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**SINGAPORE'S SUCCESS CULTURE
AND ITS CHALLENGES TO CHRISTIAN MEN
IN BUILDING STRONG FAMILIES**

by

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✓
submitted in fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree

PHILOSOPHIAE DOCTOR

in the

**FACULTY OF THEOLOGY
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA**

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APRIL 2002





PREFACE

This study would have taken a much longer time to complete if not for the support of many people. Hence, I wish to express my heartfelt appreciation to those who have stood faithfully by me.

Firstly, I wish to thank the Principal of Singapore Bible College, the Rev Michael Shen, and its Board of Directors. They have been gracious in granting me study leave and sponsoring my effort.

Secondly, I am grateful to the leadership and members of Evangel Baptist Church. I remain indebted to their tremendous support in terms of prayer, finance and encouragement.

Thirdly, my appreciation goes to Prof Julian Muller. As my supervisor, he has directed me to some very useful resources. Also, his warm encouragement and frank criticism have helped to spur and sharpen me as I go through the rigours of intense study and writing.

Fourthly, I am ever grateful to my beloved family. I thank my wife, Iris, for so willingly taking care of much of the family's needs during my days of academic labour. Our daughters, Vera and Stacey, have also been very well behaved, giving me the peace of mind to study and write at home. Also, a word of gratitude should go to my aged mother, Mdm Ng Kwai Ling, who lives with us. She has been a great help in many ways to all of us.

Finally, I thank God for the opportunity to undertake this study. I have been greatly blessed while going through the whole process. May God use this completed work to glorify Himself and bless His people.

CONTENTS

PREFACE	ii
LIST OF TABLES	ix
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	x
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Study Concern	1
1.1.1 Theme	1
1.1.2 Problem statement	4
1.1.3 Relevance	6
1.2 Study Purpose	7
1.2.1 Aim	7
1.2.2 Objectives	7
1.2.3 Hypothesis	8
1.2.4 Delimitations	8
1.3 Defintions of Terms	9
1.3.1 Success	9
1.3.2 Culture	9
1.3.3 Christian	9
1.3.4 Man	9
1.3.5 Family	9
1.4 Study Methodology	10
1.4.1 Descriptive practical theology	10
1.4.2 Historical practical theology	10

1.4.3	Systematic practical theology	11
1.4.4	Strategic practical theology	11
1.4.5	Opinion poll and conversational partnerships	12
CHAPTER II	DESCRIPTIVE PRACTICAL THEOLOGY: EMERGENCE OF SINGAPORE'S SUCCESS CULTURE	14
2.1	From Colony to Self-Government	14
2.1.1	Arrival of Raffles	14
2.1.2	Early economic progress	18
2.1.3	Japanese Occupation	20
2.1.4	New political consciousness	30
2.2	From Merger to Independence	37
2.2.1	Merger with Malaya	37
2.2.2	Separation from Malaysia	40
2.3	From Survival to Success	43
2.3.1	Battling the odds	43
2.3.2	Achieving success	46
2.4	Success and Social Values	51
2.4.1	National core values	51
2.4.2	People's aspirations in life	53
2.5	Success and Family Values	55
2.5.1	What is family?	55
2.5.2	Spousal roles	58
2.5.3	Health of family	63
2.6	Success and Values of the Young	67
2.6.1	Individualistic pursuits	67

2.6.2	Relationship with parents	68
2.7	Secular Perspectives on Success	70
2.7.1	Denis Waitley	70
2.7.2	Harry Alder	74
2.7.3	Anthony Robbins	77
2.8	Secular Perspectives on Successful Marriage-Family Life	81
2.8.1	John Gottman	81
2.8.2	Lawrence Shapiro	85
2.8.3	Stephen Covey	88
2.9	Secular Perspectives on Successful Masculinity	94
2.9.1	Warren Farrell	94
2.9.2	John Gray	96
2.9.3	Ronald Levant	100
2.10	Chapter Summary	102
2.10.1	Singapore's past	102
2.10.2	Singapore's present	104
2.10.3	Influence of secular ideas	105
CHAPTER III	HISTORICAL PRACTICAL THEOLOGY: THE CHRISTIAN VOICE ON SUCCESS, MARRIAGE-FAMILY LIFE AND MASCULINITY	107
3.1	Reflections on Biblical Texts	107
3.1.1	Joshua 1:1-9	107
3.1.2	Luke 10:38-42	114
3.1.3	Genesis 2:18-23	118
3.1.4	Ephesians 6:1-4	124
3.1.5	Genesis 12:1-5	130

3.1.6	Mark 10:35-45	134
3.2	Sayings of Classical Church Figures	138
3.2.1	St Augustine	138
3.2.2	Martin Luther	142
3.2.3	John Wesley	145
3.2.4	Charles Spurgeon	150
3.3	Thoughts of Contemporary Christian Thinkers	154
3.3.1	Richard Foster	154
3.3.2	John Schneider	160
3.3.3	George Knight, III	165
3.3.4	Craig Keener	168
3.3.5	Leo Perdue	172
3.3.6	Rob Palkovitz	174
3.3.7	David Seamands	176
3.4	Chapter Summary	179
3.4.1	A cumulative Christian understanding of success	180
3.4.2	A cumulative Christian understanding of marriage-family life	181
3.4.3	A cumulative Christian understanding of masculinity	183
CHAPTER IV	SYSTEMATIC PRACTICAL THEOLOGY: A CHRISTIAN-SECULAR DIALOGUE ON SUCCESS, MARRIAGE-FAMILY LIFE AND MASCULINITY RELEVANT TO THREE CHALLENGES IN SINGAPOREAN SOCIETY	185
4.1	The Challenge to National Prosperity	185
4.1.1	Some secular views on success, economics and competition	185



4.1.2	Some Christian views on success, economics and competition	198
4.1.3	An evaluation of views	212
4.2	The Challenge to Family Stability	221
4.2.1	Some secular views on spousal intimacy and child nurturing	222
4.2.2	Some Christian views on spousal intimacy and child nurturing	236
4.2.3	An evaluation of views	246
4.3	The Challenge to Masculine Enterprise	257
4.3.1	Some secular views on man and his work	257
4.3.2	Some Christian views on man and his work	264
4.3.3	An evaluation of views	267
4.4	Chapter Summary	274
4.4.1	Redefining success	274
4.4.2	Reprioritising marriage-family life	275
4.4.3	Rethinking masculinity	277
CHAPTER V	STRATEGIC PRACTICAL THEOLOGY: UNDERSTANDING WORK-FAMILY COMPLEXITIES FACED BY CHRISTIAN MEN IN SINGAPORE	279
5.1	An Opinion Poll: Attitudes of Married Christian Men in Singapore toward Work and Family	279
5.1.1	Tabulation and interpretation of responses	280
5.1.2	Summary of conclusions	286
5.2	Conversational Partnerships: Understanding Work-Family Complexities of Some Christian Men	287
5.2.1	Environment of complexities	287

5.2.2	Profiles of conversational partners	292
5.2.3	Hearing the stories	292
5.2.4	Interpreting the sentiments	321
5.2.5	Suggestions on being pro-family in a meritocratic work culture	326
CHAPTER VI	CONCLUSION	340
6.1	Review of Present Study	340
6.2	Recommendations for Further Study	344
ANNEXURE A	Map of Indian Ocean-South China Sea Trade Route in the Late 18th Century (Baker 1999:80)	
ANNEXURE B	Map of Singapore and Malaya (Ong 1997)	
ANNEXURE C	Letter of Intent	
ANNEXURE D	Questionnaire	
ANNEXURE E	Conversational Guide 1	
ANNEXURE F	Conversational Guide 2	
ANNEXURE G	Conversational Guide 3	
ANNEXURE H	Conversational Guide 4	
ANNEXURE I	Conversational Guide 5	
ANNEXURE J	Conversational Guide 6	
BIBLIOGRAPHY		
ABSTRACT		



LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1	WEF's Global Competitiveness Rankings 1999	48
TABLE 2	Attitude toward General Social Values (Kau, Tan & Wirtz 1998:43)	53
TABLE 3	Attitude toward Materialism (Kau et al 1998:78)	54
TABLE 4	Attitude toward Family (Kau et al 1998:25)	59
TABLE 5	Attitude toward Feminism (Kau et al 1998:94)	59
TABLE 6	Divorce Rates 1980-95 (Stella Quah 1998:53)	63
TABLE 7	Relative Happiness after Divorce (Wong & Kuo 1983:87)	65
TABLE 8	Life Goal of Singapore Youth (Yeo & Chow 1997:9)	67
TABLE 9	How the Young Relate to Parents (Chew et al 1998:13)	69
TABLE 10	Modifying Perfectionism (Basco 1999:86)	191
TABLE 11	Gender Differences in Reactions to Stress (Gray 1993:178-213)	226
TABLE 12	Ages of Respondents	280
TABLE 13	Occupations of Respondents and Spouses	280
TABLE 14	Educational Levels of Respondents and Spouses	281
TABLE 15	Marriage and Children	281
TABLE 16	Responses to Statements 1 to 4 in Questionnaire	282
TABLE 17	Responses to Statements 2 to 8 in Questionnaire	283
TABLE 18	Responses to Statements 9 to 12 in Questionnaire	284
TABLE 19	Profiles of Conversational Partners	292



LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS*

Old Testament

Genesis	Gn
Exodus	Ex
Leviticus	Lv
Numbers	Nm
Deuteronomy	Dt
Joshua	Jos
Judges	Jdg
Ruth	Ruth
1 Samuel	1 Sm
2 Samuel	2 Sm
1 Kings	1 Ki
2 Kings	2 Ki
1 Chronicles	1 Chr
2 Chronicles	2 Chr
Ezra	Ezr
Nehemiah	Neh
Esther	Es
Job	Job
Psalms	Ps
Proverbs	Pr
Ecclesiastes	Ec
Canticles	Can
Isaiah	Is
Jeremiah	Jr
Lamentations	Lm
Ezekiel	Ezk
Daniel	Dn
Hosea	Hs
Joel	Jl
Amos	Am
Obadiah	Ob
Jonah	Jnh
Micah	Mi
Nahum	Nah
Habakkuk	Hab
Zephaniah	Zph
Haggai	Hg
Zechariah	Zch
Malachi	Ml

New Testament

Matthew	Mt
Mark	Mk
Luke	Lk
John	Jn
Acts	Ac
Romans	Rm
1 Corinthians	1 Cor
2 Corinthians	2 Cor
Galatians	Gl
Ephesians	Eph
Philippians	Phlp
Colossians	Col
1 Thessalonians	1 Th
2 Thessalonians	2 Th
1 Timothy	1 Tm
2 Timothy	2 Tm
Titus	Tt
Philemon	Phlm
Hebrews	Heb
James	Ja
1 Peter	1 Pt
2 Peter	2 Pt
1 John	1 Jn
2 John	2 Jn
3 John	3 Jn
Jude	Jude
Revelation	Rv

* Kilian, J 1989. *Form and Style in Theological Texts*. Pretoria: UNISA.



CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Study Concern

1.1.1 Theme. Singapore was once a British colony. Today, she has attained an economic stature that is not only respected in Asia, but also in the world.¹ How does Singapore, with only a population of slightly more than four million people and often ridiculed as a 'tiny dot' on the map, manage to outdo so many other countries in economic terms?² How does Singapore, with hardly any natural resources and who only gained independence after separation from Malaysia in 1965, achieve so much economically in so short a time? To answer these questions, it is necessary to understand the national mindset promoted by the Singapore government since independence.

One good way to capture this national mindset is to look at the functions of the Economic Development Board (EDB) in Singapore. This body was set up by the government in 1961 and given two especially crucial responsibilities - attracting foreign investments into Singapore and developing local businesses into competitive enterprises. The former chairman of the EDB, Philip Yeo, once exhorted:

Almost every country that had industrialised before us had strengths in raw materials, large home markets, well-developed industrial skills and relevant education systems. Singapore had none of these advantages. Yet, we succeeded. Why?

¹ On page 54 in its 7 December 2001 issue, the influential publication on Asian affairs, *Asiaweek*, listed the per-capita Gross National Product (GNP) of Singapore as even higher than that of Britain - US\$24,664 for Singapore as against US\$23,793 for Britain.

² According to *Singapore 2001* published by the Ministry of Information and the Arts, the total land area of Singapore (main island and offshore islands) adds up to only 682.7 sq km.



Singapore's economic success over the past 36 years was due to our focus on growth and our emphasis on doing all the things necessary to support that growth. We invested heavily in infrastructure and education. But more importantly, we dared to challenge convention, and have continued to do so ever since.

These initiatives needed vision and daring - in short, a pioneering spirit. It is this spirit that must be kept alive if Singapore is to remain successful in the next millennium.

Some Singaporeans worry about the stress from a fast-paced life, and ask why we are so keen to be No. 1. They want to know what is wrong with being No. 2. Nothing is wrong with being in the No. 2 position, but that is not the point.

The issue is about desiring to be and working at being No. 1. It is a mindset; a competitive spirit; not so much the absolute position we actually achieve.

If we are satisfied with being No. 2, we will gradually slip to the third position, the fifth position, then 10th and 20th and so on.

Similarly, if we are No. 1 and we take it for granted, we know for sure that someone will overtake us.³

Philip Yeo's words tersely reflect the mindset constantly preached by the Singapore government and diligently lived out by many Singaporeans - in order not to lose out, one must always compete to stay ahead.⁴ While this mindset is not necessarily wrong, the worrying thing is that many in Singapore seem to have placed economic pursuit as their overriding concern in life. In fact, Christian men in Singapore seem especially vulnerable to this tendency as observed by Australian missiologist and former Singapore Bible College lecturer, Keith Hinton, who did a study of trends in Singapore churches and revealed the findings in his book *Growing Churches Singapore Style*.

Firstly, Hinton (1985:113) observed that Singapore Christians were clustered in the higher-educated and higher-income stratas of society - 94.5 % of them were literate; 28.0 %

³ This is an excerpt of Philip Yeo's message in the 1997 *EDB Yearbook* which was reproduced on page 15 of *The Sunday Times* on 26 October 1997 under the heading: 'Why we must be obsessed with being No. 1.' *The Sunday Times* is the leading English-language newspaper in Singapore on Sunday.

⁴ This mindset is commonly known in Singapore as the *kiasu* mentality. Literally, *kiasu* means 'fear of losing'.

were professional or technical persons; 24.0 % were holding administrative or managerial positions.⁵ Secondly, Hinton (1985:185) also noted that Singapore Christian ‘... males were generally more career oriented, and many male converts became absorbed with secular ambition and lapse from active Christian involvement before the age of marriage’

Though his observations were made some time ago, working patterns in Singapore today seem to increasingly validate Hinton’s views. For example, as the Singapore economy spans outward and embraces a regional emphasis, more Singapore men are required and expected to travel as part of their work. This willingness to do business travel and be away from home is often tied up with the quest to do well and succeed in the marketplace. This working lifestyle poses a potential threat to family life. Vincent Teo, who was travelling extensively for fourteen years in his previous job as a marketing director, but is now a marriage and family counsellor, aptly describes the threat this way:

Travelling overseas on work assignments is a common way of life for Singaporeans these days. Multi-national companies who made Singapore their regional headquarters employ staff with regional responsibilities. Many local companies taking on a regional push are also recruiting staff who must be willing to travel as part of their job description.

I remember when I first took on a regional job in 1980. There were hardly any Singaporeans on the plane. Nowadays, you will probably meet someone you know in the same plane if you travel frequently enough.

This new travelling pattern can put a strain on marriages if husbands and wives are not consciously aware of the need to continue to maintain communication and closeness.⁶

The family is an important institution to God. We are to protect and strengthen it. How then can the Christian man in Singapore succeed in the marketplace without weakening his

⁵ Hinton quoted these figures from *Religious Trends in Singapore with Special Reference to Christianity*. This book was co-written by Bobby Sng and Poh-Seng You, and published by the Singapore Graduates’ Christian Fellowship and Fellowship of Evangelical Students in 1982.

⁶ Teo, Vincent 1998. Absence and Distance. *In Touch with the Family* (November/December), p12.

commitment to his family? What does the Bible have to say about success at work and at home for the family man? What masculine strengths and weaknesses respectively enhance and hinder the man's ability to relate, especially to those in his own family? What can Christian men in Singapore do as model citizens in upholding strong family values? In an attempt to address these concerns, the following theme is proposed for this dissertation:

The success culture in Singapore and its challenges to the Christian man in building a strong family.

1.1.2 Problem statement. The lack of land and natural resources in Singapore means that the country has to depend very much on human resources (the people) to survive as a nation. Hence, the government has always been challenging the people to be productive and competitive in order to maintain an economic edge over others, especially countries in the East Asia region.

Singapore's nation building has very much been focused on striving for economic success. Christians in Singapore are not spared the constant reinforcement of this national emphasis in their daily work. The sociological profile has shown that many are largely in the higher-educated and higher-income categories, implying that many of them are high achievers with demanding jobs. Especially for Christian men, there is this tendency to reduce the needs of spouses and children to only the material, thereby neglecting their non-material and emotional well-being. In families where both husbands and wives work, the caring of the children has largely been delegated to housemaids, baby-sitters, grandparents or child care centres.

The inherent danger in this societal pattern is that material abundance without emotional intimacy at home can stress and strain family relationships. In fact, the priority of career over family seems to be already breeding in the working culture of the male population in Singapore even before marriage. A survey conducted by the Social Development Unit

(SDU) in Singapore has revealed that many single men cited holding a demanding job (46.2 %) as the main reason for not placing a priority on marriage.⁷

Dr David Z Nowell, a scholar in historical theology and ordained Baptist minister in the US, is of the opinion that the act of neglecting the home for work is a preferred choice rather than an absolute necessity on the part of the contemporary man. He comments:

There is no mandate that a man find success in the business community; we are not legislatively required to return a high standard of living for our families. But most of us choose to participate in that search for success and prosperity, a search that often gets in the way of what is mandated - if not legislatively then at least ethically and most certainly biblically - to be a good husband and father (Nowell 1995:2-3).

Undoubtedly, the national emphasis on competing and staying ahead of others has instilled in many Singapore men a certain drivenness. While this drive to be ambitious is not necessarily bad, Nowell cautions against allowing it to be a controlling force in one's life. He points out that such a driven person sees achievements as more important than relationships. This perception hinders the person's ability to cultivate strong relationships since people are only regarded as objects to be manipulated to reach one's goal. Also, Nowell asserts that unrestrained drivenness makes a person obsessed with the appearance of success in that he wants to look good before others all the time. Things that publicly display power and prestige become his greatest obsessions in life. Indeed, even a wife becomes '... less a partner with whom life is shared than she is a trophy to be displayed' (Nowell 1995:180-81).

Robert Lewis and William Hendricks who co-authored the book *Marriage Roles* claim that the fundamental male mindset can be summed up in one word - *performance*. Men like to win and are performance-oriented. Hence, it is results that often matter to them, not processes so often demanded in relationship building (Lewis & Hendricks 1991:117). When applied in

⁷ *The Straits Times* 21 April 1997. Marriage not a priority for young Singaporeans: SDU survey, p21. The SDU is a 'matchmaking' agency initiated by the government to encourage marriage and population growth.

the context of the family, Lewis and Hendricks are basically sharing the same sentiments as Nowell, that is, performing well as breadwinner for the family to the neglect of being a love giver and caregiver at home is a preferred choice rather than an absolute necessity for the man. The sad consequence of this is that he sacrifices so much nourishing his family materially but so little nurturing their non-material wellness.

1.1.3 Relevance. How does this study contribute to the discipline of practical theology? First, it must be stressed that practical theology is essentially dialogic in that it brings a number of elements into conversation with one another (Ballard & Pritchard 1996:82). Thus, this study intends to critically correlate insights from Christian theology with other disciplines. It will also raise theological issues concerning the biblical meaning of success and family headship; examine the history and experience of Singapore society and identify the current state of family life; relate the wisdom of behavioural science to the provision of pastoral guidance to Christian men. With these intentions in mind, this study aspires to contribute relevantly to the specific field of pastoral care and counselling within the discipline of practical theology.

In their book, *Foundations For A Practical Theology Of Ministry*, James N Poling and Donald E Miller speak of six types of practical theology. According to their classification, the study at hand will fall under Type IIB in which practical theology is viewed as a ‘... critical correlation in terms of method which focuses primarily on the formation of the church as a community of faith’ (Poling & Miller 1985:47).⁸ While this study will seek interdisciplinary collaboration between Christian theology and the social/behavioural sciences, the primary target for action and response is still the church as a community of faith. Hence, the relevance of this study lies in its attempt to be a pastoral guide on strong family living for the community

⁸ For a complete discussion of all the six types of practical theology listed by Poling and Miller, read Chapter Two of their book.



of believers in Singapore in general and the Christian men in particular, as they express their faith and interact with others in the wider society.

Since it is intended that this study be a critical correlation of insights from biblical studies, theology, history, sociology, psychology and counselling, sources will have to be wide ranging and include relevant books, reports, surveys, statistical findings, journals, magazines, newspapers, dissertations and theses. This study will also include a first-hand opinion poll using questionnaires to augment the library research.

In sum, this study attempts to make the following contributions:

- To expose the false belief that homemaking should not be a masculine responsibility, and to challenge Christian men in Singapore to lead their families as God-honouring husbands and fathers in a materialistic and success-oriented society.
- To help the Church in Singapore in the ministry of building strong Christian families so that a good witness can be presented before a highly secularised society.
- To nurture professionalism in the ministry by formulating a pastoral guide with which those in Christian full-time vocation or voluntary work can use to effectively care and counsel Christian men with troubled family lives.

1.2 Study Purpose

1.2.1 Aim. Based on the concerns already mentioned, the overall aim of this study is:

To critically correlate insights from the normative Christian sources and other disciplines so as to formulate a pastoral counsel on building strong families for Christian men in Singapore as they live out their faith and interact with others in a success-oriented society.

1.2.2 Objectives. To achieve this aim, the following objectives are to be fulfilled in this study:

- To understand how the historical experiences of Singapore have contributed to the success of the country.
- To understand the present social situation in Singapore and where the society is tending to head toward, with special attention on how this will impact family life.



- To understand the meaning of success from a secular perspective.
- To understand the meaning of marriage and family from the social and behavioural sciences.
- To understand the dynamics of marriage-family life.
- To understand the male psychology and how it affects marriage-family relationships.
- To perform a biblical-theological evaluation of these insights, and to reflect on how these can be used to help Christian men build strong families.
- To suggest how Christian men (and the Church) in Singapore can act toward building strong families.

1.2.3 Hypothesis: This study is motivated by the assumption that the Christian man needs to reinterpret, not reject, the spirit of competition and excellence in Singapore in order to establish a successful career and a strong home at the same time.

1.2.4 Delimitations. This study is limited to the context of Singapore. In many ways, Singapore is unlike other countries. She has many unique features that cannot be totally found or reproduced elsewhere. These include her scarcity of land, lack of natural resources, history, political culture, and small yet highly urbanised population made up of many races.⁹ Such a combination has posed unique challenges that Singapore has to deal with as a country. Hence, suggestions that will be forthcoming in this study are to address the Singapore situation specifically.

Secondly, this study aims only to help Christian families in Singapore. In other words, this study attempts to provide some suggestions to people who have essentially professed faith and belief in the teachings of the Bible. In the event that these suggestions be found helpful and applicable to non-Christian families, it will be most heartening though this is not the predetermined intention.

⁹ The population of Singapore is predominantly ethnic Chinese (almost 80 %). Malays, Indians and Eurasians are the other racial groups.

Lastly, this study is limited in that it is primarily an attempt to address Christian men in Singapore. While wives and children will not be entirely ignored, the main task in this dissertation is to help Christian men build strong families without losing their masculine dignity.

1.3 Definitions of Terms

In order to better appreciate the scope of this study, the following terms in the theme stated earlier are defined:

1.3.1 Success. In the Singapore context, success is commonly understood in terms of the popular *Five Cs* - cash, condominium, car, credit card and country-club membership. Thus, this study will critically evaluate the adequacy of defining success primarily as the attainment of possessions, position and prestige.

1.3.2 Culture. This does not refer to the traditional and customary practices of a given racial group in Singapore. Rather, it is used to indicate the national mindset as evident in the primary interests and pursuits of Singaporeans as a people and as individuals.

1.3.3 Christian. In secular Singapore, *Christian* is a rather loose term in that it has been used to describe things that associate with Roman Catholicism, or even with cults like the Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons. In this study, the term will be used strictly to describe things that associate with the Protestant tradition in which personal faith in Jesus Christ for salvation is essential.

1.3.4 Man. This does not refer merely to the male gender. The *man* under study here is the one who is provider, husband and father, that is, the *working family man*.

1.3.5 Family. This is the nuclear family composed of father, mother and dependent child(ren) staying with the parents. Members of the extended family, like grandparents, are not included. One-parent, no-parents and childless households are also not considered in this study.



1.4 Study Methodology

To accomplish the task of this study, the model advocated by Don S Browning in his book, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, will be adopted. In exploring practical wisdom and understanding, Browning spells out four movements in the process of doing practical theology.

1.4.1 Descriptive practical theology. In this movement, ‘social-systemic, material, and psychological determinants are traced and explained as well as possible’ (Browning 1991:48). The wisdom and insights from non-Christian texts and sources that help in addressing the concerns and issues raised in this study will be discussed.

Poling and Miller (1985:70) call this first step the description of lived experience whereby attention is given to the context under study, including how things are understood and valued there. This step will naturally bring into light events and patterns that describe contextual perceptions and practices as they are at present.

Ballard and Pritchard (1996:77) add that the present experience should only be the starting point of the study because a tension has been uncovered. Any considered response of change must be analytical of the present. And that calls for open discussion and dialogue with multiple sources of information and expertise.

1.4.2 Historical practical theology. In this second movement, Browning (1991:49) pays attention to the question: ‘What should be the norm?’ For Christians, the texts that guide and direct normative Christian perceptions and practices are found in the Bible, church history and the writings of Christian thinkers. Hence, in this movement, the concerns and issues raised in the study will be addressed by exploring and reflecting on these normative texts.¹⁰

¹⁰ Ballard and Prichard (1996:77-78) assert that mere exploration of information from the multiple sources, both Christian and secular, only indicates possibilities and does not provide answers. For concrete answers to be forthcoming, reflection must take place. Only then will there be a discovery of a need to change; a recognition that all is not well; an acknowledgement that things are not what they ought to be.

