic environment.