This is likened to an exercise in apologetics in which a Christian perspective on experience is stated and defended in a rational manner. The aim is to maintain the Christian position as '... at least one valid perspective on the modern world' (Poling & Miller 1985:86).

1.4.3 Systematic practical theology. In a picturesque manner, Browning (1991:51) describes this movement as the '... fusion of horizons between the vision implicit in contemporary practices and the vision implied in the practices of the normative Christian texts.' To arrive at this fusion, trends that emerge as a result of progress and modernity are evaluated against the central Christian witness to determine if there can be any harmonious integration.

In more direct language, this is the time when the discrepancy between 'what is' and 'what ought' is openly discussed; when the continuity and discontinuity between the descriptive and the normative can be debated and judged (Poling & Miller 1985:88-89). It can be a crucial time of both threat and strength in that normative Christian perceptions, beliefs and values will have to respond to the challenges of contemporary realities.

1.4.4 Strategic practical theology. This last movement in Browning's model is actually a resumption from where the first descriptive phase has left off. Browning (1991:242) calls it a transformational movement - 'the shift of the church from conservatism and caution to venture and risk' after a critical correlation of wisdom and insights from the normative Christian texts and the other disciplines. This movement is also described as a return to contextual experience so that guidelines and specific plans that have been developed can be tested for their relevance in real life (Poling & Miller 1985:93).

Ballard and Pritchard (1996:142) sum up this last phase as that which moves reflection into action in order to bear the following range of outcomes:

- educational activity
- new attitudes



- refinement of skills
- corrective action
- new action
- prayer and celebration.

1.4.5 Opinion poll and conversational partnerships. This study begins with some predetermined assumptions of how Christian men in Singapore view success and their families. To test these assumptions, an opinion poll using questionnaires will be carried out.¹¹ A random sample of working family men from two congregations will be picked, and their responses tabulated and interpreted. Below are the predetermined assumptions, each with its related statements.

Assumption I: The Christian man's view of success is very much influenced by the achievement-oriented culture in Singapore.

Statement 1: I compete with others so that I can stay ahead of them.

Statement 2: I compete with others so that I can bring out the best in myself.

Statement 3: I measure achievement in terms of getting the desired results.

Statement 4: I measure achievement in terms of experiencing the satisfaction of having tried hard.

Assumption II: The Christian man in Singapore cares much about his family, but he tends to do so materially rather than emotionally.

Statement 1: I work hard at providing well for my family so that they can be materially comfortable.

Statement 2: I work hard at relating closely with my family members.

Statement 3: I expect my family members to be understanding when work takes me away from them.

¹¹ The method of questionnaire survey as suggested in Chapter Seven of William Wiersma's book, *Research Methods in Education: An Introduction (6th edition)*, will be adopted.

Statement 4: I enjoy doing things *with* my family more than doing things *for* them.

Assumption III: The Christian man in Singapore still holds to the traditional views of masculinity.

Statement 1: I fail as a man if I cannot be the sole breadwinner in my family.

Statement 2: I lead my family by sharing substantially in home responsibilities.

Statement 3: I fail as a man if I have integrity of character but no influence of control.

Statement 4: I lead my family by listening to their views before making decisions that will affect our home.

The findings of this opinion poll will be used toward the end of this study to give an indication of how Christian men in Singapore are trying to balance work and home.

Qualitative interviews in the form of conversational partnerships will also be used to better hear and understand the work-family complexities faced by some Christian men.

Biblical-theological formulations will then be employed to address the larger socio-cultural concerns with the view of enhancing family life in the face of many competing demands.

CHAPTER II

DESCRIPTIVE PRACTICAL THEOLOGY: EMERGENCE OF SINGAPORE'S SUCCESS CULTURE

2.1 From Colony to Self-Government

2.1.1 Arrival of Raffles. As Britain ended her war with France in 1815, the government and the East India Company decided to ease their commitments in South East Asia, and to work out a peaceful and fair trading arrangement with the Dutch in the region. The British restored Java and Malacca in the region to the Dutch in exchange for the remaining Dutch territories in India.

Meanwhile, Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, the British Lieutenant-Governor of Bencoolen, harboured messianic ambitions to boost British trade in South East Asia. He viewed Britain's role in the region as a crusade 'to free the peoples of the eastern archipelago from civil war, piracy, slavery and oppression, and to restore and revive their old cultures and independence under the influence of European enlightenment' (Turnbull 1989:6).

When Raffles first reached Bencoolen in 1818 as the appointed Lieutenant-Governor, he was greatly concerned with the vast expansion of trade carried out by the Dutch in Sumatra. Hence, he visited Lord Hastings, the Governor-General of India, with the intention to persuade him to support his plans of increasing British influence in Sumatra. He failed to convince Lord Hastings who, however, did authorise him to protect British trade route through the Straits of Malacca. Raffles's specific instructions were to secure an agreement with Aceh at the northern tip of Sumatra and to establish a port at Riau, Johore or some other southern sites without antagonising the Dutch. Upon receiving his instructions, Raffles



went to the Malayan island of Penang and enlisted the help of an old friend in the person of Colonel William Farquhar.¹ Raffles reckoned that Farquhar's long experience in Malaya, together with his intimate knowledge of local politics, would be very useful to him. Moreover, Farquhar also shared the same antipathy toward the Dutch (Turnbull 1989:7).

Raffles immediately sent Farquhar south to locate a base while he himself finalised arrangements at Aceh. His actions irritated Colonel James Bannerman, then Governor of Penang.² He insisted that Raffles delayed his trip to Aceh pending further instructions from Lord Hastings in India. Raffles agreed verbally, but then secretly sneaked out of Penang and went south to team up with Farquhar.

On 28 January 1819, Raffles and Farquhar anchored their fleet of eight ships off St John's Island, close to the mouth of the Singapore River. The local villagers came to investigate and Raffles learnt from them that the Temenggong was the ruler figure in Singapore. What was more heartening to Raffles was the news that there were no Dutchmen on the island (Turnbull 1989:8).

The next morning on 29 January, Raffles and Farquhar landed on Singapore soil and met the local Malay chief, Temenggong Abdul Rahman. Raffles reached a quick agreement with the Temenggong the next day. The local chief gave permission to the East India Company to set up a trading post on Singapore island. In return, the British would guarantee protection and the annual payment of three thousand Spanish dollars (Chew 1991:36).

However, Raffles later negated this agreement when he ceremoniously signed a treaty on 6 February with the Temenggong's elder brother, Tengku Long, who was then officially recognised as the Sultan of Johore.³ This treaty allowed the British to maintain trading

¹ Farquhar was then in Penang and planning to return to Britain for retirement. He had been the British Resident of Malacca until its return to the Dutch in 1818.

² Bannerman interpreted Raffles's actions as trying to interfere in his sphere of influence.

³ Both the Temenggong and Tengku were then engaging in an intriguing fight for the Johore throne. Singapore was part of the Johore sovereignty.



facilities in Singapore together with an annual payment of five thousand Spanish dollars and a guarantee against external attacks. At the same time, the enraged Temenggong was pacified with the assurance of a half share of any port or trade levies collected from native vessels (Chew 1991:37).⁴

The Dutch were furious when they learnt of this treaty because they claimed Singapore to be part of Riau, and thus, under their control. They considered driving out the British by force. Farquhar made an urgent appeal to Bannerman in Penang for military reinforcements. Bannerman urged Farquhar to flee Singapore, and assured the Dutch that Raffles acted without proper authorisation.⁵ Seizing the opportunity to settle an old score, Bannerman notified Lord Hastings in India and accused Raffles of being impetuous and irresponsible in leaving his new trading post almost defenceless.

But the news of the new settlement in Singapore was greeted with loud cheers from the trading community in India. Also, Lord Hastings was angered by Bannerman's apparent attempt to justify himself in the face of possible reprimands from London. Hence, Hastings sided with Raffles and provisionally supported the Singapore arrangement pending final approval from the London office. Bannerman was also ordered to help Raffles in the defence of the Singapore settlement.⁶

When the news of Raffles's action reached London in August 1819, there was fear of an Anglo-Dutch confrontation. But the British saw the importance of a port south of Malacca in order to prevent the Dutch from having 'all the military and naval keys of the Straits of

⁴ This benefit eventually persuaded the Temenggong to pen his signature on the treaty together with Raffles and his elder brother.

⁵ At this time, Raffles had returned to his base in Bencoolen, leaving Farquhar to oversee the daily running of the new settlement in Singapore.

⁶ It is worth noting that Farquhar stayed in Singapore during the whole crisis. He even succeeded in intercepting and diverting to Singapore five hundred Indian troops returning from Bencoolen to India. His courage helped Singapore through her first crisis.

Malacca.' This position on Singapore sparked off a long 'paper war' with the Dutch which eventually was won by the British (Turnbull 1989:10-11).

By 1821, under the Residency of William Farquhar, Singapore had grown into a highly cosmopolitan settlement. There were nearly 3 000 Malays; more than 1 000 Chinese; and 500 or 600 Bugis, together with Indians, Arabs, Armenians, Europeans, Eurasians and other minority groups. The first Chinese immigrants actually came from Riau and Malacca, and many of them had intermarried with local Malay women to form a distinct Baba Chinese community (Turnbull 1989:13).

It must be noted that Singapore was still not under British rule during this time. In fact, it was some kind of a three-power rule featuring the Johore Sultan, the Temenggong and the British Resident. It was only on 7 June 1823 that British rule became more direct when an agreement was signed with the Sultan and Temenggong. The British gained control of the whole of Singapore, except the reserves of the Sultan and the Temenggong. The two Malay royalties were also adequately compensated for life in monetary terms when they agreed to give up certain rights and privileges. With this new agreement, British laws would be enforced in Singapore, but 'with due respect to the usages and habits of the [Malay] people.' However, this still stopped short of Singapore becoming a British colony (Chew 1991:39).

In 1824, Singapore eventually became a British possession as a result of two treaties - the Anglo-Dutch Treaty signed in March in London, and the Treaty of Friendship and Alliance signed in August between the East India Company, the Johore Sultan and the Temenggong of Singapore. The latter treaty was negotiated by the then Resident of Singapore, John Crawfurd, on behalf of the British (Turnbull 1989:27).⁷

⁷ Crawfurd had succeeded Raffles as the Resident of Singapore. Earlier in April 1823, Raffles had replaced Farquhar with himself as the Resident following serious disagreements between themselves.

In 1858, the East India Company came to an end, and India came under the direct rule of the British Crown. However, Singapore continued to be administered by the British from the Indian capital of Calcutta. It was only on 1 April 1867 that the British ended the Calcutta administration, and Singapore officially became a British Crown Colony (Turnbull 1989:73).

To say that Raffles founded Singapore would be factually inaccurate. She was already historically existing under Malay rule when Raffles first stepped ashore. But Raffles saw the economic potential of Singapore in view of her strategic location at the meeting point of important trade routes. This belief in Singapore gave him the dare and drive to set up a British trading post on a narrow coastal strip by the Singapore River (Chew 1991:38).⁸

As the course of history would reveal, Singapore was blessed to have three men as her early pioneers - Raffles for his visionary first step onto Singapore soil; Farquhar for his tenacity during the early dangers; and Crawford for his win-win pragmatism which persuaded the Malay rulers to release control over Singapore in exchange for some handsome compensations. Indeed, colonising Singapore was good for those concerned only because of the economic profits and rewards involved.

2.1.2 Early economic progress. The treaties reached in 1824 with the Dutch and the Malay royalties assured Singapore's political future as a British possession. Soon, she became the focal point of British investment as well as Chinese immigration because of her increasing commercial potential. Singapore's strategic position gave her a clear advantage over other British ports in the Straits of Malacca. Situated at the southernmost tip of the Straits of Malacca, and blessed with a sheltered deep-water harbour, Singapore suited the needs of sailing traders very well. By using Singapore as their port of call, these sailors could time their

⁸ Actually, Raffles only visited Singapore three times - twice in 1819, and then for eight months from October 1822 to June 1823. He largely supervised Singapore at a distance from his base in Bencoolen, West Sumatra. It was Farquhar who worked arduously with the Malay power figures for the survival and growth of Singapore in her infant years.

journeys in such a way that they could take full advantage of the monsoon winds to get their ships to cover good distances (Wong 1991:42-43).

This navigational convenience also attracted many trading junks from China. These junks brought in many Chinese immigrants who had given themselves to some kind of bonded labour. This marked the early rise of immigrants from China to Singapore. In fact, from 1819 onwards, the increasing need for labour, trading and artisan skills had encouraged a steady influx of Chinese and Indian immigrants to Singapore. Besides ships from the East, those from the West also found Singapore ideal for their Indian Ocean-South China Sea journeys (Wong 1991:44-45).

The natural advantages of Singapore as a port were also complemented by a regulated incentive - trading was permitted without the imposition of duties or port charges. This free-port status was also another major reason why both Asian and Western traders found Singapore attractive (Wong 1991:47).

The Suez Canal in 1869 ushered in steam shipping but it did not undermine Singapore's importance as a port. Steam vessels needed much coal and fresh water, and Singapore was able to provide these supplies abundantly.

In 1914, the Panama Canal became operational for sea travel. But the Suez Canal still provided a cheaper route for goods from East Asia to the Atlantic. Hence, Singapore kept her importance in world trade yet again (Wong 1991:51-52).

Undoubtedly, the period of peace and security as a British entity had contributed greatly to the economic development of Singapore in her very early years. Wong Lin Ken, a Singapore historian, described how this played a significant part in Singapore's future years:

Under the shelter of Pax Britannica, Singapore developed unthreatened by war until the Japanese invasion of 1941 - a 122-year period of uninterrupted peace which permitted the development of a trade infrastructure that survived the rigours of the Japanese Occupation and made it possible for post-war

Singapore nationalists to face new challenges with solid historical advantages (Wong 1991:63).

The migrant workers contributed much to Singapore's progress during this time. They worked hard to give themselves and loved ones back in their homelands a better life. Herein lies the early seed of a money-making culture in Singapore.

2.1.3 Japanese Occupation. The increase of Japanese aggressiveness in the 1930s was of much concern to the British. Japan occupied Manchuria in 1931; resigned from the League of Nations in 1932; and invaded China in 1937. It then became British policy to beef up her defence of Singapore in anticipation of Japanese aggression. A dry dock was completed in 1938 and capable of taking the largest vessels afloat at that time. Army barracks were built and could house a full infantry battalion. In addition, two new air bases were set up in Tengah and Sembawang. Batteries of heavy artillery and anti-aircraft guns were deployed at Changi to cover the eastern approaches to the naval base.

In spite of this shoring up of her defence capabilities in the Far East, Britain did not station a peace-time fleet in Singapore. London believed that a naval force could reach Singapore in seventy days should the need arise. Meanwhile, the existing army and air units would protect the naval base until relief came. Another reason why the Royal Navy was not stationed in Singapore was the fact that the Japanese navy was far away and they had no air bases within striking distance. Hence, Britain assumed that a small garrison with strong seaward defence was sufficient in the protection of Singapore. In fact, so sure was London of this defence system that Singapore was considered impregnable. However, behind this proud boast of 'Fortress Singapore' was a sad story of discord between the military commanders on the ground and the War Office in London.

In 1937, British ground commanders had alerted the War Office that the defence of Singapore island was bound up with the defence of the whole Malayan peninsula. They



predicted that the Japanese might attack Singapore down the peninsula from the north.⁹ This led Major-General William Dobbie, General Officer Commanding Malaya, to push for the construction of defence works in North Malaya and Johore, but his suggestion was rejected by the War Office.¹⁰ Even pressures from Australia and New Zealand failed to move London. These two allies had warned Britain that Singapore was very much a 'sitting duck' without the protection of a peace-time fleet. The War Office stubbornly stood by its decision, stressing that Britain's priority was to concentrate her naval strength in Europe against looming German hostilities (Turnbull 1989:158-59).¹¹

In August 1939, Major-General L V Bond was appointed the new General Officer Commanding Malaya. He foresaw that it would be impossible to hold Malaya without sufficient ground troops as his forces would be spread too wide and thin. He proposed to his air comrades of a concentrated ground defence in Johore and Singapore until being reinforced. Bond had assumed that the air bases north of the peninsula would be strong enough to deter an attacking force before it actually reached Malaya.¹² The air commanders counterargued that concentrating defence on the south would allow the enemy to capture the northern air bases easily, and in turn, making Singapore isolated and vulnerable. This was one of many disagreements among the military commanders on the ground concerning how best to defend Singapore (Murfett 1999:180-81).

Meanwhile, political will in London relating to the defence of Singapore also proved to be very half-hearted. British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, flatly objected to proposed air

⁹ As events later turned out, they predicted correctly.

¹⁰ Johore is immediately north of Singapore and the two are only separated by the narrow Straits of Johore. At that time, there were three air fields along the east coast of Malaya but no military units to protect them.

¹¹ When war finally broke out in Europe in September 1939, Britain revised the time estimate for sending a naval task force to Singapore from 70 to 180 days. She again reappraised her position in 1940 when threatened by German invasion - she had to reduce her Far Eastern commitments and rely on the American fleet at Pearl Harbour to deter Japan.

¹² Bond was wrong. The Royal Air Force was actually too weak to deal with the Japanese when they finally attacked.

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reinforcements for Malaya.¹³ He was under the illusion that Singapore was already well-defended. As far as Churchill was concerned, the Japanese would not attack unless the war in Europe crippled Britain. He also insistently believed that the Americans would intervene immediately should the Japanese attack.

By now, it was very apparent that the Far East Command would receive little help should the crucial hour come. What made this even more painful was the fact that the ground commanders had actually predicted correctly where and how the Japanese would invade. In fact, in anticipation of this, they had a grand defence plan, codenamed *Matador*, aimed at checking the Japanese by beating them in seizing the southern ports of Thailand. This would keep the Japanese at bay, but there was one great flaw in the whole plan - executing it. To carry out *Matador*, the British would first have to violate Thai sovereignty in order to seize the targetted ports, and the Thais had vowed to fight off any intrusion into their territory (Murfett 1999:183-84).

In spite of her precarious position, there was an uneasy calm in Singapore all this while. Not much civil defence works were going on because the British felt that these projects would divert precious labour away from tin and rubber production. Moreover, they wanted the local communities to have a false sense of security, believing that Britain was in control of the situation and more than capable of defending her colonial subjects (Murfett 1999:189).

Admittedly, not all British shared this same indifference towards defending Singapore. In 1941, two senior military men assumed their duties in the Far East - Lieutenant-General Arthur Percival was appointed General Officer Commanding Malaya, and Brigadier Ivan Simson was the new Chief Engineer Malaya Command. Both of them were appalled at the

¹³ Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, Commander-in-Chief of land and air forces in the Far East, had appealed for more aircraft. But British engagement in Europe and the Middle East would not permit this. However, between June 1940 and April 1941, the number of Commonwealth troops was trebled, but they lacked the support of artillery and tanks (Turnbull 1989:161).

ease and calm they saw in Singapore. The lack of interest in organising the locals for defence works and the soft-living of troops stationed here greatly disturbed these two top brasses (Turnbull 1989:162).

In a bid to force the Japanese to end their fierce war with China, the USA, Britain and Holland imposed economic sanctions on Japan. In retaliation, Japan forced France to provide her with military bases in Indo-China. This gave the Japanese a naval base just 750 miles from Singapore and air fields only 300 miles away from northern Malaya. In the light of this development, Percival wasted no time in urging London for reinforcements. Unfortunately, Churchill refused to heed because of the war with Hitler's Germany in Europe. What made Churchill's stand even more ridiculous was that Britain had no formal or unified defence arrangement for the Far East with the Americans and the Dutch even up to this point (Turnbull 1989:163).

Percival was not the only one to feel frustrated. Ivan Simson's suggestions in October 1941 to build defences along the northern coastline of Singapore and around Johore Bahru were also snubbed by Churchill. Even his proposals for air-raid shelters were rejected. It seemed that the British Prime Minister had decided to turn a deaf ear to his own commanders on the ground. Eventually, it had to take the demands of a loud and angry Australia to make Churchill relent.¹⁴ One of Britain's fastest and most modern battleships, *Prince of Wales*, was sent to the Far East accompanied by the cruiser, *Repulse*, and an aircraft-carrier (Turnbull 1989:164).

As this battle fleet set sail, Japan confirmed her decision to attack South East Asia in November 1941. The aim of this offensive was to force the USA and Britain to lift their sanctions so that Japan would have enough resources to complete her war with China. The

¹⁴ Many Australian troops were in Singapore on combat duty at that time.

25th Japanese Army, under the command of the ruthless Lieutenant-General Tomoyuki Yamashita, was ordered to strike and carry out Japan's southern campaign (Turnbull 1989:165).

Back in Singapore, the arrival of the *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse* on 2 December 1941 brought great cheers from the people. But unknown to many, the accompanying aircraft-carrier had run aground, thereby depriving the two newly arrived battleships of very vital air cover.

These two ships had hardly settled into the naval base in Singapore when the Japanese began their offensive with deadly speed and surprise. Within hours on the night of 7/8 December 1941 (Malayan time), Japanese fighter planes attacked and destroyed the American fleet in Pearl Harbour. Simultaneously, they also invaded Hongkong and the Philippines; landed troops in southern Thailand (Songkhla and Patani) and northern Malaya (Kota Bharu); and bombed Singapore.¹⁵ Hence, the British lost the initiative right from the start. They were unable to launch the proposed *Matador* strategy which was to enter into southern Thailand and forestall any Japanese offensive before it reached Malaya. As it was, the Japanese beat the British in gaining control of southern Thailand, thereby effectively nullifying the *Matador* plan.

The lightning strikes of the Japanese shook the British into desperate action. Both the *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* were rushed to the north to intercept the invaders. But without a supporting aircraft-carrier, coupled with the fact that the northern air field in Kota Bharu was already in Japanese hands, this trip was really a suicide mission. Both the *Prince of Wales* (proudly nicknamed by the British as *HMS Unsinkable*) and the *Repulse* were sighted and

¹⁵ Some twenty-seven thousand Japanese troops landed almost unopposed in southern Thailand and northern Malaya.

sunk by the Japanese air force on 10 December 1941 (Turnbull 1989:166). The Japanese now controlled the high seas!

The superior Japanese air force also knocked out more than half of the British planes in North Malaya and easily captured the weakly defended air fields. Without air cover and with an almost empty naval base, only the ground troops were left to defend Singapore and they had to do this by fighting a retreating battle through the whole stretch of the Malayan peninsula.¹⁶

As the battle-hardened Japanese troops stormed down the peninsula relentlessly with the aim of reaching Singapore, Commonwealth troops were scurrying back in constant retreat. Meanwhile, back in Singapore, the locals were horrified at the sight of Europeans being evacuated out of the war zone while they were left behind to face their impending fate (Turnbull 1989:167-69).

In January 1942, the Commonwealth defenders entrenched themselves in Singapore for a last-ditch effort to fight off the invaders. This left the whole northern shore of Singapore open and vulnerable (Turnbull 1989:173).

On 8 February 1942, Singapore was heavily bombed by day and shelled by night. That evening, under the cover of darkness, the Japanese crossed into Singapore with speed and stealth. The crucial battle for Singapore had begun. Civilian casualties were extremely high during the last days of fighting, and the town was filled with the stench of filth and death. Realising that the cause was lost and not wanting a bloodbath to take place, Churchill gave Percival the permission to surrender on 14 February (Turnbull 1989:182-83).¹⁷

¹⁶ At the outbreak of war in Malaya, there were only three infantry divisions - one Australian and two Indian, but these were largely poorly trained and equipped. Britain did send the 18th Division as reinforcement but could not assemble an air and naval task force because of the war in Europe and the Middle East.

¹⁷ When he carried out his Singapore offensive, Yamashita had only 30 000 troops left. On the other hand, Percival had some 85 000 men under him when he made his last-ditch defence of Singapore. Clearly, the disparity between the fighting spirit of the invaders and that of the defenders was telling.

But unknown to the British, the invading Japanese were actually running very low in ammunition by then. Any prolonged fighting would have jeopardised their attempt to capture Singapore. However, the defenders of Singapore could only see their own hopeless position, not the worries of their seemingly invincible enemies. So, the British officially surrendered to the Japanese on 15 February 1942. The fall of Singapore took '30 days faster than its attackers had planned, but 4 months faster than the final "period before relief" as anticipated by the British' (Murcott 1999:236-38).

Commenting on the fall of Singapore, Ong Chit Chung, a military historian, felt that the fall of Singapore was the tragic result of too many half-measures. There was a shortfall of 16 battalions; inadequate artillery and no tanks; and only 158 obsolete aircrafts as opposed to the 336 modern ones accepted as standard deployment. The one man who could have corrected all these discrepancies was Winston Churchill, but he did not. Thus, Ong (1997:249) concluded:

The responsibility or blame must rest squarely on the shoulders of Churchill. It was Churchill who placed Malaya below the Middle East and Russia in terms of priorities. It was Churchill who consistently underestimated the Japanese threat.

The conquering Japanese marched into Singapore and renamed it *Syonan*.¹⁸ They began a reign of terror. There were instances of rape, torture, beatings and detention. To intimidate the people with greater fear, heads were even decapitated and put on public display. Though the conquerors had preached the equality of all Asians, they clearly treated the locals as inferior to themselves (Thio 1991:96). Rather than fulfilling their promise to liberate their fellow Asians from colonialism, the Japanese were more interested in becoming the new

¹⁸ *Syonan* means 'Light of the South' and the Japanese had intended to make Singapore a centre of Japanese imperialism in the south.

masters so that they could control the resources in South East Asia to support their war against China (Turnbull 1989:192).

The local Chinese bore the brunt of the Japanese cruelty.¹⁹ This was because of the on-going Sino-Japanese War as well as the fierce resistance put up by Chinese volunteer fighters in the battle for Singapore. Even after the fall of Singapore, Chinese guerillas from the Malayan People's Anti-Japan Army (MPAJA) and the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) continued to engage the Japanese in cat-and-mouse battles.²⁰ Hence, the Japanese harboured great hatred and suspicion towards the Chinese population (Turnbull 1989:191).

One Singaporean who had lived through this period of fear and terror was Lee Kuan Yew who later became the first Prime Minister of Singapore. Recalling a personal encounter, Lee (1998:53-54) said:

As I passed this group of soldiers, I tried to look as inconspicuous as possible. But they were not to be denied attention. One soldier barked '*Kore, kore!*' and beckoned to me. When I reached him, he thrust the bayonet on his rifle through the brim of my hat, knocking it off, slapped me roundly, and motioned me to kneel. He then shoved his right boot against my chest and sent me sprawling on the road. As I got up, he signalled that I was to go back the way I had come. I had got off lightly. Many others who did not know the new rules of etiquette and did not bow to the Japanese sentries at crossroads or bridges were made to kneel for hours in the hot sun, holding a heavy boulder over their heads until their arms gave way.

The Japanese also seemed to adopt a divide-and-rule strategy. In fact, they divided the population even more deeply than the British because of the different treatment they gave to the different communities in Singapore (Turnbull 1989:205). They were generally friendly to the Malays. This was probably because of the help they received from Malay agents before the start of the Malayan campaign. These agents had provided the invading forces with valuable

¹⁹ The act of persecution was known as *sook ching* and the Japanese used it to purge the local population of anti-Japanese elements.

²⁰ Later, a unit called *Force 136* was formed to set up an intelligence network against the Japanese. Besides these resistance fighters, another group called *Dalforce* was also battling the invaders. It was made up of local supporters of the nationalist and communist movements in China, and led by the British officer, Colonel John Dalley (Thio 1991:108-09).



information about British defences and suitable landing sites. They also acted as guides and interpreters for the Japanese who in turn promised to respect the religion, customs and possessions of the Malays.²¹ In particular, the Malays in Singapore were given extended holidays, advanced pay and generous provisions to celebrate their religious festivities. They were also trained in new skills so that they could do jobs which were once done only by non-Malays (Thio 1991:98-100).

Like the Malays, the Indians were also generally well treated. Japanese propaganda won over the Indians by promising to support the independence movement in India against the British.²² To express their sincerity in this support, the Japanese left Indian properties unharassed during the first three days after the fall of Singapore.

On the other hand, the Eurasians were badly treated like the Chinese. Those with direct European ancestors were immediately interned. Others were warned to view themselves as Asians and discard their social aloofness by joining the other communities in manual labour (Thio 1991:101-02).

On the whole, life for the locals during the Japanese Occupation was hard and spartan.

Historian Eunice Thio described the harshness this way:

The average family subsisted on a diet of broken rice grains made into porridge - with sweet potato and tapioca to provide bulk - and a few fragments of salt fish or *ikan bilis* (dried white bait) added for flavour. Cornmeal, ground *ragi*, and sago replaced the almost unattainable wheat flour. Bread was heavy and fibrous, being made of bran and palm-oil residue (Thio 1991:104).

In the year 1944, the fortunes of war began to turn against the Japanese. In November, the Americans conducted their first bombing raids on Singapore harbour. The aim was to mine

²¹ These Malay agents were members of the Kuala Lumpur-based dissident organisation called the *Kesatuan Melayu Muda*.

²² Subhas Chandra Bose, a Bengali revolutionary and President of the Indian National Congress in 1938-39, arrived in Singapore in July 1943. He had disagreed with Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru on the issue of the use of force against British colonialism. The Japanese used him in Singapore to spearhead the armed struggle for India's freedom against the British.

the harbour waters and to destroy rail and sea communications. The last days of Japanese Occupation were just as unbearable for the people - 'long queues for rice; water, gas and electricity were breaking down because of poor maintenance; hospitals were badly equipped and stocked; soaring prices; widespread malnutrition' (Turnbull 1989:212).

It was not until 15 August 1945 that the Japanese formally surrendered. But the news was only made public in Singapore two days later with the statement that the 'Emperor has decided to end the war.' On 21 August, the press officially announced Japan's unconditional surrender for the first time (Turnbull 1989:213). The following month on 12 September, all Japanese forces in South East Asia ceremoniously surrendered at the City Hall in Singapore and the British Union Jack was raised up again (Thio 1991:109).

But this return of British power was a hollow one. The rapid collapse of British forces during the battle for Singapore and the pitiful sight of British prisoners of war doing forced labour after the fall permanently destroyed the image of British superiority and invincibility. Incapable of defending her colonial subjects, Britain's right to reimpose colonial rule in Singapore was irreversibly undermined. Among the younger Singaporeans who could not reverentially respect the British as their elders did was Lee Kuan Yew himself. He concluded that the destiny of Singapore should not be left to the whims and fancies of foreign powers, but should be the sole responsibility of Singaporeans themselves. Lee said on one occasion:

My colleagues and I are of that generation of young men who went through the Second World War and the Japanese Occupation and emerged determined that no one - neither the Japanese nor the British - had the right to push and kick us around. We are determined that we could govern ourselves and bring up our children in a country where we can be proud to be self-respecting people.

When the war came to an end in 1945, there was never a chance of the old type of British colonial system ever being re-created. The scales had fallen from our eyes and we saw for ourselves that the local people could run the country.²³

²³ Lee, Kuan-Yew 1962. *The Battle for Merger. Towards Socialism* 5, 10-11.

An unfriendly mood greeted the British as they returned to Malaya and Singapore immediately after World War II. MCP and MPAJA guerillas, who had fought underground with the British against the Japanese during the war, emerged to challenge the reimposition of colonial rule. These were communist forces and they looked to the successful communist movement in China as their inspiration. At the same time, those in Singapore who had gone through the ordeal of the Japanese Occupation had developed a strong sense of belonging to the island. This gave rise to a new political consciousness soon after the war years, geared toward the fight for Singaporeans to become masters of their own homeland (Thio 1991:110-11). The war had taught them to rely on themselves to guard their own interests if they did not want to be expended and exploited by others again.

2.1.4 New political consciousness. The British had somewhat anticipated a difficult return to colonial rule after what happened during the war. Hence, they had planned to allow Malaya and Singapore to exercise self-government eventually. Almost immediately after their return to South East Asia, they formulated the Malayan Union scheme in October 1945. Under this formulation, the nine Malay states, Penang and Malacca would become the Malayan Union (still a Crown Colony) while Singapore remained a separate colony by herself. This separation of Singapore from the Malayan Union was to ease the fear of the mainland Malays toward the huge Chinese population in Singapore in any political reorganisation (Yeo and Lau 1991:117-18).²⁴

Shortly after the war, the MCP agreed to disarm itself and work toward its goal of a communist Malaya and Singapore by political subversion. The MPAJA also disbanded itself in January 1946. By this time, the MCP had some seventy thousand supporters in Singapore alone and its strongest vehicle of influence was the General Labour Union. With this powerful

²⁴ Later events revealed that many political parties in Malaya and Singapore were not in favour of the Malayan Union scheme because of British unwillingness to transfer power to the locals speedily and generously.

machinery, the communists used labour unrests to protest against widespread unemployment, food shortage and soaring prices. On 15 February 1946, the British Military Administration refused the MCP permission to hold a procession to lament the first anniversary of British defeat in Singapore. On the eve of the planned procession, 27 leading communists were arrested; 10 of them were banished without trial by the British (Turnbull 1989:224).

The period of military administration ended when civil administration returned in April 1946. Earlier, the British-formulated Malayan Union scheme was forced upon Malaya and Singapore. This then provoked the formation of Singapore's first indigenous political party, the Malayan Democratic Union, in December 1945. This party supported the Malayan Union, but only with Singapore as part of it and not as a separate colony. The eventual aim was to make Singapore part of a self-governing Malaya within the British Commonwealth (Turnbull 1989:225).

On the Malayan peninsula, the Malayan Union scheme also provoked Malay activists there to form the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) in March 1946. UMNO felt that to accord immigrant people with political status equal to that of the native Malays was unfair. The British were surprised by the strong opposition of the Malays and consequently revised the scheme. Eventually, the only feature of the original Malayan Union scheme that survived was the separation of Singapore from Malaya. The British also accepted UMNO's proposal for a gradual assimilation of immigrants into the Malay states which would work toward independence under British guidance. This agreement saw the Malayan Union giving way to the Anglo-Malay Scheme in May 1947 (Turnbull 1989:226-27).²⁵ The MCP condemned this move as pro-Malay and pro-British. They had wanted a self-governing Malaya

²⁵ This provisional scheme was later superseded by the Federation of Malaya in February 1948 with Singapore as a separate Crown Colony.

inclusive of Singapore in which all communities would enjoy equal rights (Yeo & Lau 1991:120).

Singapore's first post-war general election in 1948 to fill six elected seats in the Legislative Council was poorly supported - only 25 562 voted out of a potential electorate of around 200 000. However, the newly formed Singapore Progressive Party (SPP) contested and won three of the six seats. In the course of constitutional reforms, this party helped to set up the Public Service Commission (PSC) in 1951 and the Central Provident Fund (CPF) in 1954. Both of these have remained as vital institutions in Singapore to this day.²⁶ Like all other political parties in Singapore at that time, the primary objective of the SPP was to gain self-government for Singapore through gradual reforms with the view of eventual independence as a merged Singapore-Malaya entity (Yeo & Lau 1991:122-23).

Meanwhile, the MCP was frustrated by the little progress in getting Singapore into Malaya. They failed to exploit labour unrest and to influence the constitutional debate toward this merger, resulting in the birth of the Federation of Malaya in February 1948 without the inclusion of Singapore. Hence, in May and June, these communists became militant and resorted to acts of violence on the Malayan mainland.²⁷ This led the British to declare a state of emergency in the Federation of Malaya. Almost at the same time in Singapore, the island's first indigenous political party, the Malayan Democratic Union, dissolved itself voluntarily. They had also been pushing hard for a Singapore-Malayan union like the MCP, and thus, feared that the British might link them with the communists and act against them (Turnbull 1989:233).

²⁶ The PSC helps to recruit top talents into government service while the CPF is government-enforced savings to enable Singaporeans to look after their own financial welfare. By 1970, 30 % of the total population in Singapore were owning low-cost public homes purchased through the use of their CPF savings (Drysdale 1984:406).

²⁷ This armed struggle lasted for twelve years and was confined to the mainland of Malaya.

While all this tension was developing in Singapore and Malaya, six young men studying in Britain formed a Malayan Forum discussion group in London in 1949. This group aimed at building support for a Malayan independence movement through their discussions. Among them was a group of Singapore students who resolved to work for the island's independence as part of a united Malaya where racial equality and fair distribution of wealth would be practised. Lee Kuan Yew was one of these Singapore students.²⁸ In August 1950, Lee returned to Singapore after his law studies at Cambridge University. He quickly established himself as a 'sharp and effective courtroom lawyer' and was the legal adviser to many trade unions (Turnbull 1989:245-46).

In 1954, MCP activists reappeared on the political scene but now advocating a return to constitutional struggle. They met Lee Kuan Yew and after long negotiations, they agreed to work with Lee for constitutional reforms based on a policy of cooperation. Through this agreement, Lee got to know two prominent Chinese-educated leaders - Lim Chin Siong and Fong Swee Suan.²⁹ Lim and Fong later teamed up with Lee to form the People's Action Party (PAP). The resolve of this party was to urge all anti-colonial forces to cooperate in this nationalist struggle for an immediate Singapore-Malaya merger with the view of eventual independence from colonial rule (Yeo & Lau 1991:130-31).³⁰

In February 1954, the British made public the Rendel Report and announced that a general election would be held in 1955 under the guidelines spelt out in the report.³¹ This

²⁸ Lee Kuan Yew was a third-generation Baba Chinese. He was born in 1923 into a middle-class family. After the war, Lee read law at Cambridge University and excelled academically. Through the Malayan Forum, he met economist Goh Keng Swee and physiologist Toh Chin Chye. Goh was the founder and first chairman of the forum while Toh was the second chairman.

²⁹ The ethnic Chinese in Singapore then received their education in two ways - the English-educated Chinese were taught in schools where the medium of instruction was English, and the Chinese-educated ones were taught in schools which used Chinese as the medium.

³⁰ It must be noted that Lee Kuan Yew himself was anti-colonial rather than anti-British as some misunderstood him to be. Also, though he hated the ruthlessness of the Japanese during the war years, he still admire them as a self-respecting people until today.

³¹ In the Rendel Report, it was recommended that large degree of power be transferred to the locals. There would be 25 elected representatives in the legislature. The Cabinet would be accountable to this legislature, and

announcement stirred up a heightened interest to form new political parties and alliances in Singapore. One of these was the PAP, inaugurated in October 1954. Lee Kuan Yew was its first secretary-general and Toh Chin Chye was its first chairman (Turnbull 1989:248).³²

It must be noted that this new party was actually an alliance of two camps - the non-communist camp under Lee Kuan Yew and the pro-communist camp under Lim Chin Siong. Though Lee was the most vocal member of the PAP, it was Lim and his camp that were the real force because they commanded the support of the trade unions and the Chinese masses (Turnbull 1989:254).³³

The much anticipated election was held in April 1955 under the recommendations of the Rendel Report. The PAP contested but did not fight to win to form the government. Lee had reckoned that to govern under the Rendel recommendations would be too constraining for him. Hence, the PAP contested only for 4 seats and won 3 of them (Turnbull 1989:252).

The victorious party in this election was the Singapore Labour Front (SLF). It won a total of ten seats. The leader of the SLF, lawyer David Marshall, was a Singapore Jew. With his party's victory, Marshall became the first Chief Minister of Singapore. On the other hand, Lee Kuan Yew became the 'de facto opposition leader' in the Legislative Assembly (Yeo & Lau 1991:133).

As Lee's foresight had anticipated, Marshall had great difficulty exercising his role as Chief Minister. For one thing, the Rendel recommendations were clearly pro-British as key ministerial functions were in the hands of the colonial masters. For another, the place and

comprised 6 local ministers and 3 British ministers. The British would take charge of External Affairs, Defence, Internal Security, Finance, Law and the Civil Service. The local ministers would be selected from the party that won the general election in 1955.

³² The PAP had pledged to contest in the 1955 election for: immediate independence for Singapore in union with the Federation of Malaya; repeal of emergency regulations; common Malayan citizenship; Malayanisation of the civil service; free compulsory education; encouragement of local industry; amendment of trade union legislation; a workers' charter.

³³ Many of the Chinese in Singapore were from the Hokkien dialect group. As Lim Chin Siong spoke Hokkien fluently, he was able to sway the Chinese mass to his side.

power of the Chief Minister was not clearly defined, resulting in Marshall constantly clashing with the British Governor of Singapore. A frustrated Marshall found himself in 'titular power without substance' (Turnbull 1989:253).

While Marshall was having problem with the British Governor, Lee Kuan Yew was trying to sort out his own dilemma in working with the communist element (MCP) in his party (PAP). Lee wanted an independent, democratic and socialist Malaya inclusive of Singapore through open constitutional struggle, but the MCP wanted a communist union even through a violent take-over. However, the English-educated PAP leaders (with Lee as one of them) could not be seen as anti-MCP at this time as they needed the Chinese-educated MCP activists to help win over the huge Chinese-educated masses in Singapore. On the other hand, the MCP would also not want to jeopardise its alliance with Lee because the PAP was a good cover for its subversive work in Malaya and Singapore.

Shortly after assuming office, Marshall had to deal with strikes and riots inspired by student and labour activists in May and June 1955.³⁴ Behind these unrests was the instigative hand of the MCP. Unable to keep law and order with a firm hand, Marshall finally resigned on 7 June 1956 and was succeeded by his party mate, Lim Yew Hock (Yeo & Lau 1991:133-35).

Unlike Marshall, Lim Yew Hock came down hard on the communist activists. He ordered massive hunt-down of the communists, resulting in almost the whole top-level leadership of the MCP being detained, including Lim Chin Siong (Yeo & Lau 1991:136-37).³⁵

Later, Lim Yew Hock went to London for constitutional talks that lasted from 11 March to 11 April 1957. He then brought home many points of agreement with the British concerning constitutional reforms, paving the way for Singapore to become a self-governing

³⁴ These included the Chung Cheng High School 'sit-in', and the Hock Lee Bus Company riot in which many were killed.

³⁵ This purging of the communists benefitted the non-communist wing of the PAP in the long term as it enabled the party to be built up without the influential Lim Chin Siong.

state in the British Empire. Among these was the right of the British Governor to suspend the Constitution and govern himself in 'extreme' circumstances. The British also insisted that those who had a record of subversive involvement be barred from being elected into the first Legislative Assembly of the new state of Singapore. In Assembly debates, Lee Kuan Yew himself was very supportive of these points of agreement with the British. Lee then prepared the PAP in earnest to contest in the 1959 general election.

Unlike what they did in 1955, the PAP wanted to win the 1959 election in order to form the government. It contested in all the 51 seats and won 43 of them at the polls on 30 May. Among other factors, the decisive PAP's victory was due to its sincere efforts to reach all Singaporeans, including the Chinese-educated and lower-income voters, thus avoiding being labelled 'pro-colonial' or 'capitalistic' (Yeo & Lau 1991:137-39).

As voting was made mandatory for the first time in 1959, Lee's victory at the polls gave him a very strong mandate from the people to govern. 89 % of the almost 600 000 eligible voters went to the polls. And with the strong endorsement from the people, Lee Kuan Yew led them into a new era as the first Prime Minister of the self-governing state of Singapore. But before forming the new government, Lee secured the release of eight party associates who were earlier detained at Lim Yew Hock's order. Six of them, including Lim Chin Siong, publicly signed a statement in support of the PAP's non-communist position. Indeed, 1959 helped to define Singapore's style of democracy - 'citizens speak through the ballot box, and a government takes charge with a strong hand.'³⁶

When Lee's government was in place, the office of Governor was abolished, and the British Commissioner became the leading British authority in self-governing Singapore. Though very much in the background, the Commissioner had great powers - he was entitled to

³⁶ *The Straits Times* 3 June 1999. We begin a new chapter ... a people's government. pp 42-43.

see the agenda of cabinet meetings together with all cabinet papers; he was also the Chairman of the Internal Security Council with the power to suspend the Constitution and assume charge in time of emergency (Turnbull 1989:265-66).³⁷ As the British took a back-seat in the governing of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew was planning to push harder forward. He was not content with just moving Singapore from colony to self-government; he wanted Singapore to be independent in union with the Malayan mainland.³⁸ But all the unrests during this period of political and social turbulence had warned Lee to keep working at another important union if Singapore was to progress further - making Singaporeans see themselves as one united people regardless of race, language or religion.

2.2 From Merger to Independence

2.2.1 Merger with Malaya. From 1955, the PAP had pushed for immediate merger of Singapore and Malaya. But the Malayan Federation under Tunku Abdul Rahman had opposed it. They feared the large Chinese population in Singapore and viewed them as communist-oriented. Hence, Lee's first task in power was to win the trust of the Tunku. Under the 1959 Constitution, both Britain and Malaya had control over the internal security of Singapore through a right to vote at the Internal Security Council. This would be revised in 1963. Lee warned the Tunku that when this revision came, the internal security of Singapore would no longer be under the control of the British or the Malayan Federation. Lee's warning was well heeded by the Tunku because of rising tension in Singapore after the PAP came into power. In their desperate attempts to undermine Lee's rule, communist activists stirred up student and labour unrests, and succeeded somewhat to win over the ground. This was evident in two by-

³⁷ In self-government, Singaporeans controlled National Development, Finance, Home Affairs, Labour and Law, Health, Education and Culture. The British continued to control the Defence and Foreign Affairs portfolios. For the first six months of self-government, former Governor, William Goode, acted as the Head of State (*Yang Di-Pertuan Negara*). In December 1959, he was succeeded by a Singaporean, Yusof bin Ishak, who was the former chairman of the Public Service Commission.

³⁸ It was common knowledge that Lee always believed that tiny Singapore had no permanent future unless it became one with the Malayan mainland and shared in its rich resources.

elections sometime later in 1959 where the PAP candidates were decisively defeated by their opponents. In the face of these defeats, the PAP leaders threatened to resign from government. This situation also worried the Tunku who was afraid that a pro-communist government might replace the PAP, and Singapore would become a base for communist subversion of the Malayan mainland (Yeo & Lau 1991:139-40).

The pro-communist elements in the PAP were in turn anxious to know that the Malayan Federation was warming up to the idea of merger. These people opposed merger because they knew that should it become a reality, they would be persecuted by the anti-communist central government when it exercised its power in internal security. Thus, the pro-communists in the PAP attempted to influence party policy by trying to get into the Central Executive Committee (CEC). But they failed because Lee denied all of them cadre membership in the PAP.³⁹ Finally, in a battle of political wits, thirteen PAP Assemblymen who were pro-communists were expelled from the party, ending their attempt to capture control in the PAP.

This expelled faction then formed the *Barisan Sosialis* (BS) with Lim Chin Siong as Secretary-General and Lee Siew Choh as Chairman. The aim of the BS was to topple the PAP in open opposition. Lee Kuan Yew answered the challenge by calling on Singaporeans to support the PAP-backed merger at a general referendum to be held on 1 September 1962. Almost 71 % of the votes favoured the PAP-backed merger, and the call of the BS to cast blank votes only garnered 26 % support. The people of Singapore were ready to move with Lee Kuan Yew to be a part of a greater Malaya.

³⁹ Under the PAP's Constitution, only cadre members could be elected into the CEC.

But on his part, the Tunku wanted merger only within the larger framework of Malaysia. This was the proposed union of Malaysia, Singapore, Sabah, Sarawak and Brunei.⁴⁰ The Tunku wanted to balance the large increase of Chinese from Singapore with the indigenous peoples from the other three places.

Not taking its defeat at the referendum lying down, the BS linked up with the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), intending to stop the merger from gathering strength.⁴¹ In response, the Internal Security Council, in which the Malayan government had a say, mounted a purging campaign on 2 February 1963. More than 100 people were detained, including Lim Chin Siong and 23 other BS members. With these dissidents out of the way, Malaya, Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak finally came together and formed Malaysia on 16 September 1963 (Yeo & Lau 1991:142-43).

In accordance with the Malaysia Agreement concluded in July 1963, Singapore handed over control in foreign affairs, defence and internal security to the central government. However, she still had great powers over finance, labour and education. Singapore could also retain her own executive government, Assembly, Head of State and Public Service Commission. In addition, 15 seats in the new Malaysian Legislature were allotted to Singapore. On her part, Singapore was obliged to contribute 40 % of her income from taxes to the central government, and this amounted to 27 % of her total revenue then (Turnbull 1989:274).

With the realisation of merger, Singapore seemed to be heading for better days. Moreover, PAP rule had improved the life of people generally, and brought material benefits by way of broad industrialisation, and redistribution of national wealth through subsidised

⁴⁰ Sabah, Sarawak and Brunei were collectively called British Borneo. Eventually, Sabah and Sarawak agreed to join Malaysia while Brunei decided against.

⁴¹ The PKI in turn influenced President Sukarno of Indonesia to authorise sabotage and terrorist activities against Malaysia. This period of hostility in the early days of Malaysia was known as the 'Confrontation'.

social services, housing, education and health care. The status of women was improved and industrial relations were relatively peaceful. Vigorous attempts were also made to enforce law and order - gangsters were arrested and kidnapping gangs broken up.⁴² All these created a favourable social and industrial environment for foreign investments to come. But sadly, the journey on the merger road was a disastrous one for the PAP (Turnbull 1989:276). And Singapore learnt a hard truth - she could not take her incipient success for granted as a harsh turn of events would easily spoil it all.

2.2.2 Separation from Malaysia. After merger, Singapore leaders were dismayed by the little political and economic freedom they had. This was largely due to the ambiguous terms of merger.⁴³ A conflicting situation could not be avoided.

In the 1963 general election in Singapore just after merger, politicians from the Malayan mainland came over to the island to contest in it. They were all defeated. The following year in 1964, the PAP decided to 'reciprocate' by contesting in the Malayan general election. Though defeated, the PAP's participation sparked off a loud protest from Malay politicians on the mainland who condemned it as a challenge to Malay supremacy (Yeo and Lau 1991:144).⁴⁴

⁴² In fact, the government has since legislated some very stern and harsh laws to keep society from fracturing. For example, American teenager Michael Fay committed gross vandalism when he was residing in Singapore, and was sentenced to jail plus six strokes of the cane in 1994. The enraged American Congress and media pressured President Bill Clinton to demand that the sentence be lifted. But the Singapore government only agreed to reduce the caning from six to four strokes. Indeed, for those who observe the law, they will feel very much secured and protected; but for those who violate it, they will find the law coming down hard on them without fear or favour.

⁴³ The economic ambiguities resulted in disputes over Singapore's contribution to the central treasury, textile exports to Britain, and the central government's intention to close the Bank of China (this would badly affect Singapore's trade with China). Singapore felt that the central government had shown little concern over her industrial development and unemployment situation.

⁴⁴ The Tunku and Lee had mutually agreed before the merger that political parties from the mainland and Singapore would not cross over to each other's territory to contest in any general election. But the PAP contested in the mainland because Lee felt that the Tunku had not kept his word. Also, Singapore was only given 15 out of 159 seats in the central parliament when it could have qualified for 25. Besides, no PAP men were appointed to high positions in the central government, not even Lee himself. Feeling overlooked, Lee decided to increase the PAP's share of power in Malaysia by contesting in the 1964 general election on the Malayan mainland. It proved to be a costly move as it eventually led to racial tension between the Malays and the Chinese in Singapore.

At the time of merger, the PAP government had undertaken to safeguard Malay political, educational, religious, economic and cultural interests in Singapore. Special financial aids were also extended to Malay children. However, all these measures paled in comparison to the very preferential treatment given to the Malays on the Malayan mainland. In addition, many Malays in Singapore then felt that their established way of life in village houses was threatened by the proposed urban renewal plans of the government. They would have to relocate and live in modern high-rise apartments built by the government. When pressured by Malay representatives to give greater concessions to their community, Lee Kuan Yew firmly refused except in the matter of education (Turnbull 1989:282-83).

Malay activists from the Tunku's UMNO party cited the PAP's participation in the mainland's general election and 'indifference' towards the Malays' plight in Singapore as evidences of Lee's anti-Malay position. They accused him of trying to unite the Chinese against the Malays and mounted a malicious campaign in Singapore with racial undertones. This resulted in two bloody riots in Singapore between the Chinese and the Malays in July and September 1964.

It was clear that the Tunku's UMNO party was bent on building a 'Malay Malaysia' with Malay domination. But Lee defiantly called for a non-communal 'Malaysian Malaysia' and formed the Malaysian Solidarity Convention (MSC) to push for this.⁴⁵ This further antagonised the UMNO activists who now charged Lee for harbouring ambition to be the Prime Minister of 'Lee Kuan Yew's Malaysia'. They demanded a suspension of the Singapore Constitution, outlawing the PAP and Lee's detention as a political criminal. But the Singapore

⁴⁵ The MSC comprised the PAP, two Malayan parties and two Sarawak parties. The aim was to use the grouping to win the majority of seats in Malaysia to form the government in order to realise 'Malaysian Malaysia'.

leader was saved from the 'jaws of martyrdom' when the British Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, warned the Tunku against Lee's detention (Yeo & Lau 1991:145-46).

Meanwhile, Lee continued to be belligerent in parliament, and the sessions in May and June 1965 were filled with abuses. Lee defiantly said: 'If we must make trouble, let us have it now instead of waiting for another five or ten years.' By now, the Tunku was increasingly angered by Lee's abrasiveness and insensitivity (Turnbull 1989:284).

So intense was the dislike for Lee in the UMNO camp that it openly supported the *Barisan Sosialis* candidate in a by-election in Singapore in July 1965. This was sad irony because it was well known that this opposition party was anti-Malaysia and affiliated to the Malayan Communist Party. But in spite of UMNO's support for the opposition, the PAP won decisively.

This crucial victory convinced the Tunku that the PAP already had the upper hand over the communists in Singapore. In other words, he believed that it had become very difficult, if not impossible, for the communists to use Singapore as a base to subvert the Malayan mainland.⁴⁶ Also, the Tunku viewed Lee as a great political threat to the Malays because of his very aggressive 'Malaysian Malaysia' stance. He realised that it was not possible to check Lee constitutionally, and repressive action would only have serious repercussions at home and abroad. The Tunku became more and more convinced that the only way out was for Singapore to leave Malaysia. That fateful day came on 9 August 1965 when Singapore parted with Malaysia and had independence thrust upon her (Yeo & Lau 1991:147).

Recalling his meeting with the press on the morning of that turning point in Singapore's history, at which he broke down briefly, Lee (1998:16) revealed:

⁴⁶ It was this fear of communist subversion that had persuaded the Tunku to take in Singapore in the first place.

At that moment, my emotions overwhelmed me. It was only after another 20 minutes that I was able to regain my composure and resume the press conference.

I was emotionally overstretched, having gone through three days and nights of a wrenching experience. With little sleep since Friday night in Kuala Lumpur, I was close to physical exhaustion. I was weighed down by a heavy sense of guilt. I felt I had let down several million people in Malaysia: Immigrant Chinese and Indians, Eurasians, and even some Malays

Prior to merger, Lee was convinced that an independent Singapore would not be viable without the Malayan mainland. But as events had dictated, she had to separate from Malaysia and become an independent nation. The uncertainties ahead made independence a heavy load. Indeed, Singapore leaders felt that the country was like a 'child untimely borned', but they would have to prove their own 'prophecy of doom' wrong. They learnt that Singapore's potential would make others envious of her, and Singapore's small size would make her vulnerable to unfair treatment. Nevertheless, they had to lead all Singaporeans to believe in themselves and battle the odds together.

2.3 From Survival to Success

2.3.1 Battling the odds. The first priority for newly independent Singapore was her defence. The plan was to have a small regular army complemented by a large force of conscripted national servicemen.⁴⁷ But before this, volunteers were first needed for defence. Some cabinet ministers and members of parliament answered the call, leading the way in this first test of Singapore nationalism (Drysdale 1984:395-96).

In November 1965, the Ministry of the Interior and Defence (MINDEF) was set up. The first military advisers and instructors came from Israel.⁴⁸ While national service was

⁴⁷ The national service policy was implemented in 1967 and required all able-bodied men of 18 years old to serve full time in the armed forces for 2 to 2 1/2 years.

⁴⁸ Actually, requests for military help were made to a number of countries but only the Israelis responded favourably.

designed to create and maintain a defence force at minimum cost, the primary objective then was to use it to nurture a sense of national unity (Turnbull 1989:294).

The government had to sensitively and actively promote a Singaporean identity without suppressing ethnic peculiarities.⁴⁹ Moreover, to guard racial harmony in Chinese-dominated Singapore, the government had to check the rise of Chinese chauvinism since the social ethos then had a distinct Chinese or Confucian flavour - discipline, hard work, competition, self-reliance and desire for material success (Turnbull 1989:292).

Lee Kuan Yew described the challenge to rid communal tension this way:

Multiracialism in a permissive tolerant society became imperative for Singapore, in which were large components of people with diverse ethnic, linguistic and religious backgrounds. The problem was how to create a situation where the minority, either in ethnic, linguistic or religious terms, was not conscious that it was a minority, and that the exercise of its rights as equal citizens with all the others was so natural and so accepted by society that it is not conscious of the fact that it was sharing equal rights with the others in dominant ethnic groups (Drysdale 1984:397).

Another big task for young Singapore was to diversify the sources of her foreign investment. Hitherto, more than 70 % of Singapore's foreign investment came from Britain. It was time to build up new trading relationships. With the end of Indonesia's hostility toward Malaysia following the end of President Sukarno's rule, trade with Indonesia was greatly improved, beginning June 1966. As the USA became increasingly involved in the Vietnam War, Singapore served as an important supplies centre for the Americans. At a later time, the closure of the Suez Canal, following the Seven Days' War in the Middle East, fortuitously enhanced Singapore's status as a ship-repair centre as more vessels had to use Singapore as an alternative port of call (Turnbull 1989:293).

⁴⁹ To tap the advances of the English-speaking world, and to retain the people's respective ethnic roots and identity, the government actively promoted bilingualism in its education policy - students would learn English and their own mother tongue (Mandarin, Malay or Tamil).

In the midst of all these positive happenings, Singapore received an unwelcomed news from the British on 18 July 1967 - they would withdraw all their forces from Singapore by the mid-1970s. Six months later, the withdrawal plans were brought forward by three years to 1971 because of acute economic problems in Britain. This acceleration of British withdrawal with the closing down of their military bases posed a big problem as many locals would lose their jobs. To compound this problem further, Singapore's industrialisation so far could not create enough new employment opportunities for all those who would be retrenched. Lee Kuan Yew rushed to London to ask the British to phase out the withdrawal over an eight-year period. But they only agreed to extend final withdrawal from March 1971 to December the same year (Drysdale 1984:400-01).⁵⁰

The PAP went to the polls in April 1968 to seek a new mandate to steer Singapore out of this uncertain period. They won all seats and took more than 84 % of the total votes. In July the same year, the Economic Development Board (founded in 1961) was reorganised, its original function of financing being transferred to the Development Bank of Singapore (DBS).⁵¹ The following month in August, sweeping labour laws were passed with the aim of making the labour movement more cooperative rather than confrontational.⁵² An investment-friendly environment was meticulously put in place (Turnbull 1989:295).⁵³

By August 1973, the government owned 26 companies wholly with an authorised capital of 670 million Singapore dollars and 33 others partially with some 200 million

⁵⁰ The British also promised to hand over valuable assets, retrain redundant workers, help create an air defence system, and give a soft loan of 50 million British pounds.

⁵¹ The DBS was to provide long-term financing to local manufacturing industries.

⁵² Employment and industrial laws were amended in order to reduce the power of unionists to keep pressing for increasing fringe benefits.

⁵³ Several other statutory authorities were set up in the ensuing years to facilitate economic growth with strong infrastructures - the Public Utilities Board, the Telecommunication Authority of Singapore, the Port of Singapore Authority, the Jurong (Industrial) Town Corporation and the Monetary Authority of Singapore.

Foreign investors could lease land and buildings cheaply and speedily. Tax exemptions were also given to companies with pioneer status, and export-oriented ones enjoyed even further tax incentives. The government also secured treaties on the avoidance of double taxation with other countries (Cheng 1991:209).



Singapore dollars in equity. This made the government the most important entrepreneur in the development process (Chan 1991:164).⁵⁴

Though critics had often charged the PAP government for being authoritarian because of its almost obsessive emphasis on order and stability, and intolerance of opposition politics, it was clear that Lee and his colleagues had earned the trust of Singaporeans. In the general elections of 1968, 1972 and 1976, the people gave them their resounding support by voting in an all-PAP parliament. Indeed, Singapore under the PAP battled and overcame the odds stacked against her survival after separation from Malaysia.⁵⁵ By example and propaganda, the government was preaching the message that the limitations of Singapore's small size could be surmounted by a spirit of diligence, competition and excellence. The people believed and wanted to not merely survive, but to succeed in making a better life for themselves.

2.3.2 Achieving success. The first eight years after independence saw Singapore achieving spectacular economic growth. External trade increased by more than 15 % per year from 1965 to 1973.⁵⁶ The country also diversified into other industries and grew rapidly as a financial and shipping centre for the region. In 1968, it was made the headquarters of the Asian Dollar Market and launched its own national shipping line; became a gold market in 1969; and completed the construction of its container port in 1972 (Turnbull 1989:295-97).

⁵⁴ Singaporeans were used to living under paternalistic colonial rule. This mentality of allowing the higher powers to decide for them, together with their low interest in politics, favoured the development of a paternalistic style of government in Singapore. Also, state government in Singapore was much like secular management - achieving maximum output with the scarce human and material resources available in Singapore (Chan 1991:176-77).

⁵⁵ In fact, Singapore's economy grew by a high 8 % in 1965, the year of separation from Malaysia. Henceforth from 1966 to 1973, the annual average rate of growth at constant prices was 13 %. Unemployment dropped from 8.1 % in 1967 to 4.5 % in 1973. The problem was slowly changing from one of job shortage to that of labour shortage, especially skilled labour (Cheng 1991:194-97).

⁵⁶ In 1977, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) mooted to transfer Singapore from recipient to donor country status because of its consistently robust growth.

The spirit of diligence, competition and excellence as preached by the government was bearing fruit as Singaporeans began to enjoy a better life materially. Edwin Lee, academic historian at the National University of Singapore, observed:

As different as the Malays, Chinese, and Indians are in their philosophy and ethos, they have all responded to changes which have taken place since the nation's independence, to rapid industrialisation and urbanisation, and to new standards in education and technology. They have responded at different speeds, but display common tendencies represented by smaller families, larger incomes, home and car ownership, working mothers, better-educated children, holidays abroad, and a generally higher quality of life. They are starting to dream together, as they work together, for all the good things that the future holds for those who dream the Singapore dream (Lee 1991:264).

With Singapore continuing to experience great measures of economic growth and success, Lee Kuan Yew handed his office as Prime Minister to Goh Chok Tong on 28 November 1990 after thirty one years at the helm.⁵⁷ This marked the rise of the second-generation of PAP leaders and the beginning of their task to continue Singapore's growth and success into the next millennium. The younger Goh has been described as 'capable of making tough decisions yet consults his colleagues and tries to build consensus for these decisions.' Like Lee, he too has the shrewdness of a politician though not the dynamic oral skills of his predecessor (Milne 1990:129).

East Asia was hit by its worst post-war economic crisis which began in 1997. Many economies in the region were badly weakened, and countries like Thailand, South Korea and Indonesia were on the brim of bankruptcy if not for the rescue efforts initiated by the International Monetary Fund. However, responding quickly and appropriately with certain institutional reforms, Singapore was one of the least hurt in this crisis. In fact, international confidence in Singapore continued to remain strong. In its Global Competitiveness Report

⁵⁷ Goh, an economist by training, was former managing director of the national shipping line (Neptune Orient Lines) before he became a politician. Lee has since been Senior Minister in the Cabinet until today. With his experience in politics and statesmanship, he is acting like an adviser to the younger set of leaders.

1999, the Geneva-based World Economic Forum (WEF) placed Singapore as the most competitive economy after a study of fifty nine countries. Below is a summary table adapted from the WEF report:

TABLE 1: WEF's Global Competitiveness Rankings 1999

Ranking in Competitiveness		Singapore's Ranking by Competitive Criteria	
1st	Singapore	Openness	2nd
2nd	USA	Government	1st
3rd	Hongkong	Finance	2nd
4th	Taiwan	Infrastructure	7th
5th	Canada	Technology	2nd
6th	Switzerland	Management	12th
7th	Luxembourg	Labour	1st
8th	Britain	Institutions	2nd

Over the years, Singapore has learnt to compete with the outside world and excel. But this tendency is also readily observable among Singaporeans themselves as they compete and compare with one another in many areas. This is largely due to the system of meritocracy designed and nurtured by the government since the early years of independence. For example, prestigious government scholarships are given to outstanding students on merit alone, putting 'the child of a taxi driver on par with that of a merchant banker' (Mahizhnan & Lee 1998:5). As such, many young Singaporeans are already pushing themselves and striving for material success via the route of meritocracy. A young student who puts in hours into his studies will pour in hours into his work when he enters the working world.⁵⁸

The government recognises that the people view success only in a narrow, economic sense in its recent report, *Singapore 21*, which spells out its aspirations for Singapore in the new millennium.⁵⁹ It now calls on the people to define success beyond the basic survival level to the higher social and spiritual dimensions (Government 1999:20).

⁵⁸ Many parents are also pushing their children hard in their studies, as evident in the large number of students taking private tuition lessons. The desire to excel and succeed has generally made the school, the workplace and even the home, stressful and competitive.

⁵⁹ Five features are listed by the government as pillars of a 21st century Singapore - every Singaporean matters; strong families; opportunities for all; feeling passionately for Singapore; active citizens in nation-building.

Explaining the need for this redefinition, the report acknowledges:

There are good historical reasons why Singaporeans view success narrowly. Economics was the imperative when the country first came into being. When we had nothing, having something was success. Education was pursued as the path to a good job.

On the positive side, a narrow definition of success has helped to maintain Singapore's competitive edge by feeding the desire to excel. But it has also had undesirable social effects (Government 1999:18-19).⁶⁰

Indeed, a survey conducted in conjunction with the *Singapore 21* report has revealed that 64.1 % of Singaporeans feel keenly stressed by the fast pace of change in Singapore. To help people cope, the report suggests that individuals retain the drive to succeed but widen their definition of success (Government 1999:18).

The call now is not to let success be an end in itself, but the by-product of pursuing satisfaction. When applied to the ambitious Singaporean working hard to be successful, what this means is to put professionalism ahead of prestige - to stay at a task in order to deepen expertise rather than switching job in order to do something more prestigious (Government 1999:21).⁶¹

As for the family, the report gloomily forecasts:

As Singapore enters the next century, the family will come under increased strain. Nuclear families will be the trend. In most cases, both mother and father will be working. In a knowledge-driven workplace, their jobs will be less secure and more demanding. At home, their children will be open to more influences and be harder to manage (Government 1999:25).

With the government embarking on its drive to attract capable foreigners to come beef up the country's limited pool of local talents, Professor Tan Kong Yam of the National University of Singapore has more sober news for the Singapore family:

⁶⁰ Some of the undesired social effects identified are: an unforgiving society that does not believe in giving a second chance to those who have failed; a risk aversion attitude that avoids trying new grounds for fear of failing; mismatched talents in that some end up like 'square pegs in round holes' in life ('e.g' a talented violinist chooses to be a banker, even a mediocre one, because of the lure of better material returns).

⁶¹ This writer has personally known ambitious Singaporeans who have been greatly stressed and depressed because of premature or ill-timed career changes.

On the one hand, due to the open immigration policy necessitated by sustaining international competitiveness, ambitious and capable people from the region could gravitate to Singapore. They and their offspring increase the competitive and stress level in the country, including the educational system and the general cost of living through the bidding process on the limited supply of houses and cars (Mahizhnan & Lee 1998:167).

Truly, the road ahead for the Singapore family does not promise an easy ride. Even the government refrains from offering any easy answers. In his speech to the nation at the National Day Rally on 22 August 1999, Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong called on Singaporeans to make the country a 'first-class economy and a world-class home.' He passionately challenged the nation not to rest on its laurels but to press on to excel even further - in economic growth, in education, in sports and in the performing arts. But what he left out in his two-hour speech was a call to excel in family life. Ironically, 'strong families' is identified as one of the pillars of society in the government's vision spelt out in *Singapore 21*.⁶²

Undoubtedly, Singapore has achieved great economic success. This is the result of belief, unity, and diligence combining to fire up perseverance, optimism, excellence and competition in the will of people. And this success culture is beginning to assert its influence in other spheres. People are not only challenged to be productive workers, but also to be active volunteers in social work and strong builders of family life. It certainly takes superhuman energy and effort to do these all at the same time. However, nation building demands that the public call cannot be anything less.

What then are some of the prevailing values in Singapore today in view of this success culture which is still largely materialistic? The findings of some recent studies on the population, the family and the younger generation will provide some answers.

⁶² Excerpts of Goh's speech appeared in the local daily, *The Straits Times*, on 23 August 1999 (front page and pages 26-30). Not long later, Lee Kuan Yew sounded a warning in his capacity as Senior Minister when interviewed by the Dutch newspaper *NRC Handelsblad*. He said: 'If the younger families decide that their careers count for more than their children's upbringing, we will have a very different generation that will not be as good; and it's irreversible.' Lee's comments were quoted on page 2 of the 17 September 1999 issue of another local daily *The New Paper*.

2.4 Success and Social Values

2.4.1 National core values. In multiracial Singapore, citizens are urged to see themselves as Singaporeans, but at the same time, cautioned not to lose their own ethnic identity.⁶³ For example, at the annual celebration of the nation's independence on 9 August, Singaporeans are called to come together and rejoice as one people regardless of ethnicity. On the other hand, the different races are also encouraged to openly and lavishly celebrate their own ethnic festivities. Besides, all the different ethnic groups have their own self-help agencies to attend to the welfare of their respective communities. Hence, the key to social cohesion in Singapore is not to assimilate the cultures of the minority groups into that of the dominant one, but to have a national ideology that will both integrate a pluralistic people and at the same time respect their essential differences. This national ideology was officially spelt out by President Wee Kim Wee when he addressed the opening of the Seventh Parliament in January 1989. The Head of State mentioned four core values to ensure continued prosperity and survival for the nation: placing community over self; upholding the family as the basic building block of society; resolving major issues through consensus instead of contention; stressing racial and religious tolerance and harmony (Jon Quah 1990:91).

In stressing community over self, the thrust is to go for a balance between individual and community interests. Concerning this, Lee Kuan Yew has this to say: 'Without a cohesive society, a people who care for each other, especially the successful for the less successful, we cannot succeed.'⁶⁴ However, communitarianism does seem to conflict with meritocracy which is also strongly emphasised by the government (Jon Quah 1990:88). On one hand, communitarianism implies that the majority of people should not be left behind. On the other

⁶³ The latest racial profile is: 76.8 % Chinese, 13.9 % Malay, 7.7 % Indian and 1.4 % other races - Ministry of Information and the Arts 2001. *Singapore 2001*. Singapore: MITA.

⁶⁴ *The Straits Times* 21 September 1999. Singapore 21 'can help bond people early,' p31.

hand, meritocracy requires that only the best should be placed ahead, implying that many will be left behind. Indeed, Singapore is still very much a young nation in transition and her leaders will have to continue ironing out such seemingly contradicting policies.

In promoting the family as the basic institution in society, the government has been careful not to advance the Confucian model of the family so as not to disturb the non-Chinese racial groups. Given its proud tradition of being clean and honest, the government also takes pain to ensure that family ties do not breed nepotism in the national leadership (Jon Quah 1990:94-95).⁶⁵

In choosing consensus over contention, the government intends to cement strong bonds with the people. It does not wish to resort to violence when working out national problems with the masses. When formulating major public policies, the leaders of the country have thus committed themselves to listen and consult (Jon Quah 1990:95-96).⁶⁶ Different measures have been implemented in recent years to facilitate this consultative style. One is the Feedback Unit which is established to help channel ground sentiments concerning public policy matters to the government. The other is the Nominated Member of Parliament scheme which is set up to bring in recognised professionals who have no political affiliation in order to improve the quality of parliamentary debates.⁶⁷

Racial and religious harmony is advanced as a national core value simply because Singapore is not a homogeneous society in spite of her predominantly Chinese population. In fact, the Chinese themselves are divided into many dialect groups, each with its own distinct

⁶⁵ It is interesting to note that there has been much criticism from outside Singapore concerning the rapid rise of Lee Hsien Loong, the elder son of Lee Kuan Yew, in his political career. The younger Lee is now the Deputy Prime Minister of Singapore. But the government has consistently maintained that Lee Hsien Loong has advanced purely on his own merit. In fact, the senior Lee once retorted when questioned by a foreign critic: 'If he is not my son, he will be the prime minister by now.'

⁶⁶ The paternalistic style of government adopted in the early years by Lee Kuan Yew and his colleagues has often been criticised as being authoritarian and dictatorial.

⁶⁷ This move is deemed necessary because the opposition members in parliament have often been alleged to lack the sharpness to take on the ruling PAP government when debating on public issues.

customs and practices. To preserve social cohesion, it is therefore, important that there is respect and tolerance of one another's rights, practices and beliefs (Jon Quah 1990:97).⁶⁸

While most Singaporeans may agree that the core values preached by the government are good for social bonding, how willing are they to put them into practice? A recent study has revealed some interesting findings.⁶⁹

TABLE 2: Attitude toward General Social Values (Kau, Tan & Wirtz 1998:43)

	% Disagree	% Neutral	% Agree
Respect for authority is important to society.	3.3	31.9	64.8
Conforming to social norms is very important.	20.8	49.4	42.9
Society should come before the individual.	8.2	52.2	39.6

In summarising the findings in Table 2, the study suggests that while most people agree that it is important to respect authority, most also do not conform to social norms and do not put society before self. Further analysis shows that the higher-income and better-educated Singaporeans are more likely to view social values negatively. In other words, such people are more likely to be individualistic; show least respect for authority; and less likely to conform to social norms (Kau et al 1998:48). When interpreted in the light of the national core values, what emerges is a society in which people may generally respect the government's rationale for enunciating these values, but they lack the personal conviction to practise them in real life.

2.4.2 People's aspirations in life. The same study has also made an assessment of the people's aspirations in life in terms of their attitude toward materialism.

⁶⁸ The government has declared Singapore to be a secular state. Thus, it is only prudent that in the search for a national ideology, religious issues and preferences should be avoided.

⁶⁹ This value and lifestyles study was done by three professors in marketing at the National University of Singapore - Kau Ah Keng, Tan Soo Juan and Jochen Wirtz.

TABLE 3: Attitude toward Materialism (Kau et al 1998:78)

	% Disagree	% Neutral	% Agree
I admire people who own expensive homes, cars and clothes.	35.4	45.3	19.2
Some of the most important achievements in life include acquiring wealth and material possessions.	14.5	45.9	39.7
The things I own say a lot about how well I am doing in life.	14.0	47.4	38.7
I like to own things that impress people.	27.4	49.7	23.0
I don't pay much attention to the material objects other people own.	8.6	52.9	38.5

The table reveals that while most of the respondents do not really admire other people's wealth and do not own things just to impress, they do tend to connect doing well in life with having possessions and do consider acquiring wealth as one of the most important things in life (Kau et al 1998:112).⁷⁰ Hence, are Singaporeans materialistic? The findings seem to be saying 'yes' and 'no' at the same time. A possible explanation for this apparent ambivalence is that while Singaporeans may have a materialistic mindset, they are prudent enough not to express or exhibit it grossly in life.

One unique feature that characterises the behaviour of many Singaporeans is that of *kiasuism* ('fear of losing out'). Two distinct marks of *kiasuism* are: take what you can even if you do not really want or need it; as the argument goes, something must be good if most people want it.⁷¹ What then results from *kiasuism* is a herd mentality where all go for the same

⁷⁰ The profile of the respondents in this survey shows that 33.2 % of those with university/postgraduate qualifications and 31.2 % of those who earn more than S\$3 000 per month are Christians (Kau et al 1998:212). Both these figures are the highest in their respective categories, reinforcing the belief that many Christians in Singapore are in the higher-educated/higher-income category of society. According to the latest available figures, 14.6 % of the resident population aged 15 years and above profess to be Christians (either Protestant or Roman Catholic) - Ministry of Information and the Arts 2001. *Singapore 2001*. Singapore: MITA.

⁷¹ Two examples of *kiasuism*: 1) At buffet meals, there is a tendency for people to take as much food as they can onto the plate even if they cannot consume or do not need that amount. To avoid food wastage, some restaurants have threatened to 'fine' people who leave behind too much food on their plates! 2) Even though it is extremely expensive to buy and maintain a car in Singapore because of certain government controls, many people still consider owning a car as a dream rather than a nightmare. It is quite unbelievable to know that in tiny Singapore where public transportation is so affordable and efficient, there are many who are willing to shoulder great financial burden in order not to lose out in this 'race' for car ownership. However, it is true that there is a genuine need for some to have their own cars.

things and avoid the same things (Cunha 1994:73). No one dares or wants to be different from the crowd.

David Chan Kum Wah, a lecturer in the Department of Philosophy, National University of Singapore, candidly describes the prevalence of *kiasuism* in Singapore this way:

The pressure to conform and to participate in materialistic preoccupations is so strong in Singapore that even those who are aware of the possibility of alternative pursuits find themselves drawn into the rat race.

Every now and then, we find *kiasuism* becoming an obstacle to some objectives of the state. Unfortunately, this is not seen as reason for changing the values of Singapore society. Instead, *kiasuism* is used to persuade people to achieve economic and social objectives. If people are too *kiasu* to work abroad, then we must convince them that it is materially rewarding to do so. They are offered state support to ameliorate the risks, and new role models of entrepreneurship are held up for emulation. People are told not to miss opportunities for making money. The state's goals can be achieved in this way but, in the process, *kiasuism* is being reinforced (Cunha 1994:74).⁷²

Hence, people tend to shun pursuits that do not promise monetary benefits as they take the cue from the government which unhesitatingly gives official and public recognition to government departments and statutory boards which have shown proof of efficiency in terms of economic profitability (Saw & Bhathal 1981:152). Indeed, it is not an overstatement to say that the government has unwittingly nurtured a materialistic attitude in many Singaporeans as a result of its very aggressive push for sustained economic growth.

2.5 Success and Family Values

2.5.1 What is family? One of the hottest debates in Singapore today is how a family should be defined.⁷³ A notion of what a family is made up of was articulated by Chan Soo Sen, Parliamentary Secretary (Prime Minister's Office and Community Development), at the Family

⁷² In order to sustain economic growth, the government has already started an external economic wing, expanding Singapore's business interests both regionally and globally. Singaporeans have since been encouraged and challenged to work abroad.

⁷³ For the purpose of this dissertation, the family is delimited to the nuclear family which comprises father, mother and dependent child(ren).

Festival 1999. In a newspaper report of the event, he described a family as one made up of 'man, wife and children living in the same household.'⁷⁴

Chan's definition sparked off immediate responses from a number of notables. One of them was Claire Chiang, a nominated member of parliament and an active social worker. She rebutted in the same report that a family could mean 'a single woman with her aged parents, siblings forming a family or single parents taking care of their own children.'⁷⁵

Another person who responded in the media to Chan's comments was Dr Robert Loh, President of the National Council of Social Services.⁷⁶ He retorted:

We felt that the report in the papers will make those who do not follow the pattern of a traditionally structured family a bit upset, or they might even feel marginalised.

The council is very interested in preserving family values and so we thought we would send a strong signal by saying that, look, we don't think traditional families are the only source of happy families.

There are other ways in which families can be happy. Other kinds of structured families can be happy and hence also strong as a result.

Family relationships are more important than just having a traditionally-structured family.

When further asked if he would consider homosexual couples or single mothers by choice as non-traditionally structured families to be accepted in Singapore, Loh added:

The council is here to serve society. Is Singapore society ready to accept these things?

We have to keep pace with society and these set-ups are still a no-no in our society.

We cannot endorse and project or promote these values systems until and unless society accepts them.

⁷⁴ *The Straits Times* 27 May 1999. What makes up a Singapore family? p40.

⁷⁵ The 1995 *Department of Statistics Report* revealed that 16 % of Singaporeans did not live in traditional one-family nuclear households. In other words, there were other extended family members ('e g' grandparents) living in these households.

⁷⁶ Loh's comments were quoted in: *The Straits Times* 4 June 1999. Why Ally is not all right, p70.



On the government's side, Abdullah Tarmugi, Minister of Community Development, also offered his opinion in this family debate. He defined a family flexibly to mean a married couple, a single parent with children or grandparents living with grandchildren. But he stressed that homosexual families are not recognised in Singapore society. Emphasising that the welfare of the child is more important than the actual composition of his/her family, Abdullah Tarmugi added:

We cannot shun these families. We may not recognise them as families but we cannot withhold assistance for the children.

What happens to the child is important whatever the parent has done, whether it is right or wrong. I don't want to moralise or be dogmatic. We all have our own morality.

While we don't condone the lifestyle of single unmarried parents or unmarried couples with children we must look into the welfare of the children.⁷⁷

The family debate was given yet another twist when an inter-ministerial work group, looking into cohesion and conflict in an ageing society, called for a review of family policies by the government.⁷⁸ The group redefined family to include grandparents, uncles and aunts. Anticipating the problem of an ageing society because of low population growth and a significant number who were either childless or single, the group felt that the extended definition of family would encourage people to turn first to their families, then the community, and lastly to the state for help.⁷⁹

In the midst of this hot family debate, what comes out as most evident is the lack of a clear understanding of the type of family that Singapore wants to encourage and maintain. Why? The answer is best given by leading sociologist of the National University of Singapore, Stella Quah. She believes that the problem is largely due to the fact that 'the family has been

⁷⁷ *The Straits Times* 6 June 1999. Family: Definition flexible, p29.

⁷⁸ The group proposed two recommendations: 1) Housing policies can be reviewed to encourage families to stay not only near parents, but also grandparents. 2) Tax incentives for those who live with economically inactive members of the extended family, and not just parents.

⁷⁹ *The Straits Times* 2 September 1999. Uncle, auntie ... They're part of family too, p40.

viewed as an instrument of social change in government policies since the 1960s (Stella Quah 1990:247). In other words, the government has been doing too much social engineering through its public policies in order to achieve its goals and objectives. And since the government has to adapt and adjust to changing conditions, policies have to be changed from time to time in order to be relevant and effective. The unintended consequence of this is that mixed and confusing signals are sent and received by the people from time to time, especially with regard to the family. The family planning policy is an example in mind.

In the 1960s, the slogan ‘Two is Enough’ was used to persuade people to have not more than two children. Various public incentives and disincentives were also implemented in order to discourage having a third child. This was during the time of high unemployment and population growth. Today, Singapore is enjoying high employment but facing the problem of low population growth and a fast ageing population. Hence, couples now are urged to have three children or more if they can afford it.

It must be admitted that the government has always done social engineering with noble intentions. However, the danger is not in these intentions but in the unintended and unanticipated consequences which may encourage unhealthy attitudes, values and lifestyles. Being highly pragmatic and goal-oriented, the government has shown that it will not hesitate to change or modify the conventional in order to accommodate something that promises to work well. The danger then is to inadvertently allow solutions to contemporary problems to bring harmful beliefs and practices into society.⁸⁰

2.5.2 Spousal roles. In the midst of this debate on what a family is, what then is the general attitude of Singaporeans toward the family?

⁸⁰ For example, in the current family debate, seeing the child’s welfare as more important than his family structure may encourage couples to resort quickly to divorce or to practise cohabitation.



TABLE 4: Attitude toward Family (Kau et al 1998:25)

	% Disagree	% Neutral	% Agree
I am close to my parents.	3.4	25.9	70.8
My family is the single most important thing to me.	4.6	26.0	69.5
I am close to my brothers/sisters.	4.7	26.8	68.4
I listen to the advice of my elders.	2.2	37.5	60.3

Table 4 clearly indicates that Singaporeans generally have a pro-family attitude. Other statistical analyses also reveal that the more family oriented are usually females, older in age, and either Malay or Indian in ethnicity. On the other hand, those with higher education and income tend to place less emphasis and priority on family matters (Kau et al 1998:48).⁸¹ Clearly, the demands of a well-paid job secured through better education make it very difficult for one to devote as much time to the family as he/she would like to.

How then does this generally pro-family attitude express itself in spousal roles? To understand how these roles are perceived in Singapore, it will be beneficial to first take a peek at the general attitude toward feminism today.

TABLE 5: Attitude toward Feminism (Kau et al 1998:94)

	% Disagree	% Neutral	% Agree
A woman's life is fulfilled only if she can provide a happy home for her family.	7.2	33.6	59.2
A women should seek her own career.	4.5	31.6	63.9
I believe that a woman can work outside the home and also take good care of her children.	4.9	25.8	69.3
Women are smarter than men.	20.7	63.3	16.0

Generally, Singaporeans are fairly chauvinistic on the issue of feminism. They are supportive of it only in agreeing that women should have their own career. Otherwise, most still hold on to very traditional beliefs about woman, and have high expectations about her balancing career and family (Kau et al 1998:114).

This conclusion is supported by another study (Stella Quah 1990:273) in which 3 000

⁸¹ The exception here is that the highest income group shows more support for the idea that the family is the single most important thing in their life.

people were interviewed, and 85.9 % of them expressed the opinion that a mother should put children before career. In fact, this was the view of 79.4 % of the married women working outside home and 78.5 % of those working at home.⁸²

In 1996, the Ministry of Community Development (MCD) commissioned sociologist Stella Quah to carry out a comprehensive research on the contemporary family in Singapore. Some of the findings in her research were made public in mid 1999. According to these findings, parents in Singapore do care deeply for their children's welfare. More specifically, children's education is found to be of greater concern to parents in Singapore. A high proportion of them also indicated that they preferred to use reasoning rather than caning to discipline their children. Hence, the new generation of Singapore kids are treated as 'precious, helpless beings who need intensive care and nurturing.'⁸³

It is this parental concern over child's education that prompted Roland Cheo to research into how private tuition would affect a child's grades for his master's thesis at the National University of Singapore.⁸⁴ He came out with this startling finding which was published in *The Straits Times*: among students of the same ability, those who spent more time on tuition fared worse than those who had fewer hours of grilling by private tutors.⁸⁵

Cheo's study also showed that children who described their mothers as encouraging had better grades. Hence, he concluded:

Instead of wasting their money hiring one tuition teacher after another, parents should really provide a comfortable environment for their children and be more involved and encouraging.⁸⁶

⁸² The same survey also highlights that dual-income families increased from 27.1 % in 1980 to 39.8 % in 1990. Similarly, the mean income contributed by the wife in such a family increased from 36.2 % in 1980 to 41.0 % in 1990.

⁸³ *The Straits Times* 19 July 1999. Study On The Family: Kids' education is No. 1 worry, p1.

⁸⁴ According to a 1992 survey by *The Straits Times*, Singapore parents were reported to have spent an estimated S\$260 million a year on tutors to help boost their children's grades. This is another example of *kiasuism* in Singapore.

⁸⁵ Cheo cited two reasons for this: 1) Students 'overstudied' a subject to the point that they were turned off by it. 2) The quality of tuition teachers was not high.

⁸⁶ *The Straits Times* 15 June 1999. Tuition 'may hurt grades,' p3.

Parents in dual-income families are caught in a bind indeed - they desire the best for their children but have to resort to less than personal means to nurture them because of work commitments. But who is expected to carry the greater load in homemaking and caring for children in a dual-income Singapore family? In her MCD-commissioned research, Stella Quah again found that spousal roles in Singapore were in line with the traditional view of husbands as providers and wives as nurturers. Among the dual-income families surveyed in this research, more than half the women cut back on work after marriage, but only about 1/3 of the men did so. In addition, 91 % of those surveyed believed that a working woman's primary responsibility was still to the home. It does seem that Singapore women are generally modern in that they want a career, yet conservative at the same time in that they give the home a higher priority.⁸⁷

But the general consensus today is that there should be more effective support for working mothers who are burdened with both job and home responsibilities. As Singapore continues to advance and develop, not only do children at home need both parents, but the economy also needs both men and women in the labour force. Thus, a vital change in the attitude of men concentrating only on earning money and women trying to be both productive worker and effective homemaker simultaneously is needed.

The call then is for man and woman to be partners in family life. But this is a Herculean effort for the man because of the various reasons pointed out by Janet Salaff (1998:255-56):

- men with higher incomes have not increased their share of household chores
- they turn their energies to new money-making opportunities
- those with children who are no longer infants justify their withdrawal from housework because they think they are now less needed at home
- many bring work home or take courses or start own businesses as they rise in their careers.

⁸⁷ *The Sunday Times* 18 July 1999. Traditional view of spousal roles persists, p35.

This general reluctance of the man to be more involved in family life is potentially detrimental to the home. This is because Singapore women today are much better educated. The modern Singapore female feels stifled being home bound, and values the sense of fulfilment and security that comes from working. Also, a highly educated woman today will want to discuss and make joint decisions with her husband over important home matters (Kuo & Wong 1979:57).⁸⁸ These aspirations of the modern woman in Singapore certainly require that the man discards his traditional view of 'man works outside and woman stays inside.'

Recognising the need to change this mentality, Abdullah Tarmugi (Minister of Community Development) urged at the 1999 Symposium on the Singapore Family:

Both couples have to share the duties of holding a family together. The traditional roles of the wife being wholly responsible for the house is outdated - we have to review that.

This thinking is outmoded - we ought to open up and the men have to do it differently and the women cannot also think their husbands can stay at home while they go to work.

Each family will have to find its own equilibrium to keep the family together.⁸⁹

As noted by Stella Quah, this call to review the traditional perception of spousal roles in the contemporary Singapore family is largely due to three social trends which do not necessarily pull in the same direction (1998:173-74):

- the need to uphold traditional social values in order to safeguard family stability and social order
- the need to sustain the national economy which requires both men and women in the labour force
- the need for gender equality which matches the emphasis on meritocracy.

⁸⁸ It must be noted that the modern working woman in Singapore still sees her work as secondary to her roles as wife and mother (Kuo & Wong 1979:58).

⁸⁹ *The Straits Times* 18 July 1999. Singapore family strong but stressed, p4.

In sum, this discussion about spousal roles is not one about battle of the sexes. Rather, it brings into focus the need for married couples in Singapore today to work at becoming strong partners in the home and active participants in the economy. The working woman is not to neglect her traditional duty as homemaker, and the working man is to cultivate an 'untraditional' willingness to share family chores as co-housekeeper.

2.5.3 Health of family. As a result of this tension that arises from the need to review spousal roles, one question begs to be answered: how strong is family life in Singapore today? *The Sunday Times* disclosed in a report on 27 June 1999 that there were more than 5 000 couples who got divorced in 1998 - 4 186 non-Muslim couples and 1 465 Muslim couples.⁹⁰ These figures respectively indicate a 14 % increase in non-Muslim divorces and a 21 % increase in Muslim divorces when compared with those in 1997.

The composite table below shows how divorce has risen steadily in Singapore since 1980:

TABLE 6: Divorce Rates 1980-95 (Stella Quah 1998:53)

	1980	1990	1995
<i>Under Women's Charter</i>			
Total number of marriages	19 989	19 577	20 562
Total number of divorces	1 043	2 662	3 127
Divorce rate per 1 000 marriages	53.0	135.9	152.1
<i>Under Muslim Law</i>			
Total number of marriages	4 032	4 762	4 412
Total number of divorces	447	972	983
Divorce rate per 1 000 marriages	110.9	204.1	206.4
Average Age of Divorcees and Average Duration of Marriage			
	1980	1990	1995
<i>Under Women's Charter</i>			
Male's average age	36.6	37.0	39.7
Female's average age	32.8	33.5	36.2
Average years of marriage	11.6	12.0	13.0
<i>Under Muslim Law</i>			
Male's average age	35.0	35.9	38.3
Female's average age	29.9	32.2	35.1
Average years of marriage	9.0	8.8	9.8

⁹⁰ In Singapore, Muslim marriages and divorces are handled by the Muslim (*Syariah*) Court.

The report in *The Sunday Times* also specified that in the first ten months of 1998 women applied for 1 600 personal protection orders to stop their husbands from battering them. And most of the women who filed for divorce in that year were in their 30s. It does seem that women in Singapore today are more aware of their rights and will not hesitate to take their husbands to court for marital abuse or unreasonable treatment.

Explaining the reasons for this assertiveness on the part of young women today, two Singapore women shared their views.⁹¹ One of them was Esther Tzer Wong, a well-known counsellor in Singapore. She said:

People usually start families and compete in the office to establish themselves when they are in their 30s.

It can be a confusing period for women, because they either opt for a career or drop out of the workforce to look after their families.

Juliana Toh, principal therapist at the Singapore Counselling and Care Centre, offered another reason:

Women who are financially independent are less likely to tolerate differences and so they are prepared to leave their children with their father. This is very frightening.

Indeed, how women perceive marriage today is quite different from the past. Marriage in the past was very much a social and economic necessity - to relieve the burden of parents; to insure against old-age destitution; to provide labour for farming; to perpetuate the family name. As such, women in the past were less assertive and more tolerant toward their spouses, and they also did not want the social stigma of being a divorcee. However, today's women are a different breed altogether - they practise a 'philosophy of egoistic hedonism' which regards personal happiness as supreme, even if it means having to divorce in order to experience it (Saw & Bhathal 1981:147-48).

⁹¹ Their views were quoted in: *The Sunday Times* 27 June 1999. Over 5,000 couples divorce; rise in cases, p3.



Perhaps, this search for personal happiness was best captured on statistics in a joint study by Aline Wong and Eddie Kuo, both were then professors in sociology at the National University of Singapore.

TABLE 7: Relative Happiness after Divorce (Wong & Kuo 1983:87)

	% Male	% Female
Much happier	48.4	42.2
Happier	37.9	46.8
Same	8.2	5.5
More unhappy	3.8	5.5
Much more unhappy	1.7	0.0

All the facts and figures have underscored some realities confronting the Singapore family today - the man still strives hard in his career; the woman also prefers to work, and has become more assertive and independent; divorce is rising steadily as couples increasingly take this option in ending their fights and differences. However, Professor Stella Quah still remained upbeat about the overall state of the Singapore family when she summarised the findings of her MCD-commissioned study.⁹² She commented:

A very positive picture. The majority of families are doing well and show a lot of affection. Spouses are satisfied with their marriages and there is a certain level of cohesiveness.

Families can become stronger if they are helped. Dual-income families need more time to be with their families. Employers could help with better or more family-friendly regulations.

The flexi-time scheme is good and we should review the five-day-week idea. Bosses can also give leave to men to look after their sick children and leave for both men and women to look after sick parents.

The stress levels for dual-income families will go up and families will find it more difficult to transmit values to the next generation.⁹³

Responding to Professor Quah's assessment, some participants at feedback dialogues regarded her view of the Singapore family as 'too optimistic.' For one thing, her positive

⁹² Her study with a sample of 1 652 adults did not include single-parent families.

⁹³ *The Straits Times* 23 July 1999. The family is well, but it will face more stress in future, p54.

picture contradicted the increase in divorces. Perhaps, what was expressed by married people on questionnaires was not exactly what was experienced by them in reality.⁹⁴ Also, her study excluded children, thereby depriving her data of some very important input.⁹⁵

An outsider's perspective from expatriate Dwight Hill is worth noting too. He was residing for a while in Singapore when he was stationed here as a staff of Navigators USA, a parachurch organisation. Hill warned:

I worry about Singapore, because I believe I see some of the same materialistic patterns here that mirror our experiences in America. The current generation of Singaporean youth could well be saying, 'We would rather have had our mother home than being raised by the maid. We could have gotten along without that extra car. We could have ridden the MRT more often. Where were our parents when we needed them most?' Just like America, Singapore's pursuit of wealth could be at the price of her children. Divorce, crime, and delinquency rates could go up as kids receive less and less affectionate attention from their parents. It is a worthless prize.⁹⁶

These are words that sound out a challenge to the family man in Singapore today - to keep his family strong in the face of powerful, destabilising forces. Firstly, as the labour force improves in skills, competence and professionalism, he has to face stiffer competition in the workplace. Secondly, as people-scarce Singapore continues to emphasise economic growth and meritocracy, married women who are generally well educated today are encouraged to continue working, with lots of opportunities for advancement. The family man in Singapore must then come to terms with this emerging force of feminism. And thirdly, as dual-income families increase in Singapore, working parents will have to leave their children more and more to the influences of maids, grandparents, peers and even, the television. Hence, the

⁹⁴ It is possible that the respondents might indicate things which they would like to see happen instead of stating what was really happening in their family life. Also, the Asian tendency of not wanting to be open with private matters like family problems may be another possible reason why the responses were more positive than expected.

⁹⁵ *The Straits Times* 26 July 1999. MCD study on families 'too rosy,' p27.

⁹⁶ Hill, Dwight 1998. Prosperity At What Cost? *Impact* (August/September), p17.

family man in Singapore today will do well to guard his young against the influence of potentially undesirable values.

Current signs are indicating that the Singapore family today is stressed and strained. To keep the family in a reasonably healthy state in the days to come, every family member needs to play a part. Especially for the man, much will depend on how he handles the three destabilising forces that have been mentioned.

2.6 Success and Values of the Young

2.6.1 Individualistic pursuits. The young people of Singapore today have never faced hardship like their parents or grandparents. With youthful impatience, they want quick success rather than to persevere for results in their endeavours. Lee Kuan Yew sounded this warning with great foresight in his 1989 National Day message:⁹⁷

Our forefathers had left their homelands to make good in a strange land and were determined to succeed, keen to achieve their best. The determination to work hard and to achieve became a habit which they passed on to their children. But after the second generation, and more often, many years of comfortable growth and prosperity, we have tended to take things for granted (Jon Quah 1990:82).

Indeed, the two dominant life goals of the young today are individual freedom and material wealth, as revealed in a study by the Singapore National Youth Council (SNYC) on youth between the ages of 15 to 29 (see Table 8).

TABLE 8: Life Goal of Singapore Youth (Yeo & Chow 1997:9)

To acquire social position	12 %
To improve society and the world	8 %
To live as I like	44 %
To get rich	32 %
Others	4 %

In another recent study on the lifestyles of 18-year old junior college students, majority of the respondents indicated that they were only fairly satisfied with the material aspects of

⁹⁷ Lee was still Prime Minister of Singapore then.

their life - money (52.2 %); housing (42.4 %); transportation (44.8 %).⁹⁸ Though public housing and transportation in Singapore are affordable and of a high standard, many young people still aspire to live in private houses and have their own cars. These private possessions are attractive not only because they are viewed as status symbols, but also as means to have a private and exclusive lifestyle. In a subtle sense, this is one way in which young people exert their individualism - their desire to be left alone in their own private world far from the crowd. This trend has led Jon Quah (1990:87) to conclude that society before self does not seem to be attractive as a worldview to the pragmatic young because they believe that 'self-interest that is enlightened and legitimate should be given free play.'

2.6.2 Relationship with parents. According to the Fifth World Youth Survey, when youths need to seek advice, the mother is often ranked as the top adviser while the father is constantly within the top five positions. However, this is not the case for Singapore. Findings of the SNYC study (Yeo & Chow 1997:15) have shown that youths here prefer to be advised by friends than by parents.⁹⁹ As far as parental advice is concerned, 24 % indicated that they would go to their mothers while only 9 % would turn to their fathers. Another 10 % would rather depend on their own good sense than to seek advice from anyone. It is significant to note that slightly more Singapore youths prefer not to go to anyone for advice than to seek it from their fathers.

This rather uneasy father-child relationship was further underscored in the doctoral research of Ong Ai Choo, a National Institute of Education lecturer. She surveyed 748 teens aged 16 to 19. According to her findings, these Singapore teens wanted their fathers to show warmth, listen to their problems and explain reasons for punishment. This implies that too many fathers were seen by their teenage children to be cold, aloof and authoritarian. Ong's

⁹⁸ Chew, Len & Tan 1998:70.

⁹⁹ These friends include clubmates, girlfriends/boyfriends, neighbours/schoolmates and older peers.

research also revealed that teens regarded their mothers as more caring and nurturing, and more willing to include them in decision making. Interestingly, those who scored better grades in their studies indicated that they were largely encouraged by their fathers' affection and willingness to communicate with them.¹⁰⁰

In view of this rather 'odd' behaviour of Singapore youths, how do they really regard their relationship with their parents? Some answers can be drawn from Table 9 below:

TABLE 9: How the Young Relate to Parents (Chew et al 1998:13)

	Strongly Disagree %	No Strong Opinion %	Strongly Agree %
Be filial to parents	1.7	6.6	91.8
Respect elders	1.4	12.7	85.8
Listen to the advice of elders	1.9	41.4	56.7
Support aged parents	1.4	6.2	92.4
Live with parents after marriage	19.7	59.7	20.7

Two points can be made from the information provided in the table. Firstly, while the young may respect and listen to their parents, this does not amount to accepting their views. In fact, the young are very much independent thinkers today as a result of better education and media exposure. Secondly, as young couples set up their own families, many prefer to live apart from their parents.¹⁰¹ This implies that support for parents is likely to be financial rather than physical. In this regard, Jon-Quah (1990:86) points out a dilemma facing young couples today - though their Asian values teach them the need to preserve strong family ties, they also value their own lifestyles and privacy, and do not want to be tied down by the needs and demands of parents at home.¹⁰²

Undoubtedly, success has challenged some of the Asian values which Singaporeans have inherited from their forebears. This is partly because Singapore has achieved success not

¹⁰⁰ *The Straits Times* 15 November 1999. Teens want fathers to be more caring, p39.

¹⁰¹ In the past, the mature family was usually a large entity because sons who were married would continue to stay with their parents and siblings in the same village house.

¹⁰² A contemporary practice today is to send elderly parents to aged homes, visiting them periodically and providing them materially through the services of these institutions. In the past, such a practice was contemptuous as it was viewed to be an act of abandoning one's parents.

in isolation, but in contact with the outside world, particularly the English-speaking West. In fact, with better education, media technology, free flow of information, overseas work and foreign talent in the new millennium, Singapore will be even more influenced and exposed to ideas that may not necessarily correspond with traditional Asian perceptions and practices in the country. As it is now, Confucianism is not deeply entrenched in Singapore in spite of the island's predominantly ethnic Chinese population simply because of her openness to accept any 'foreign' ideas that will work well.

How then have some of these outside ideas influenced the perspectives of Singaporeans toward success, family and masculinity today? The following sections will capture some of the essential assertions of certain personalities pertaining to these three issues in question.¹⁰³ All these individuals are respected as authorities in their respective fields on the strength of their academic credentials or life achievements. They are 'popular' in that their works are easily obtainable from the marketplace of ideas, and designed to help the 'man in the street' to understand and apply. They are also secular in that they speak with a socio-psychological emphasis. Some of these personalities have even visited Singapore to give talks or lead seminars. Though their views may not necessarily be unique, they do represent prevailing ideas that are greatly influencing the minds and lives of many Singaporeans today.

2.7 Secular Perspectives on Success

2.7.1 Denis Waitley.¹⁰⁴ In his book, *The Psychology Of Winning*, Waitley does not claim to have unique insights into the achievement of success. However, he (Waitley 1979:6) stresses one point as of singular importance: it makes little difference what is actually happening, it's how you personally take it that really counts.

¹⁰³ Attempts to dialogue with these ideas from a biblical-theological perspective will be made in Chapter IV.

¹⁰⁴ Denis Waitley holds a doctorate in human behaviour. He is a university professor as well as consultant to corporations, government and private organisations. He has also appeared regularly as a speaker and panelist.

Waitley (1979:7-9) identifies three types of people based on how they react or respond to what is happening in their lives. He calls the first type *spectators*. These are people who watch life happen as bystanders. They fear taking up responsibility and setting example for others to follow. Because of this, Waitley brands them as people who fear to win.

A second type of people is what Waitley calls *losers*. These tend to envy others. They express this tendency in a number of ways - criticising others; trying to be like someone else; putting oneself down.

Thirdly, there are people whom Waitley hails as *winners*. These are people who always put themselves together in spite of the odds. They set and achieve goals that not only benefit themselves, but others as well. Hence, Waitley believes that the act of winning in life includes giving freely to others and being glad that you are you. To win in an endeavour is to know that you have done better than what you did the last time.

To become a total winner in life, a person should develop some essential qualities. First, Waitley (1979:21-22) advocates a *positive self awareness*. By this, he implies that every person has equal rights to fulfil his/her potential in life, but each also has his/her own unique potential. What this awareness means as people relate with one another is that they need to try and understand another person's point of view, that is, to feel with (empathise) and feel for (sympathise) others. This calls for an open-mindedness that enables people to look at things as relative rather than as absolute. Waitley (1979:24-25) further adds that this attitude will give people a mental toughness to adapt, relax and cope with adversities and failures in life. They begin to normalise adversities and failures, and see these as feedback to correct and get back on track.

Second, Waitley (1979:38-39) speaks of the quality of *positive self esteem*. He lists three reasons for low self esteem: allowing the unrealistic standards of others to control



oneself; being aware of the need to change but refusing to do so; letting self doubt make one jealous of others and pressurising one to always want to prove himself/herself. Instead of comparing with others and becoming depressed, Waitley pictures a winner as one who views himself/herself in terms of his/her own abilities, interests and goals. In other words, a winner is one who is always trying to better his/her past performances rather than comparing with others.

Waitley (1979:40-43) gives some practical suggestions as to how self esteem can be improved:

- base actions and decisions more on rational thinking than on emotions as these negate the wisdom and power of the mind
- take pride, passion and pleasure in what you are doing now rather than looking for greener fields
- accept yourself just as you are at this moment yet always seeking to improve
- do positive self talk so as to instil in you positive thoughts about yourself and your performances; accept compliments boldly without putting yourself down in actions or words.

Third, *positive self control* is another quality essential in winning. Waitley (1979:50) views life as a 'do-it-to-yourself' kind of programming in which you take full responsibility for determining all your actions. You are to 'choose from alternatives and shape your own destinies.' You make the best use of what you have when you say 'I decide to do' rather than 'I have to do' (Waitley 1979:54). In this way, you assume self control by sitting in the driver's seat of your own life.

Fourth, Waitley dwells on the quality of *positive self motivation*. If there is to be any motivation at all, it must come from within the person. Motivation is an internalised state and dependent on the interplay of two key emotions in a person - the negative emotion of fear and

the positive emotion of desire (Waitley 1979:65).¹⁰⁵ To be motivated to achieve success, drive, focus and persistence are necessary to help you concentrate on the desired outcome; you are to challenge yourself to finish what you have started by using words like 'can' and 'will' (Waitley 1979:71-74).

Fifth, Waitley (1979:95) describes how your subconscious ('Robot') controls the conscious level of your thinking ('Judge') to give you a *positive self image*. The memory bank in your 'Robot' contains data which cannot be wilfully erased. Hence, no action can ever take place without reference to the 'Robot' in you. At the same time, an action often takes place without consulting the "Judge" in you. That being the case, Waitley (1979:97) claims that everyday decisions are based on information about yourself which has been stored as 'truth' in the memory bank of the 'Robot' in you. This 'truth' is your self image but is often a figment of your imagination because it is distorted by your own life environment. In order to make any permanent change in your personality or behaviour, Waitley (1979:98) suggests that you should first go for a change in self image, and reinforcing that by a change in lifestyle.¹⁰⁶

Sixth, Waitley (1979:123) argues passionately that winning has much to do with a *positive self discipline* which he describes in the following manner:

Self discipline is mental practice - the commitment to memory of those thoughts and emotions that will override current information stored in the subconscious memory bank. And through relentless repetition, the penetration of these new inputs into our 'Robot achievement mechanism' resulting in the creation of a new self image.

Winning is very much a mind game. A person can simulate winning by imagining success in his/her mind. Such a mental 'suggestology' is powerful as it allows actual pursuits of success to be reinforced by simulated winning in the mind (Waitley 1979:128).

¹⁰⁵ Somewhat contradictingly, Waitley has earlier maintained that one should base his/her actions and decisions more on rational thinking than on emotions.

¹⁰⁶ But if the self image is only a figment of your imagination and not the real self (as asserted by Waitley), changing it from a negative to a positive one will still result in you living in self deception rather than reality.

Waitley views success as winning in life. And winning has much to do with having a positive concept of self. As long as the self concept is positive, man can exercise the enormous potential in him. There is nothing wrong with the self; what is wrong is your image or perception of it. You are not to fix the self by correcting it from bad to good. Rather, you are to bring out the best in one's self by having a positive self image; by challenging the self to perform from good to better. To be a winner in life is to allow the self to work out its fullest potential by aiming high, and determining to go all the way through positive self talk, mental visualisation and emotional internalisation. Though Waitley also considers giving to others as important, the preoccupation with self as advocated in his approach leaves very little room for one to be passionate for others. Simply put, what is likely to come out of his psychology is a lopsided infatuation for oneself, with little interest for others.

2.7.2 Harry Alder.¹⁰⁷ In his very readable book, *NLP*, Alder describes various mental techniques to help change behaviour. NLP stands for Neuro-Linguistic Programming and is propagated today as an 'art and science of personal excellence.'¹⁰⁸ NLP is an art in that it helps us to think and act; it is a science in that it uses well-researched methods to bring about successful behaviour.¹⁰⁹ In fact, the NLP way to behavioural changes is so refreshing that it claims to challenge orthodox psychology, and to render prevailing self-development and positive thinking ideas incomplete and outdated (Alder 1994:2-4).

¹⁰⁷ Dr Harry Alder works with major companies in the United Kingdom, helping their staff to reach their maximum potential.

¹⁰⁸ Neuro refers to the neurological processes of seeing, hearing, feeling, tasting and smelling. Linguistics recognises the role of language in our thinking and communicating. Programming implies that we programme our thoughts and actions like a computer programmed to do a specific task.

¹⁰⁹ NLP techniques were first practised in the 1970s by two men - John Grinder (a linguist) and Richard Bandler (a mathematician, psychotherapist and computer expert). They studied the methods of three leading experts who had brought outstanding changes in human behaviour - Milton Erickson (a hypnotherapist), Virginia Satir (a family therapist) and Gregory Bateson (an anthropologist). Out of their studies, Grinder and Bandler formulated the first NLP exercises.

Alder (1994:7-8) asserts that the human brain has the god-like ability to understand ourselves, others and the environment; it gives each person an enormous potential for getting what he/she wants in life.

The book (Alder 1994:13-18) outlines five key NLP principles. First, you need to note that *the map is not the territory*. This means that your own interpretation of things around you builds itself into a mental map which represents your understanding of reality. Since such a mental map is only a personal and subjective interpretation, no two mental maps are the same. In other words, different people have different mental maps of the same territory. Hence, the map is not the territory but only your subjective perception of the territory. In order to enhance your communication and relationship with another person, you need to try and understand that person's mental map.

Second, you need to note that *underlying all behaviour is a positive intention*. This helps you to see the best in every human action. Know that even in a negative action, the intention behind it is always positive. In NLP, the way to correct that wrong behaviour is to identify the positive intention behind it and explore other ways to achieve that desired intention/outcome.

Third, you need to note that *choice is better than no choice*. This encourages the creation of as many options as possible. With choices, there is greater freedom to act and greater chance to get what you want in life.

Fourth, NLP believes that *the meaning of your communication is the response it produces*. In any communication, you are to treat the response from the other person as simply a piece of information. The ensuing response/effect informs you to change your behaviour until the response/effect you desire to see in the other person is forthcoming. People may not first respond in the way you want because they respond to you with their own mental map of

the situation. Bearing this in mind will take much emotion out of the situation as you focus on achieving a desired response/outcome. You do this by first understanding the mental map of the other person and then changing your own behaviour in order to reach the outcome you desire. Moreover, it is definitely easier to change yourself than others.

Fifth, you need to note that *there is no failure, only feedback*. Whatever happens is not to be judged as either good or bad, but to be seen as merely information for further action. This informational feedback is used by you to change your behaviour so that the desired outcome is achieved. This 'no failure' attitude empowers you to learn from every so-called mistake and to turn every outcome to your advantage. Not getting what you want initially is only a feedback for you to adjust your behaviour and priorities so that you can eventually get what you want.

Alder asserts that if you are to get what you want in life, you must adopt a thinking strategy that helps you replace disempowering/negative self beliefs with empowering/positive ones.¹¹⁰ His book (Alder 1994:96-100) describes a simple method of creating a desirable self belief in 'do-it-yourself' fashion:

- First, state that desirable self belief in positive terms - for example, 'I am outgoing'.
- Second, ensure that belief is truly yours and not that of others - for example, say 'I am a likeable person' instead of 'other people like me'. It is also important that the belief is within your control, that is, you can act in a likeable way.
- Third, restate the desirable self belief in dynamic, not static terms - for example, say 'I am becoming confident' instead of 'I am confident'. Such a dynamic affirmation allows you to have your 'off' days without undermining the truth of that statement as it points to a direction rather than a destination. Even

¹¹⁰ This involves basically changing one's state of mind this way: Think of a scene when you feel very defeated. Then, think of another scene when you feel very masterful and victorious. Replace those modalities (sights, sounds, feelings, tastes and smells) in the defeated situation with those in the victorious one. These senses are actually representation systems that create the state in your mind. This switching of representation systems is to be done at the alpha state, that is, the period just before going to sleep when the mind is very receptive to remembering, imagining and suggestive thoughts. When this switching is done deliberately and repetitively, the undesired state of mind in the defeated scenario can be altered (Alder 1994:67-70).

when you do wrong and have not yet arrived, you are still progressing and getting better.

- Fourth, select an action that supports the desirable belief. Run through that action in your mind. If you have no personal experience, you may draw on that of others - for example, you may imagine a famous speaker talking confidently before a huge crowd.¹¹¹ As soon as you are ready, put yourself in the scene and imagine yourself as the key character. Work through the sights, sounds and feelings associated with that scene. While this is going on, state your belief out loud in an affirming tone; let the picture in your mind provide all the evidence of your desired self belief with you as the main actor. This will empower a belief you choose to have about yourself.

- Fifth, decide where and when you are going to put your visualised actions into actual practice. Make a commitment to start because appropriate behaviour will enhance the desired self belief and fuel confidence in you.

Success to Harry Alder is getting what you want in life; whether you really need it or not is not his interest here. To succeed in getting what you want, he advocates stretching the human mind with positive visualisation and imaging exercises in order to develop empowering self beliefs. The kind of mental gymnastics he teaches may sound novel, yet it still rests on the same old optimism that when the indomitable spirit of self belief is stirred up, a person can achieve anything, for nothing is impossible then.

2.7.3 Anthony Robbins.¹¹² In his book, *Unlimited Power*, Robbins (1986:25) asserts that it is 'not what happens that separates failures from successes, but how we perceive and what we do about what happens that makes the difference.' In a sense, how you communicate with yourself regarding what happens to you defines for you what is success and what is failure.

Robbins (1986:70-81) has formulated a belief system for success with these statements:

¹¹¹ This sounds like a kind of mental cloning which tries to make you into a particular person in certain behaviours.

¹¹² Anthony Robbins is considered as USA's foremost leader in the science of peak performance. He is both founder and chairman of the Anthony Robbins Companies which are committed to assisting people achieve personal and professional mastery. Robbins is also a firm believer in NLP techniques.



- *Everything happens for a reason or purpose.* You are not to allow what happens to limit you. Rather, you are to learn from it and continue to think big. Belief in limits only creates limited people. In other words, you can if you believe you can.

- *There is no such thing as failure.* You always succeed in getting some kind of results. The important thing is to do, learn and try again.

- *Whatever happens, take responsibility.* You create your own world by your action and thought. To achieve the outcome you want depends very much on yourself. Hence, you have everything to gain by taking responsibility. When you retain responsibility of what happens to yourself, you retain the power to change and to produce the outcome you want.

- *It is not necessary to understand everything to be able to use everything.* You need not have to know all things before you can benefit from a learning situation. What you do need is to know what is essential and what is not. The emphasis is to extract the essence from a learning situation and not to 'dwell or sweat on the rest.'

- *People are your greatest resource.* This implies that you are to respect rather than to manipulate others. It recognises the importance of teamwork and the need to appreciate collaborative talents in a successful team.

- *Work is play.* This is not to encourage workaholicism which is merely an obsession. The workaholic is one who gets no pleasure from work, but cannot seem to do anything else in place of work. However, to love work as play is to allow oneself to be stretched and to learn new things through work. When we work at exploring new possibilities, we prevent our work from becoming a dead-end job.

- *There is no abiding success without commitment.* You owe it to yourself to be successful. As long as you are personally willing to do whatever it takes, you can make it and succeed in life.

In order to put his belief system for success into practice in real life, Robbins describes a number of behaviour-changing techniques. One of which is called *metaprogramming*. Metaprogrammes are the internal programmes which a person uses to decide what to pay attention to. This will include how that person deletes, distorts and generalises information. In other words, mataprogrammes are the keys to understand how a person mentally processes information received. These internal representations in turn direct the person's behaviour in response to the information received. Hence, in order to communicate effectively to a person,



you have to understand his/her metaprogrammes in order to get your messages across (Robbins 1986:254).

To use metaprogramming as a tool for communication with others and personal change, Robbins (1986:255-68) suggests the following guiding questions:

- *How is the other person motivated?* Determine if the person is a seeing, feeling or hearing person and use words that best appeal to his/her personality.
- *Which frame of reference does the other person prefer - external or internal?* For example, if the person needs applause to know that he/she has done well, then that person prefers an external frame of reference. On the other hand, an inner sense of satisfaction is all a person of internal frame needs to reassure himself/herself of a job well done.
- *Does the other person sort by self or by others?* The one who sorts by self will tend to do things very much for his/her own benefit; the one who sorts by others will tend to ask what he/she can do for others. The former is said to have an egotist spirit while the latter has the spirit of a martyr.
- *Is the other person a matcher or a mismatcher?* A matcher is one who responds by finding similarities while a mismatcher will tend to look for differences. The former goes for consistency and rigidity, while the latter prefers change and flexibility.
- *Is the other person interested in possibility or necessity?* A person of possibility is often stimulated by what he/she wants to do, and creates new alternatives and opportunities for himself/herself. Conversely, a person of necessity is often engaged in what he/she has to do, and sticks to what is already available.
- *What is the other person's working style - independent, cooperative or proximity?* An independent worker prefers to work all by himself/herself; a cooperative worker prefers to work with others in a team; a proximity worker prefers to work with others while maintaining sole responsibility for a task. Understanding a person's working style will help to best utilise his/her strengths so that the person can operate at his/her highest level of competence.

A second behaviour-changing technique taught by Anthony Robbins is *reframing*. To reframe is to change something negative into something positive by changing the frame of reference used to perceive the experience concerned. There are two ways to do reframing - reframe the context or reframe the content. To reframe the context, you take a negative

behaviour and consider how that same behaviour can be advantageous in another context. For example, if a sudden outburst of anger has destroyed a treasured relationship, you can reframe that behaviour in the context of a robbery and affirm how it can be a helpful reaction. To reframe the content does not require you to change the situation but to change the meaning/interpretation of the same situation. For example, some people change the meaning/interpretation of death from that of loss to that of glory, finding comfort instead of grief as a result (Robbins 1986:293-94).¹¹³

Anchoring is another technique in Robbin's book. He teaches it to sportsmen to help them reach their peak performance in a competition. Robbins (1986:316) gives a neuro-scientific explanation to the creation of anchors this way:

Whenever a person is in an intense state where the mind and body are strongly involved together and a specific stimulus is consistently and simultaneously provided at the peak of the state, the stimulus and the state become neurologically linked.¹¹⁴

The practical outworking of this explanation goes like this:

- First, put the person (or yourself) into the specific state of mind and body you wish to anchor.

- Second, provide a specific, unique stimulus as the person experiences the peak of that state. For example, when someone is laughing, squeeze his/her ear with a specific and unique pressure. Do this several times and ensure that this stimulus of squeezing is always applied exactly. If the anchor is successfully created, the person will go into laughter whenever that stimulus is applied or provided.¹¹⁵

Anthony Robbins believes that a person has unlimited power because he/she can mentally condition self belief in oneself or others. You can do all things if you believe enough in yourself. His belief system asserts that there are no failures in all that you do, but only

¹¹³ Robbins even suggests that you weaken the power of some negative remarks by reframing the person saying those words in the voice of your favourite singer!

¹¹⁴ An example of this is how the singing of the national anthem (the stimulus) can stir up a sense of patriotism (the anchor response) in a person.

¹¹⁵ A comedian can put on a 'trademark' facial expression (the consistent stimulus) and this will invariably churn his audience into spontaneous laughter (the consistent anchor response).

outcomes. While this does well to encourage you to try again, it also seems to put you in a state of denial whenever you experience failure.

2.8 Secular Perspectives on Successful Marriage-Family Life

2.8.1 John Gottman.¹¹⁶ As opposed to many remarks made relating to staying married, Gottman (1994:24) comments:

My research shows that much more important than having compatible views is how couples work out their differences. In fact, occasional discontent, especially during a marriage's early years, seems to be good for the union in the long run.

There are three types of stable marriages according to Gottman's research. The first of which is the *validating* type. In this kind of relationship, the couple still respect each other's opinions and emotions as valid even in the midst of disagreement. They pick their battles carefully, and flare-ups often end up sounding like problem-solving discussion than hostile war cry. Their relationship stability rests in their willingness to communicate and share with each other. In a conflict situation, they air their opinions, try to convince the other, and then negotiate for a compromise (Gottman 1994:35-38).

The second kind of stable marriage is the *volatile* type. Such couples are extreme in their hate and love - they not only fight on a grand scale, but also have a grander time making up. When they fight, volatile couples do not care to listen, but these arguments can add more flavour in that they serve to spice up their relationship. For a volatile couple, the fight may be intense, but the peace after it is even better. They can be very good at resolving differences in that they are very open with both their negative and positive feelings. They may explode yet they are often willing to explore reconciliatory measures (Gottman 1994:39-42).

¹¹⁶ John Gottman is a professor in psychology at the University of Washington in Seattle, USA. He has done a breakthrough study of 2 000 married couples over many years, and was noted for his ability to predict with great accuracy which people will stay married and which will divorce.



The third type of stable marriage categorised by Gottman (1994:44-46) is the *avoidant* type. Such couples often try to minimise their conflict by making light their differences rather than to work at resolving them. Issues that will lead to an impasse are often avoided. Though they may air their unhappiness, they do not see it as big enough to fight over it. Hence, avoidant couples usually do not see the need to persuade or to compromise. They prefer to let time take its natural course. Though the conflict may not be resolved, the avoidant couple still feels good about each other. They also value separateness, and this can cause one partner to feel very lonely as the other does not seem to really know or understand him/her.

Gottman (1994:57) maintains that a stable marriage must strike a healthy balance between positive and negative feelings and actions in the relationship. To achieve such a balance in the marriage ecology, his research findings point to a 5:1 ratio, that is, create five times as much positive feelings and interactions in the relationship as there are negative. Some recommendations by Gottman (1994:59-61) for increasing the level of positive feelings and interactions are:

- Be interested in what your partner is saying in any conversation.
- Be affectionate through physical touches of tenderness, like holding hands.
- Be appreciative by affirming your partner.
- Be empathetic by showing understanding.
- Be accepting by respecting your partner's opinion even if you do not agree with it.
- Be caring by showing little acts of thoughtfulness, like helping in kitchen work.
- Be supportive by not being defensive and even apologising when appropriate.
- Be humorous with your mate with jokes, teases and silliness.
- Be open to share your joy with your mate.

Gottman observes in his research that there are four forces that greatly undermine the stability of a marriage if they are allowed to become habitual patterns in the relationship. He calls these four destructive forces as the 'Four Horsemen of Apocalypse'.

The first 'horseman' is *criticism*. This is not just a complaint which is usually about a specific action/behaviour, but an act of attacking someone's character and personality. While a complaint is often specific in nature, a criticism is one of sweeping generalisation in a negative manner (Gottman 1994:72-73).¹¹⁷

The second 'horseman' is *contempt*. This is the intention to insult and abuse psychologically. Such a pattern of negativity causes one partner to rarely compliment the other. In fact, the person hardly remembers the positive qualities of his/her partner. Instead of words of admiration, what is verbally forthcoming are name-calling, sarcasm and hostile humour (Gottman 1994:79-80).

Defensiveness is the third 'horseman'. It is a mental state in which both partners feel victimised by the other in the marriage relationship. Both are not willing to take the responsibility to set things right; both plead innocent. Such a reaction is only natural because of the feeling of being cornered and attacked; it is the natural act of protecting oneself of further harm. Some tell-tale signs of being trapped in a state of defensiveness include:

- denying responsibility to blame
- making excuses
- repeating own position without trying to understand the other's view
- cross-complaining by reacting to partner's complaint with one of your own (Gottman 1994:84-88).

¹¹⁷ Example of a complaint (often directed at an action): 'I don't like being neglected!'
Example of a criticism (often directed at a person): 'You are so selfish!'



The fourth and last 'horseman' in Gottman's research is *stonewalling*. The man is the main culprit here because of his physiological and psychological make-up. To stonewall is to react with stony silence; to withdraw or disengage from any meaningful interaction with the other person, leaving him/her with a desperate sense of being rejected and abandoned (Gottman 1994:94-95).

To stabilise a marriage, Gottman (1994:175) believes that the couple must work at nullifying these four 'horsemen' and their associated emotions. He advises couples '... not to worry so much about solving your marital problems as in dealing with the emotions they stir.' To allow the 'horsemen' to become residential in a marriage relationship is to let it deteriorate into a cycle of negativity. Gottman suggests some strategies to break this destructive cycle.

Strategy 1: Be calm. Gottman calls this the antidote to 'flooding'.¹¹⁸ It helps to ease the need to be defensive and to stonewall. Gottman's research has shown that men are usually overwhelmed physiologically sooner than women in a heated argument. Also, men are more likely to have distress-maintaining thoughts when they become flooded.¹¹⁹ When feeling flooded, the person should call for a break in order to cool off before resuming to talk. During this 'time-out' period, the person can change their distress-maintaining thoughts to soothing, validating ones.¹²⁰ Rhythmic breathing is also a good way to relax and normalise one's pulse rate (Gottman 1994:176-80).¹²¹

Strategy 2: Speak non-defensively. One way to do this is to use praise and admiration sincerely. Also, make the other person feel accepted through non-defensive listening which

¹¹⁸ 'Flooding' is the feeling of being overwhelmed by your partner's negativity and your own reactions that you are swamped by distress and upset. As a result, you become very hostile, defensive and withdrawn.

¹¹⁹ Distress-maintaining thoughts include that of righteous indignation and innocent victimisation. Gottman advises men to watch their pulse rate in order to avoid flooding, which will arouse in them a fight-or-flight instinct, making it difficult for them to listen attentively to the other person.

¹²⁰ Example of distress-maintaining thinking: 'That really hurt me.'

Example of soothing, validating thinking: 'No need to take it so hard; that's as best as she can see.'

¹²¹ One can think 'in' when inhaling and 'out' when exhaling.

includes empathising with his/her views and emotions. Another way to speak non-defensively is to use a complaint rather than a criticism or contempt (Gottman 1994:181-86).¹²²

Strategy 3: Validate your partner. This is especially helpful to men when they become hyper-rational toward their partner's feelings and emotions. The purpose of validation is to consider the other person's feelings and views as valid even if you do not share them. Learn to acknowledge that your actions may have provoked the responses from your partner.¹²³ In any case, the least one can do in validation is to tell the other person that his/her feelings are understood (Gottman 1994:195-96).

John Gottman is right to say that a healthy marriage is not one without conflict, but one that deals with conflict constructively whenever it arises. However, for him to advise married couples to worry about the emotions that have been stirred up rather than the marital problem itself seems problematic. It seems that Gottman is teaching couples to deal with the surface rather than the root difficulties in their marriage. Apparently, as far as Gottman is concerned, success in marriage is simply to keep it enduring, never mind if it is hardly endearing. If couples are to accept his ideas uncritically, they may end up staying married but not enjoying their relationship in its fullest potential.

2.8.2 Lawrence Shapiro.¹²⁴ Generally, people today understand EQ (Emotional Quotient) as an abbreviated synonym for emotional intelligence. This is much like people taking IQ (Intelligent Quotient) as an abbreviated synonym for cognitive intelligence (Shapiro 1997:8-9).¹²⁵ According to Shapiro (1997:9-10), the most important distinction between EQ

¹²² Gottman calls it the XYZ statement: 'When you did (or didn't do) X in situation Y, I felt Z.'

¹²³ You can do this by admitting that you are sorry or that you are wrong.

¹²⁴ Lawrence Shapiro is the President and founder of the Center for Applied Psychology in the USA. He is also a frequent lecturer on using games to develop emotional intelligence in children.

¹²⁵ However, psychologists Peter Salovey of Harvard University and John Mayer of the University of New Hampshire have refused to use EQ as a synonym for emotional intelligence. To them, emotional intelligence is used only to describe some emotional qualities that appear important to success in life. Daniel Goleman created great public awareness of this concept through his 1995 best-seller *Emotional Intelligence*. Both Salovey and



and IQ lies in the fact that EQ is much less 'genetically loaded.' This means that in training a child to grow up well and live successfully, parents can depend more on nurture rather than nature.

Shapiro asserts that shame and guilt, when used in appropriate measures, can achieve positive results in moral teaching. He claims, 'Shame and guilt are not emotional villains. When used appropriately, they are important ways that parents can teach children moral values' (Shapiro 1997:80). Some recommendations given by Shapiro (1997:78-79) to show how shame and guilt can be used to train children into honest, ethical and caring adults are:

- Mete out consistent punishments when rules are broken. This includes ensuring that punishments are fair, immediate and effective.
- For a child over 10, get him/her to name the punishment he/she considers appropriate to the rule that has been broken. This will challenge the child to have high self expectations and to live up to them.
- Punish the child more heavily when someone else is hurt by his/her misdoing. Also, let the child feel the shame and guilt in appropriate measure in order to change his/her behaviour. The key here is not to be too quick to comfort.¹²⁶
- Ensure that the child sees the need to apologise for what he/she has done wrong. If need be, there should be both oral and written apologies so that the child can respond emotionally and sincerely.

As your actions are often guided by your thoughts, Shapiro believes that when a child is trained to change the way he/she thinks, what results is a change in the way he/she acts. This is called cognitive-behaviour modification, and there are some practical steps to take:

- Help the child to see the problem behaviour as the 'enemy'; as something outside of himself/herself. Give this 'enemy' a name that the child hates and challenge him/her to fight it. You can make the child be fully responsible for the fight by asking him/her to write out a 'battle plan' (Shapiro 1997:114-15).

Mayer are against equating EQ with emotional intelligence because they fear that this may lead to the misconception that there is some reliable test to measure how intelligent one is emotionally.

¹²⁶ Shapiro also suggests this key in helping a child develop social skills. He asserts that a parent should refrain from joining the child in complaining about his/her friends as this will only reinforce social isolation. The child should learn to endure the hurt and make decisions about how to handle relationship problems. This is especially so for children who are between 6 to 12 years old (the reciprocal and intimate stages). The parent should learn to be a good listener, to guide by setting appropriate limits and acceptable values, and to share own knowledge and experience at the right time (Shapiro 1997:195-97).

- Get the child to do self-talk, that is, to repeat his/her action statement against the 'enemy' several times until he/she begins to believe it (Shapiro 1997:121).¹²⁷

- Guide the child to run an appropriate imagery in the mind. Such an imagery will distract the thinking part of the brain, thereby weakening the nerve impulses that have been generated by distressing thoughts. Intense concentration used to form an image can produce an internal pain-suppressing effect (Shapiro 1997:125-28).¹²⁸

Shapiro considers it crucial to train a child to have an internal sense of control over his/her environment if the child is to succeed in life. He calls this control 'mastery' and regards it as important in self-motivation. Shapiro (1997:225) has this to say, especially to the *kiasu* Singapore parent:

Many parents wrongly conclude that establishing a sense of mastery is the same as mastering new skills. With this in mind, they may lead their children on a frenetic chase of extracurricular activities - rushing from piano lessons to soccer practice to karate class - often creating a sense of being controlled by the schedule of activities. But paradoxically, this hectic pace can work against children learning achievement skills: The feeling of being controlled by external forces often leads to a lack of motivation.

To increase the level of self-motivation, Shapiro (1997:225-32) suggests the following so that the child can have a good sense of control:

- Give child the opportunities to set own goals.
- Expect child to do more on his/her own. Use rewards or reinforcement sparingly and only when absolutely needed.
- Allow child to self-grade. This will make him/her more conscientious in work.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ By repeating one's thoughts aloud, the neocortex (the higher brain centre of logic) becomes activated, and this in turn inhibits the emotional part of the brain (the limbic system) from releasing hormones and other chemicals that would have increased the heart rate of the person. This physiological change implies that repeated self-talk is beneficial psychologically because it makes the person more calm, composed and confident.

¹²⁸ An example of using imagery to remove a young boy's fear of dogs (the undesirable behaviour): Guide the child to picture himself watching a barking dog with Superman beside him. Instruct him to imagine approaching the dog slowly under the watchful eyes of the superhero, and see how it turns friendly as it is being gently caressed.

¹²⁹ Shapiro stresses that the child needs to find gratification both in individual and cooperative achievements.

- Help child break up the task into smaller steps. This makes it easier for the child to complete the work.
- Let child see how the task is relevant to his/her life. This perspective adds meaningfulness to what is to be learnt.
- Become involved in child's learning. This participation keeps the parent from always pointing the finger of blame at school or teachers.

In a society like Singapore where parents are generally protective over their children, Lawrence Shapiro offers an interesting alternative to successfully develop a child. He advocates tempering and strengthening the child emotionally so that he/she can better survive the hard knocks in life. Such a mindset is deemed essential as success in life does not mean no failures, but no faint heartedness in spite of failures. The power of self belief that propels a person to press on is again glorified, but this time, it starts with the young! But what is especially problematic with Shapiro's approach is that he teaches the child to view every problem he/she faces as the 'enemy'; as something outside of himself/herself. Though this suggestion is aimed at provoking the child to fight his/her problem, it may unwittingly delude him/her into faulting other people or things all the time instead of himself/herself.

2.8.3 Stephen Covey.¹³⁰ Drawing from his own family experience, Covey believes that families that are strong are off-track most of the time, but the crucial factor is that they have a clear family vision. It is this sense of direction that brings them back on course (Covey 1997:9). Borrowing terms used in aviation, Covey (1997:10) sees the family vision in relation to the destination, flight plan and compass.¹³¹

¹³⁰ Stephen Covey is an internationally respected leadership authority, family expert and organisational consultant. He founded the former Covey Leadership Centre in the USA and is now co-chairman of Franklin Covey Company. Academically, he holds an MBA from Harvard University and a PhD from Brigham Young University. Covey also authored the highly acclaimed best-seller *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*.

¹³¹ The destination is the family mission statement shared by all in the family; the flight plan is the will to raise the family from 'inside out' because of the ill influences of society; the compass is you yourself since you know your family best, and thus, should act as an agent of change.

To nurture a strong family culture is to develop a pulsable ‘we’ experience in the family. This implies that family members must look beyond their individual selves, and recognise the need for interdependence and draw happiness from the happiness of others in the family (Covey 1997:20). Employing insights from his now famous *7 Habits*, Covey shares how a strong ‘we’ culture can be cultivated in the family.

Habit 1: Be proactive. Covey (1997:28) exhorts that you should condition yourself to act according to principles rather than to negative emotions in family situations. He talks of two circles of thinking - the Circle of Concern and the Circle of Influence. The Circle of Concern causes you to blame, accuse and judge others in your thoughts; the Circle of Influence arouses kindness, forgiveness, loyalty, commitment and humility in your thinking (Covey 1997:64).¹³² You are to be proactive not in changing others first, but in conditioning yourself to first think in the Circle of Influence so as to impact others positively.

Habit 2: Begin with the end in mind. The end that Covey has in mind is the purpose as to why one’s family exists. This purpose can be expressed as a family mission statement which Covey (1997:72) describes as a ‘combined, unified expression from all family members of what your family is all about and the principles you choose to govern your family life.’ This statement is important because it embodies shared values and expectations that will bond family members together in spite of all their differences (Covey 1997:81). It gives them the basis to talk in terms of ‘we’ rather than in terms of ‘your’ and ‘my’. When you learn to begin with the end (that is the family mission statement) in every situation, you get back on track because the purpose as spelt out in the statement becomes bigger than any problem in the family.

¹³² Example of Circle of Concern thinking: ‘My wife is so self-centred!’

Example of Circle of Influence thinking: ‘I can be other-centred and model the kind of loving interaction I desire in my marriage.’

Habit 3: Put first things first. Covey is convinced that the family is a priority that deserves your committed effort to guard. He views the family as one of the few arenas in which you can play out some permanent roles in life. Lamenting at the preference of financial rewards over family relationships, Covey (1997:116) says:

So if you're living around a temporary role and allowing your treasure chest to remain barren in terms of your only real permanent role, then you're letting yourself be seduced by the culture and robbed off the true richness of your life - the deep and lasting satisfaction that only comes through family relationships.

Covey (1997:119-25) also goes on to identify some causes that have undermined one's resolve to put the family as a 'first thing' in today's culture:

- Parenthood is not seen as a unique role and a sacred stewardship in life. There is no sense of pride and honour in being a parent.
- Marriage is more like a contract of convenience rather than a covenant of commitment. This means that it can be readily and easily broken once the relationship is considered to be cumbersome in any way.
- The material comfort and affluence today promotes a lifestyle of high financial obligation together with a preference for personal freedom and independence. This is certainly harmful to the 'we' spirit in family life.
- The advanced technology in computer and television has impersonalised relationships. Moreover, the young child may innocently accept the questionable values propagated through these channels as normal. Indeed, no matter how convenient learning has become through technology, the child learns best when a parent takes time to interact with him/her in actual (not virtual) person.

In helping you to put family first in today's culture, Covey (1997:139) first suggests that you create a regular family time. This will provide opportunities for planning, teaching and problem-solving in the family. The solemn warning from Covey (1997:146) is that if you choose not to teach your children, society will, and both they and you will have to live with the consequences.

A second suggestion by Covey (1997:151-53) is to establish one-on-one bonding in the family which ensures that there is nurturing of heart and soul at the deepest level. Such

bonding times allow family members not only to work for the present, but also to create for the future. As to how such bonding between spouses can impact their children, Covey (1997:154) has this to comment:

Children get much of their sense of security from the way their mother and father treat each other. So building the marriage relationship will have a powerful effect on the entire family culture.

Habit 4: Think win-win. As no one likes to lose, the way to build trust and love into family relationships is to let the other person know that his/her best interest is at heart. Covey (1997:179) believes that this principle is best stated this way: 'What is important to another person must be as important to you as the other person is to you.' In creating a 'we' culture in the family, the worst thing to do is to have one person winning all the time. Hence, Covey (1997:181) encourages an 'abundance mentality' in family problem-solving whereby there is an openness to look at all alternative solutions in order to achieve a 'win' for everybody.¹³³

Habit 5: Seek first to understand, then to be understood. Covey (1997:206) asserts that family relationships languish at the 'superficial, functional and transactional' level instead of rising to the height of being 'transformational' mainly because there is no genuine understanding. In fact, at the heart of family pain is the problem of misunderstanding or a lack of understanding. This problem is common because you often condition your interpretations of others, situations and messages with your own past and present experiences. In other words, you view what is outside you with your own 'tainted glasses' and thereby become distorted in your perceptions (Covey 1997:204). Covey calls a person to first seek to understand so that he/she can adjust his/her expectations. Since these expectations often form the basis of one's judgments, he argues that better understanding on one's part will make one less judgmental of

¹³³ In bringing the child into the 'we' experience, Covey (1997:184-85) suggests three things: let him/her win in little things; interact with him/her around the big issues; offset the competition focus from time to time (that is, to distract the child from constantly thinking in terms of winning).

others (Covey 1997:208). Covey (1997:213) likens understanding someone as giving 'psychological air' to that person because it 'affirms, validates, recognises and appreciates the intrinsic worth of a person.' According to him, empathetic listening is the key to better understanding (Covey 1997:224).¹³⁴

In seeking to be understood, Covey (1997:233) considers feedback as the key, and instructs people to do the following in order to help themselves better understand one another:

- Check your motive. Do you want to give feedback to help the other person, or do you want to do it in order to get back at him/her? A rule of thumb is to refrain from giving any feedback when angry.
- Seek first to understand the other person. This is to allow you to speak in that person's language of love when you feedback to him/her.
- Separate the person from the behaviour. You use feedback to deal with the problematic action, not the person.
- Be sensitive to and patient with the other person's blind spots. You need to first ensure that the person is ready to improve on what is already known before you feedback these blind spots to him/her.
- Use 'I' messages in feedback in order to imply a communication between equals. The key here is to avoid making people feel that you are talking down to them.

Habit 6: Synergise. There is synergy when the individual relationships in the family all add up to give a 'we' culture. Covey (1997:250) calls this the culture of mutual openness, vulnerability and accountability. Differences in the family are not to be merely tolerated and accepted, but to be celebrated as strengths that make living together that much more enriching (Covey 1997:255). A synergistic family is one where all members are involved together in working out a solution when a problem arises. Hence, Covey (1997:261) suggests that you see

¹³⁴ This requires that you try to see in the other person's frame of reference. For example, when you hear a message, you are to be a 'faithful translator' of what is said to you so that you understand what the other person is saying in its purest form.

problems as ‘vaccinations to trigger an immune response,’ and not as illnesses that threaten the family health.

To underscore his belief in strong family synergy, Covey (1997:273) emphasises:

Never fall into the trap of allowing money, possessions or personal hobbies to take the place of a rich, synergistic relationship ... While these things may temporarily soothe, they will never deeply satisfy. Always be aware that happiness does not come from money, possessions, or fame; it comes from the quality of relationships with the people you love and respect.

Habit 7: Sharpen the saw. This refers to the act of renewing your family life. Covey (1997:280) encourages that various family traditions be created to renew the four areas of family life - physical, social/emotional, mental and spiritual. Whatever forms these traditions take, the purpose is to enhance and enrich the ‘we’ experience in the family; to make time for the family to do things together in the midst of many competing demands.

Stephen Covey must be commended for stressing the importance of strong relationships in the family. Though he is addressing problems in the North American context, many Singaporeans are familiar with what he is talking about - the weakening and impersonalising of family relationships in modern living today. The need for group time and one-on-one bonding is often minimised as family members demand their right to personal space, freedom and independence. Also, as rightly pointed out by Covey, the family tries to lessen the pain of emotional distance with material abundance. This is only a poor substitute as many emotional needs continue to be unfulfilled. Without emotional intimacy through meaningful relationships, family members continue to misunderstand or exhibit lack of understanding of one another. As Covey is here employing his principles for business management in the context of home management, his readers will feel at ease with a set of familiar ideas. In fact, many should be well exposed to these relational strategies or skills in their own workplace. However, if there is to be one problem with Covey’s approach, it must

be the call for a win-win result in every family situation. Being essentially Asian in culture, many Singapore families still hold on to maxims like 'the child is to be seen and not heard' and 'man is the head of the house'. Such beliefs automatically create some psychological distance between the man and the others in his family. But again, in view of the evolving sociological patterns in Singapore, the challenge is for the family man to adjust his role so that he can be true to unchanging principles, yet be relevant to changing times.

2.9 Secular Perspectives on Successful Masculinity

2.9.1 Warren Farrell.¹³⁵ In answering why man is generally so preoccupied with material success, Farrell (1986:135) comments:

... The difference between the desperation felt by men as they pursue external reward power lies in men's having to prove themselves worthy recipients not only of women's attention and sexuality but also of the approval of parents and peers

Thus, Farrell sees man's preoccupation with success as his search for approval, especially by the female. In fact, he considers success as man's most respected defence against any possible rejection by the female. Success for the man is good not only because of its power to draw female attention, but also to ease the pain of female rejection since success has its own inherent and external rewards (Farrell 1986:136).¹³⁶

Farrell (1986:138) further suggests that men tend to think of women as more interested in their material success than their emotional sensitivity; that men strive to achieve success so that they can gain women's attention; that success in a sense is men's way of earning equality with women.¹³⁷ To him, success is the 'male form of power, designed to

¹³⁵ Warren Farrell has conducted numerous workshops with thousands of men and women in the USA for more than twenty years. He has also authored two other best-sellers - *The Myth of Male Power* and *The Liberated Man*.

¹³⁶ Farrell (1986:137) presupposes that man's preoccupation with success is because 'women choose the most performing man.'

¹³⁷ The inequality implied here has to do with man's responsibility to actively woo the woman even at the risk of being rejected.

compensate for the male form of powerlessness; it is the most respected defence against vulnerability.’

Another question which Farrell attempts to answer is why men are generally successful at work, but not at home. He points to man’s tendency to self-listen - that is, the tendency to do problem-solving and fault-finding as he listens to himself while another is talking - as the main cause for this (Farrell 1986:142). Man develops and sharpens his ability to self-listen in the workplace as a skill to gain success in a dog-eat-dog world. An example of self-listening is to mentally rehearse and hear what you will say in order to make yourself look good and your colleague look bad in the eyes of your boss while your colleague is presenting his case. Thus, self-listening is an art that can bring the one who masters it well closer to success. However, it can also create distance between two persons because of its tendency to exalt one and bring down the other. And man often brings this self-listen tendency from his workplace back to his home. This proves to be his own misdoing because the woman at home wants to be listened to empathetically and noticed with positive feelings, not to be put down by the self-listening man. But unfortunately, it does seem that the more successful a man is, the more he tends to self-listen at home, thereby creating distances between him and other family members (Farrell 1986:140).

Warren Farrell sees man’s motivation for success as largely coming from his desire to enhance his sexuality and fulfil his sexual needs. Success is men’s way of conquering women and showing who the stronger sex is. Even if rejected, the man can still take comfort in the inherent and external benefits of success. Hence, a man works hard at being successful as it promises him a somewhat sure-win situation. Such a portrayal of manhood by Farrell generally fits men in Singapore today as many of them still value machismo highly. And therein lies this tension in the contemporary Singapore society - male chauvinism clashing with emergent

feminism. In the context of the family where both spouses are working and contributing significantly to the total income, the man is increasingly pressured to modify the traditional perception of a wife's role; to see his wife not as a passive consumer of but as an active contributor to the family's material success.

2.9.2 John Gray.¹³⁸ From a psychological standpoint, Gray (1993:56) maintains that men and women are like reflections of each other in many ways - different but complementary.

One complementary difference between the sexes is that women expand and men contract. A woman expands in that she tends to forget her own needs and embrace those of others in relationship building. Hence, there is a need to keep her sense and value of self because of her tendency to expand. On the other hand, a man contracts in that he tends to be self-absorbed or self-centred in his relationships. This difference is often evident in how a man and a woman communicate. When a man talks, he has already rehearsed in his mind what he is going to say; he speaks to make a point. This is often not true for a woman. When she talks, she often does not speak to make a point, but to share her thoughts and feelings. Such sharing helps her explore and discover the point that she wants to make. The man who fails to understand this difference between the sexes is often frustrated by the 'time-wasting' woman. But understanding it will certainly help him support her by listening non-judgmentally (Gray 1993:58-59).

Another example of how a man contracts and a woman expands is found in their different reactions to stress. When a man is distressed at work, he contracts and becomes very focused in solving the problem. This may make him look very self-absorbed, distant, detached and uncaring toward his loved ones. But in reality, he does care much about them and that may be the very reason why he is so concerned about solving the problem at hand. Conversely,

¹³⁸ John Gray is reputed to be America's foremost bestselling author. He has written much on man-woman relationships, drawing on his many years of experience in couples therapy.



when a woman is distressed at work, she expands her anxieties to include her loved ones because she feels bad neglecting them as a result of the problem at hand. Understanding this will help the woman better support her work-stressed husband when he appears to be present in body but absent in spirit (Gray 1993:64).

Gray (1993:68) argues that the man-woman attraction will be weakened if you try to repress yourself or to change your partner. This implies that you should accept yourself and your partner in spite of your differences. To force yourself to be like your partner or your partner to be like yourself is a denial of differences that will sabotage the relationship. For a man to better understand and support his partner, the key is for him to balance the masculine and feminine sides of his psychological self. For example, if a sensitive man finds his aggressive partner repulsive, what he needs to do is to develop his masculine side. He may think that he needs a more gentle woman, but in reality, what he needs is not a more gentle woman to make him feel manly, but to develop his masculine side which his partner has helped arouse in him (Gray 1993:72-73).¹³⁹

A second complementary difference between the sexes pointed out by Gray concerns awareness. The man has focused awareness in that he views things sequentially and builds them up into a complete picture. Such a tendency causes the man to be more interested in results, goals, power, competition, work, logic and efficiency. In contrast, the woman possesses open awareness; she intuitively pieces the full scene together and then explores the

¹³⁹ The sensitive-type man usually has some repressed masculine traits in his psychological self. For example, his childhood experience of being abused by an aggressive and assertive father may cause him to repress these traits because he sees them as destructive and selfish. But as opposites attract, he becomes attracted to a woman who possesses these traits. However, negative conditioning moves him to resist these traits in his inner self whenever they are aroused in him. He then projects this resistance onto his partner and becomes disapproving of her. To have a balanced self and healthy relationship with his partner, what this man needs to do is to accept and develop these traits as part of his masculinity. He can do this by establishing meaningful interactions with other men, by taking up some competitive sports, and even by forgiving his father (Gray 1993:77-78).



various parts. This makes her more interested in relationships, sharing, cooperation and harmony (Gray 1993:83-84).¹⁴⁰

Gray cautions that the open awareness of women can lead them to share all their problems at one go, giving the impression that they are overwhelmed. At such a time, what she needs is to be allowed to share her feelings freely; to be heard and not to receive advices or suggestions. The man should be aware of this so that he will not misunderstand that he is being blamed, or interrupt with some well-intentioned but ill-timed solutions (Gray 1993:95).

Also, the man needs to realise that when he shares a problem with his wife, she may not sense that he is asking for a specific solution. Being a person of open awareness, she may go into describing how she feels. This often frustrates the man who accuses the woman of not being focused and going off tangent (Gray 1993:105).¹⁴¹

A third complementary difference highlighted by Gray has to do with how men and women reduce the pain of hurt in their lives. Being largely objective in his psychological self, the man often tries to inflict pain on others as his way of objectively experiencing and easing the pain. Thus, it is generally true that a hurting man is more likely to use physical violence than a woman.¹⁴² To check this masculine tendency, Gray advises that a hurting man learns to use the feminine side of his psychological self to get in touch with his feelings and share them with others. This will bring a relieving effect to his pain without resorting to any violence, physical or otherwise (Gray 1993:164-65).

¹⁴⁰ This difference in awareness can be demonstrated in the activity of shopping. The varieties excite the woman because her open awareness makes her enjoy the opportunity to look at all that's on show and explore the bargains. On the other hand, such varieties often drain the man because of his focused awareness. He prefers to know first what he wants to buy instead of shopping with an 'open mind'. Hence, man usually enjoys shopping less than woman.

¹⁴¹ Gray (1993:159-60) asserts that when a man has a problem with failure, he needs time to mull over and gradually assume responsibility. Unfortunately, this is also a time when an insensitive wife can do the most damage by making an offensive comment unintentionally. She needs to realise that a man accepts his mistakes most readily when he is not corrected or rejected for them.

¹⁴² In contrast, a woman often relieves her pain by hurting herself; by playing the victim in order to make others feel guilty or responsible (Gray 1993:171).



In view of their complementary differences, Gray (1993:261) lists out seven attitudes which he believes will create an emotionally supportive relationship between a man and a woman:

- *Love*: This is a primary emotional need of both man and woman. It can be expressed by touch or empathy.

- *Appreciation*: This is a primary emotional need of man. It acknowledges the value of his efforts and actions.

- *Acceptance*: This is another primary emotional need of man. It affirms and forgives the man in spite of his shortcomings.¹⁴³

- *Trust*: This is also a man's primary emotional need. It gives the benefit of doubt to the man.

- *Caring*: This is a primary emotional need of woman. It reassures her that there is interest and concern for her well-being.¹⁴⁴

- *Understanding*: Again, this ranks as a primary emotional need of woman. It validates her feelings and thoughts even though the man may not necessarily feel and think the same way.

- *Respect*: This is yet another primary emotional need of woman. It acknowledges her importance and needs.

John Gray (1993:266) is right to point out that a major cause of frustration in man-woman relationship is that man gives to woman what he needs, and woman gives to man what she needs. No wonder many men and women are puzzled by their difficult relationships in spite of their honest efforts to put things right. On the part of the man, he needs to know that there are sexuality differences, and that they are complementary rather than contradictory in nature. This will enable him to better appreciate and relate to the female sex. He also needs to know himself psycho-emotionally as a male in order to better handle his own manhood. For

¹⁴³ Man is willing to change when he feels accepted. Acceptance makes him more positive in receiving feedback. A woman does much damage in trying to change a man by nagging at him. It shows her unacceptance of him and this causes him to resist any change (Gray 1993:283).

¹⁴⁴ Gray (1993:242) comments that while man does not need to be reassured as long as he is still in a relationship, the woman needs to be constantly reassured verbally, and with signs and symbols of love. Thus, in showing care, a man will do well by saying 'I love you' or 'I understand you' frequently to a woman.

example, he needs to know that his response in a certain situation is just one way (the masculine way) of handling a matter, and not the only valid way. Also, Gray must be commended for reminding the man that he has a feminine side to his psycho-emotional self, and he needs to express it whenever appropriate if he is to have emotionally supportive relationships. Indeed, this is essentially Gray's depiction of successful manhood - a man expressing in a balanced manner the masculine and feminine sides of his psycho-emotional self in order to relate meaningfully with others, especially with the female sex.

2.9.3 Ronald Levant.¹⁴⁵ Some problem areas for men as identified by Levant (1995:18-22) are:

- *Difficulty sensing and responding to emotions*: Men do well in competing, strategising and taking action. But in being sensitive to emotions, they are often found lacking. They are strong in action empathy but weak in emotional empathy.

- *Inability to feel, identify and express feelings*: Men have been conditioned from young to suppress their feelings. This leads them to suffer from emotional numbness in later life (alexithymia). In fact, they can be so emotionally numb that they are not even aware of their own emotional reactions.

- *Overindulgence in anger*: Perhaps, men are conditioned to express one emotion freely - anger. It does seem that all the other emotions seeking expression would then turn themselves into anger, resulting in men being more prone to rage and violence.

- *Tendency to demonstrate dependency and distance both at the same time*: As a result of childhood conditioning, men learn dependency from the mother and distance from the father. In adult life, this can be seen in how a man wants to be pampered by his wife (dependency), yet feels uncomfortable in showing intimacy to her (distance).

- *Over-investment in work*: Men have traditionally been conditioned to seek validation and fulfilment from work. This has in turn led them to play a much reduced role in family life.

- *Distortion of sexual intimacy*: There is a tendency for men to view sex as a means of proving their manhood in terms of how well they perform sexually. A

¹⁴⁵ Ronald Levant is a practising psychologist in the USA and specialises in counselling men. He also researches into and writes on issues related to masculinity.



greater harm is that the female partner is not seen as a person, but as an object for sexual arousal and gratification.

Levant notes that man needs to balance action empathy with emotional empathy. He calls it learning to be emotionally intelligent. 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 with feelings; he is not good at reading the heart. The challenge today for men is to turn their action-empathy skills into emotional-empathy ones - to read the heart, not the mind; to understand someone's feelings, not counter that person's next move; to lift up another, not exalt oneself (Levant 1995:28-30).¹⁴⁶

As to why men have traditionally buried themselves in work, Levant (1995:176) has this to say:

... Men are still very much committed to fulfilling the traditional male-norm requirement of being the good provider - in part because so much of their sense of masculine purpose depends upon it, in part because it's one of the few ways they traditionally have been allowed to demonstrate their love, and in part because that's what they do best. That's when a man feels most in his element - when he's working. He's much less confident of his skills as a family man, because he never really learned how to 'do' relationships and family life

But this domination of men as good providers for the home is now being challenged by many women who are economically active and competent in today's society. However, Levant points out that these women are not out to overthrow their men as breadwinners or providers. In fact, between family and career, these women would prefer to be both even though it is never easy. The reason is that having experienced the gratification that comes from working and homemaking, they realise that to have one without the other is to shortchange oneself.

¹⁴⁶ Levant (1995:44) describes how emotional empathy can be learnt: 1) Develop a vocabulary of emotions ('hurt', 'sad' and 'loving' are some examples). Then practise using these words to describe the emotional states of people. 2) Study how actors or actresses communicate emotions. From their tone of voice, gestures, postures, facial expressions and words, determine the feelings that they are expressing. 3) Apply this skill to real-life situations. Determine the feelings of people when you are talking, listening and watching them.

Hence, these women want their men to be more active in family life partly because they need the help, and partly because they want their spouses to be happier and richer in life (Levant 1995:182).

Ronald Levant argues that the traditional masculine code - which conditions man to find his worth in work, and to suppress his feelings and emotions - needs to be reconstructed in today's society. He believes that it can be done because such a code is not only determined by differences in male-female biology, but also by the influences of gender-role socialisation. As society changes, men must allow themselves to be socialised differently so that their masculinity continues to be real yet relevant. In Singapore, with so many economically active and competent women in the workforce, men are no longer sole breadwinners. Instead, a working woman today is more likely to want her husband to be a partner rather than a breadwinner. Though men know that they are working ridiculous hours and neglecting the home, their common defence is: 'I don't make the rules. I just play by them.' With many women contributing significantly as co-breadwinners today, this response is beginning to sound very hollow since most men don't have to work themselves crazy to lay food on the table. As stressed by Levant, man today must be willing to reconstruct his masculinity, and find his worth and rewards not only in work, but also in homemaking and relationship building.

2.10 Chapter Summary

2.10.1 Singapore's past. Understanding Singapore's past helps one to appreciate that her success culture does not come about overnight. In fact, the birth of colonialism was really the beginning of economic profiteering in Singapore. The British came because they foresaw Singapore's great commercial potential, and the locals were willing to release control because of handsome compensations. Singapore's early economic development was founded on such

pragmatism. This in turn lured immigrants from China and India to settle and work in Singapore. They came with making money uppermost in their minds, hoping to give a better life to themselves and loved ones back in their lands of origin. Such an attitude planted the first seed of a money-making culture among the populace.

When the Japanese invaded Singapore in World War II, the people realised that they could not protect what they had worked so hard to acquire, materially or otherwise. The British could not, or would not, defend the interests of Singapore because they were fighting for their own interests against Nazi Germany. The people of Singapore felt betrayed by their colonial masters when the British surrendered to the Japanese. But the Asian invaders fared no better as they bullied and exploited the people to advance the building of the Great Japanese Empire. The ravages of war had taught the people of Singapore to recognise that the best persons to protect their interests and resources were none other than they themselves.

This realisation stimulated a new political consciousness among the populace after the war. The British were aware of this and they returned to Singapore with the intention of granting her self-government eventually. Many political activists emerged during this time. The most prominent of them was Lee Kuan Yew who came into power in 1959 as Singapore's first Prime Minister. But all the unrests during this period of political turbulence alerted Lee that he must first cultivate social cohesion in a heterogeneous Singapore.

Joining Malaya to become part of Malaysia was Lee's plan to help Singapore survive economically because of her lack of size and natural resources. But the merger in 1963 was only shortlived. With little political and economic authority given to them, Lee and his PAP colleagues found that they had placed Singapore at the losing end of the bargain. They clashed with their mainland counterparts. This led to bloody racial riots which eventually convinced the Tunku, leader of the Federal Government, to oust Singapore from Malaysia. On 9 August

1965, Singapore became independent and was left to determine her own fortunes in the face of much uncertainties. It was against such odds that Lee rallied all Singaporeans to believe in themselves and to carve out a future together.

In the early years of independence, Singapore did not merely survive. In fact, she succeeded in flourishing economically. Emphasising belief, unity and diligence, the government succeeded in firing up in the people the will to persevere, excel and compete.

2.10.2 Singapore's present. Understanding Singapore's present helps one to appreciate some of the tensions experienced by the people today. The emphasis on economic success by the government has unwittingly nurtured a materialistic mindset in people.¹⁴⁷ But nation building today has become more than just being economically successful. The government is now pushing for greater efforts in social involvement and family enrichment. The unfortunate thing is that while most Singaporeans respect the social and family values enunciated by the government, they lack the personal conviction to practise them in life.

Recent studies have shown that Singaporeans, including the younger generation, are generally materialistic and individualistic. *Kiasuism* is a term coined to express their fear of losing out in anything that promises monetary benefits or individual gains. It is this *kiasu* mindset that makes most Singaporeans shun involvement in social work because it promises much for others but little for oneself.

On the home front, current trends are pointing to an increasing number of dual-income families in Singapore. That women today are generally well educated, professionally competent and much needed in the workforce is a sign of an emergent feminism in Singapore. Though dual-income families enjoy greater material comfort, the sad part is that most of them

¹⁴⁷ A survey by the Institute of Policy Studies has revealed that two-thirds of the respondents are willing to die for the country in war, and half say 'no' to huge pay cuts and heavy taxes. This has led Dr Tan Ern Ser, the survey consultant, to quip: 'Money seems more important than their lives' (*The Straits Times* 19 February 2000. Here, take my life ... but not my pay, pp58-59).

are showing signs of being stressed. Spouses are spending less time with each other and their children because of work. This is compounded by the fact that men in Singapore are generally still traditional in their family role - they still leave homemaking and child nurturing very much to their wives. Little wonder young people generally find their fathers aloof and hard to relate to. Also, the steady climb in the number of divorces involving working women should alert the Singapore male to review his traditional position on work and family.

Societal trends today indicate that the preoccupation with economic success has made many Singaporeans adopt a narrow, materialistic and individualistic perspective of life. As a result, social awareness is weak and families are increasingly stressed, especially those where both spouses are working and the children are young.

2.10.3 Influence of secular ideas. Understanding the influence of secular ideas in Singapore helps one to appreciate that she succeeds not in isolation, but in interacting with the outside world. Many of these ideas have either reinforced the psyche of Singaporeans or challenged them to rethink certain perspectives.

For example, some of these secular ideas on success reinforce what many Singaporeans are already doing - using self belief and positive thinking to get what they want in life. Indeed, success is seen as primarily enriching and enhancing oneself. This reinforces the narrow and self-centred approach of many Singaporeans to life. The emphasis on not accepting failure but persevering until the desired outcome is attained is also no strange advice in Singapore's driven and goal-oriented society.

In the area of marriage-family life, some of these ideas have done well in encouraging Singaporeans to deal constructively with their emotions in marital conflict. However, such an approach can also backfire when couples deal only with the emotions but not the root problem



that arouses them. Singaporeans do well to note that enduring, but not endearing, marriages are really no better than empty relationships regardless of how longlasting these may be.

In the area of child nurturing, most Singapore parents desire that their children develop well so that they will not lose out in life, especially in the aspect of education. Hence, ideas on tempering and strengthening the child emotionally against the hard knocks in life offer an interesting alternative to cognitive development. But the danger is that parents may unintentionally use these to push their children to perform at a level higher than what the child is ready for. As it is, the educational system is already creating so much competition and comparison in academic performance, and many parents are treating their young ones more like performers rather than persons.

What is perhaps most helpful about some of these ideas is the challenge they pose to the Singapore man to reconsider his traditional view of manhood - to find his worth not only in work, but also in family life and relationship building. This is an increasingly crucial issue in Singapore because too many successful men with sunken families is becoming more and more of a reality. Indeed, Singapore's economic success has not only improved the lives of the people, but also brought with it an unwelcomed price.

This chapter has dealt with the emergence of Singapore's success culture, and how it has impacted people's aspirations in life, family roles and relationships.

In the next chapter, an attempt will be made to understand issues pertaining to success, family and manhood from the normative Christian traditions.

CHAPTER III

HISTORICAL PRACTICAL THEOLOGY: THE CHRISTIAN VOICE ON SUCCESS, MARRIAGE-FAMILY LIFE AND MASCULINITY

3.1 Reflections on Biblical Texts¹

3.1.1 Joshua 1:1-9

1 After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide:

2 'Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them - to the Israelites.

3 I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses.

4 Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates - all the Hittite country - to the Great Sea on the west.

5 No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.

6 Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them.

7 Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go.

8 Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.'

Joshua was the one to complete Moses' unfinished task in leading Israel into the promised land. He had earlier been chosen to be Moses' successor in Dt 31:7-8. And all leadership in Israel was to stand in the shadow of Moses in that it had to fulfil the command first given to Moses to possess the land for Israel (Butler 1983:13).

¹ All biblical texts are cited in the New International Version. The first two passages are used to reflect on success, the next two on marriage-family life and the last two on masculinity.

After some forty long years in the wilderness, Joshua's big day had arrived - he was to lead God's people into the promised land of Canaan. Only the Jordan River stood between them and this great promise of God. For Joshua, what a pleasure it would be to cross this divide and to claim this great promise of God. Yet at the same time, what a pressure it must be to take over from an esteemed predecessor and to face the uncertainties ahead. Hence, the words of God came to Joshua as divine consolation in that His presence would guarantee the fulfilment of His command, and act as the basis of Joshua's courage and certainty (Butler 1983:14).

Joshua was Moses' aide.² He was Moses' minister in that he rendered personal service to the senior leader (Woudstra 1981:57). He was Moses' right-hand man; a confidant with whom Moses would share his personal thoughts and feelings. On the other side of the relationship, Moses was like a father figure and mentor to Joshua. Naturally, the death of Moses was a time of both grief and anxiety for Joshua. But God chose this time to call Joshua to lead Israel into action; to arise and cross the Jordan; to claim the land He had promised Israel. He said to Joshua: 'Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to go into Canaan.' With this call, Joshua was to officially take over from Moses. But Moses had been highly regarded as a great leader by the people. For Joshua, getting into Canaan was very much a test of performance - could he perform as well as his great predecessor Moses? For the people of Israel, the march into Canaan was very much a measure of performance - could their new leader perform to their expectations?³

In view of his concern, God's words in vv 2-5 must be very reassuring to Joshua. The repeated use of 'I' by God emphasises Him as the real driving force behind the whole

² Moses was given the title 'servant of the LORD'. But this was not bestowed on Joshua until the end of the book in 24:29.

³ It was likely that Joshua was intimidated by the greatness of Moses and the awesomeness of his new responsibility (Madvig 1992:256).

Canaanite campaign: 'I am about to give' (v 2); 'I will give ... I promised' (v 3); 'I was with Moses ... I will be with you ... I will never leave you nor forsake you' (v 5). All these served to reassure Joshua of God's covenantal faithfulness and presence with him. It was as if God was telling him: 'Joshua, how well you perform is not in terms of how close you measure up to Moses, but how close you follow me as your leader. You have been chosen to succeed Moses, but you are not chosen to succeed me. Let me lead you as you perform the work I have for you. I am the covenantal God, true and faithful to what I have purposed for and through you.' In the face of the pressure to perform, Joshua was reminded to do his best in trusting God as the leader of what he was about to do. As Woudstra (1981:61) has commented, when God said, 'I will not leave you nor forsake you,' He made His unfailing presence and aid as the guarantee of Joshua's success.

The pressure to perform is very real in today's success-oriented world. It can be the pressure to perform as well as another person, or the pressure to perform to people's expectations. When a person does his best but still fails to compare favourably with someone else, or to win the applause of others, he may see himself as a person of lesser achievement. He may feel insecure about who he is and what he is doing. He may feel like a failure.

The Christian is to be and to do his best with all the opportunities that God has given him. But at end of the day, when he finds himself not a Moses, or when people are harder to please than God, he needs to ask himself two questions: 'Is God pleased with what I have become, never mind if I am not a Moses?' 'Is God pleased with what I have done, never mind if others hardly applaud me along the way?' A 'yes' to these questions should be reason enough to rejoice because it is indicative that he has let God be the leader of his being and doing. In his desire to perform well, the Christian is to let God be the leader and master of all

that he wants to be and to do. His divine presence and aid is still the guarantee of every Christian's success.

God commanded Joshua three times to 'be strong and courageous' (vv 6, 7 and 9). To be strong is to hold fast and to be courageous is to have a resolute mind.⁴ This command was also a warning that all would not be easy in Canaan. There would not only be many opportunities in Canaan, but also many distractions to tempt Joshua and the people away from all that God had purposed for them. Canaan provided Joshua not only the pressure to perform, but also the pressure to stray away from God. Hence, he was commanded to 'be strong and courageous' in the face of all the distractions; to hold fast to his faith in God and to have a resolute mind bent toward God all the time. God was here commanding Joshua to be always with Him just as He had promised to be always with His man. Joshua was called to obey all the law, to speak it, to meditate on it without deviating from it in any way (vv 7-8). He was to let God's law be so much in him that he lived it, followed it, talked about it, and even slept with it on his mind. The emphasis was that mere knowledge of God's law was not enough. One must also 'be careful to do everything written in it' (v 8). The law was to control all of Joshua's thoughts and actions, and he was commanded to obey all of it. Obedience to certain parts of it was really no obedience at all (Madvig 1992:257). The promised reward for this total obedience to God's law was that Joshua would be 'prosperous and successful' (v 8). Commenting on this, Woudstra (1981:63) says that living a life in fellowship with God by observing His law would bring 'happy achievement of life's goal and prosperity' for Joshua and the people.⁵

⁴ Wilson, William 1978. s v 'Strong, Strength, Strengthen' and 'Courage'. *Old Testament Word Studies*.

⁵ Woudstra (1981:55) has translated 'be prosperous' and 'be successful' in v 8 as 'happily achieve your goal' and 'prosper' respectively. Though there is a direct connection between law observance and prosperity here, this must not be seen as an automatic link as evident in Job and Ps 73. In a religio-ethical sense, to prosper is to seek God and to let oneself be guided by Him (Woudstra 1981:63).

Canaan was a land of abundance and opportunities. It was also a land of great distractions. In the light of this reality, Joshua and the people were not to run wild and free, but to firmly and resolutely let God's law be their reference point. In fact, God not only wanted them to enjoy Canaan as His promised blessing, but also to glorify Him there. Hence, the law was given in anticipation of their entry into Canaan.⁶ It was to be their reference point from where they would draw their direction and guidance so that when they eventually entered Canaan, they would not live like godless people but as God's people. This means that the prosperity and success mentioned in v 8 must not be understood only in material terms, but also in spiritual and moral terms. Canaan was where the Israelites must fight militarily to possess the land - that's the material aspect. It was also where they must fight spiritually so that they would continue to worship the true God and not the Canaanite idols. And Canaan was where they must fight morally as well so that they would continue to follow the holy law of God, not the decadent rules of the Canaanites. In short, Canaan was pressure to stray away for the Israelites because their integrity as God's people would be severely tested materially, spiritually and morally. They would have to fight on all these three fronts by sticking firmly and resolutely to God's law and way. That's the key to their complete victory, prosperity and success. And just as it was in the ancient world, a person's victory, prosperity and success today are often measured by the possessions he has. Walter Brueggemann (1994:276-77) calls this the 'royal/urban' view of property. He says:

This view affirmed that 'haves' are entitled to have, whether the haves are the king, the nobles, the wealthy landowners, or the managers of legitimated bureaucracy ... haves may have and legitimately seek more. The right of the have-nots - citizens, peasants, slaves, all the powerless ones - is nil.

The Bible articulates an alternative view of property that is not exclusive to the Bible but receives its most compelling statement there. It may be designated 'covenantal/prophetic'. It holds that the haves and the have-nots are bound in

⁶ Brueggemann (1977:61) asserts that the law is given not to coerce or control the people of Israel. Rather, it is for the purpose of helping them to always remember their 'historicality with Yahweh and with land.'

community to each other, that viable life depends upon the legitimate respect, care, and maintenance of the have-nots and upon restraint of the haves so that the needs and rights of the disadvantaged take priority over the yearnings of the advantaged.

Hence, in giving the land to Israel, God had intended that they would not exercise power to control one another, but responsibility to be compassionate toward one another as spelt out in the 'social laws' of Israel, especially that of the Jubilee.

Brueggemann (1977:53) further points out that entering into Canaan is not entry 'into safe space but into a context of covenant.' But the land has within it seductive power - 'it invites Israel to enter life apart from covenant.' While camping at the Jordan, the main resource which Israel seems to have in resisting this temptation is that of memory. Indeed, Israel's greatest temptation is to forget and disregard the Lord's covenantal faithfulness as they moved from being slaves to being land-owners.

Another seduction of the land is to lure the people of Israel to view themselves 'no longer recipient of the land, but as controller, no longer creature of grace but manager of achievement' (Brueggemann 1977:56). In other words, the people are tempted to worship themselves as gods of their own sufficiency. Against this danger, Brueggemann (1977:57) speaks: 'Yahweh is the Lord of *gifted existence*, taken freely and without merit. And the way to sustain gifted existence is to stay singularly with the gift-giver.'

The world today is like Canaan in Joshua's time with all its abundance and opportunities for a good life. But these opportunities can also lure Christians to stray away from God. Hence, they must view these not only as blessings, but also as responsibilities to glorify God. To do so, the same key instruction applies - be strong and courageous in a world of material seductions; hold fast to the rules of God with a resolute mind. And whenever Christians think that some of God's rules do not apply as they exploit the abundance and opportunities before them, it is a warning that they may be straying away from God's way.

When God and His rules are only relevant to a small part of life but not all of life, Christians end up believing in a big 'I' but a small God.

The integrity of Christians is also very much tested in their own 'Canaan'. They are exposed to norms, values and practices that are contrary to God's rules for living. All these pressure them to be open to other alternatives, thereby making God as merely a preferred choice rather than an absolute. God then has many competitors as far as authority over their lives is concerned. If Christians are not careful, they fall into the temptation of living according to the rules of the 'Canaanite' world, not according to the rules of God. Just as it was in Joshua's time, so it is today - Christians are not to be succumbed but to 'engage the Canaanites so that the management objectives for the land can be radically transformed.' While the notion of success today is very much about 'winning and conquering land,' the Bible clearly instructs that 'to trust is to believe land is faithfully given' (Brueggemann 1977:70). Indeed, controlling and organising this gift well is only man's faithful response to the Lord's faithfulness.

But success is not to be understood only as doing well in material terms. Understanding it in a total sense would include the spiritual and moral dimensions as well. To be prosperous and successful in the biblical sense is the result of one seeking God and letting Him be the guide. It is both a responsibility and a blessing in that as God's people seek to act with godly wisdom, they achieve the goals that God has for them materially, spiritually and morally. Only then do they avoid making God a means to their self-fulfilment. They do not make God exist to serve them, but they make themselves exist to serve Him. Indeed, success is not just the attainment of material blessings, but also embraces the responsibility to live for God spiritually and morally in a world of abundance and opportunities. It is not straying away from God, but sticking with Him as one's leader and authority in life.

3.1.2 Luke 10:38-42

38 As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him.

39 She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said.

40 But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, 'Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!'

41 'Martha, Martha,' the Lord answered, 'you are worried and upset about many things,

42 But only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.'

In v 39, Mary 'sat at the Lord's feet listening to what He said.' Picture Jesus sitting down with His disciples around Him in the house of Martha and Mary. He had some things heavy on His heart and He was about to teach these to His disciples. Along came Mary and she also sat at the Lord's feet, listening to all that He was teaching. She was not asked to leave the group. The Lord accepted her participation. He did not tell her, 'Excuse me, woman, this is purely for men.'

Malina and Neyrey believe that this story really upsets the perception of how things ought to be then. The social practice at that time would expect 'clear patterns of space that are appropriate to men and to women, patterns which replicate the understanding of male honour and female shame.' In the story, to her shame, Mary had stepped into male space and acted like a man! Thus, Malina and Neyrey (1991:62) remark:

The expected place of Mary ... is with Martha in the women's part of that household, the kitchen; she is not expected in the dining area, and so her presence there requires a special explanation. Jesus' remark to Martha serves to vindicate Mary's exceptional presence in space not expected of her

Hence, if one understands the position of women in Jewish society at that time, one will realise that the Lord had done something very revolutionary indeed. Women kept a low profile in religious gatherings. In fact, no women would be allowed to sit and learn at the feet

⁷ In first-century Judaism, it is highly unusual for a woman to be accepted by a teacher as a disciple (Liefeld 1984:944).

honour the Lord. In contrast to Mary who listened to what Jesus wanted to say, Martha ended up telling Him what He must say (Nolland 1993:604).

An affluent culture today generally believes that good things do not come free, and free things do not come good. As such, people need to appreciate afresh the free grace of God. For Christians, their significance rests in God's grace, and they are already significant before Him because of who they are in Jesus Christ. The sad thing is that many are still searching for significance in their own way and strength. They look to performance, possession and position for their sense of significance. But the truth is that they are already significant before God because of the finished work of Christ on the Cross. Nothing else needs to be added to what God has already done for them in Christ. They are to find their significance in God's grace.

The danger of trying to produce self-significance is that Christians can end up like Martha. The more they try, the more they become discontented like her. Discontentment undermines the grace of God because it makes people unappreciative of what He has blessed them with. It makes them feel that God has somehow shortchanged them; that God has not given enough to them; that they have to try and top up what is lacking in their own strength. Indeed, the danger of discontentment is that people try to find self-significance in their performance, possession and position rather than in His grace. God's people can forget that He will still accept them in spite of their failures to secure results and recognition in a pragmatic world. As far as God is concerned, they truly experience success when they find their significance and sufficiency ultimately in His divine grace, not in their human greatness.

In vv 41-42, the Lord told Martha, 'You are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed.'⁸ Picture the disappointment on Martha's face when she heard those

⁸ Some manuscripts render v 42 this way: 'but few things are needed - or only one.' This verse is traditionally understood as Jesus suggesting then that a simple meal was good enough for Him (Nolland 1993:604).



words. She was trying to honour the Lord with so many things, but somehow, still failed to please Him. What a waste of effort!

Are Christians not also as vulnerable as Martha? In all the things they busy themselves with today, is not the obsession with doing things a real temptation? Are not the unceasing movements in life directing their devotion away from the Lord to the self as they seek to advance their own significance?

While Martha received a gentle rebuke, Mary was praised for having chosen 'what is better' (v 42).⁹ She had chosen to be still before the Lord than to be busy. She knew that too much doing at this time would undermine her devotion to the Lord - she would not be able to give Him the necessary attention or to follow His schedule for her. She matched her action (or inaction) according to the Lord's values and priorities for her, resulting in her minimising what was humanly important and maximising what was important to the Lord. On the other hand, Martha's devotion was not based on this perception of values and priorities. Consequently, she ended up maximising her toil in the kitchen and minimising her time with the Lord (Gooding 1987:216). She was the loser here not because she desired to work hard or to do her best. She lost out because, unlike Mary, she failed to understand the Lord's values and priorities for her.

One's busyness can relegate his/her walk with the Lord from a relationship to a ritual; from a vital devotion to a meaningless motion. Christians need to guard their devotion to the Lord lest they are lured into finding their significance in frenzied motions. But finding their significance in their devotion to the Lord's values and priorities for them can be costly. They may be made to look like an oddball. They may have to pause and examine prevailing trends,

⁹ There is no explanation of 'what is better' (literally, it is translated 'the good part'). Some have understood this to be the contemplative life or putting worship before service (Liefeld 1984:945). Howard Marshall (1978:454) interprets 'what is better' as 'the teaching of Jesus, or perhaps the blessings of the kingdom to which it testified,' and which is Mary's 'inalienable right and possession, guaranteed by Jesus.' However, this writer would take it to mean devotion to the Lord *according to God's values and priorities*. Hence, Mary's sitting at the Lord's feet was 'better' than Martha's cooking in the kitchen though both were devoted to pleasing Him on this occasion.

and then have the audacity to say: 'This pursuit is not of right value and priority in the Lord's sight. In His name, I must stop it.' Such a response can be costly because one may lose out in significant ways when compared with others. But if one is to treasure his/her relationship with the Lord, this may be the 'only one thing' he/she must do.

The story of Martha and Mary is an account of what it means to follow the Lord. It is not by way of rushing into noisy actions, but by way of giving quiet attention to Him, and exercising His values and priorities in daily living. This story warns that today's busyness can tempt Christians to seek self-significance rather than the Lord's pre-eminence in their relationship with Him.

Life's affairs will not sort themselves out automatically into a true order of priorities. God's people are to deliberately choose those necessities that are in accordance to the Lord's values and priorities for them. The Lord does not fault them for working hard and putting in their best effort but for having a wrong order of values and priorities. The right choices guard their time and energies from being tyrannised by pursuits that make them busy, but not in accordance to the Lord's values and priorities for them (Gooding 1987:216). And such choices may mean slowing down in life so that people can find true and lasting success because, like Mary, they have 'chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away'

3.1.3 Genesis 2:18-23

18 The LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.'

19 Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name.

20 So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam no suitable helper was found.

21 So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh.

22 Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

23 The man said, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called "woman," for she was taken out of man.'

This text speaks of the institution of marriage by God. He was the officiating minister at that very first wedding where He brought the first couple together. In all that God did and said, culminating in the coming together of Adam and Eve, one sees God's intent in the institution of marriage, which is for a man and his wife to make a commitment toward companionship and completeness in each other. How then does God want a couple to live out this commitment in their marriage?

In v 18, God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.'¹⁰ In a larger sense, this verse speaks of God's intent for a person to experience community with others and not isolation from them. But in the context of the first man Adam, this verse has a narrower meaning.¹¹ It means that God's specific intent is for Adam to experience community with a 'helper suitable for him.' The Lord saw something lacking in the life of Adam - he was alone and needed companionship with a 'suitable helper' in order to be a complete person.¹²

It is interesting to read of God bringing a 'zoological parade' before Adam in v 19. 'All the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air' were brought before Adam, and he was to name them one by one.¹³ Such an act of naming the animals is evident of the fact that Adam was given authority over them as God's representative. Even more importantly, as he was

¹⁰ God's 'not good' in this verse is in sharp contrast to His earlier affirmation of all of creation. Leupold (1942:129) has noted that the creation of Adam and Eve falls within the sixth day of creation, and thus, the 'very good' in Gn 1:31 should come after the 'not good' in Gn 2:18 chronologically. In other words, God declared His creation as 'very good' in 1:31 only after He had corrected the 'not good' in 2:18.

¹¹ Depending on the context, the Hebrew word for 'man' can be translated as 'the [first] man' (referring to Adam) or generically as 'mankind'.

¹² This does not imply that marriage is a must for everyone. In 1 Cor 7, Paul points out that remaining single is both a calling and gift from God. However, it is God's intent that every person has at least a significant other in life with whom a deep and meaningful relationship is shared.

¹³ It is unlikely that all species of creatures were brought before Adam and named by him (Leupold 1942:131).

naming the animals, Adam was made to realise his lack and he became aware of his own solitude (Ross 1988:126).

Adam became aware of his lack when he reviewed the animals and found no 'suitable helper' for himself (v 20).¹⁴ The word 'helper' is not a demeaning term as it essentially describes one who provides what is lacking in the other (Ross 1988:126). Hence, in looking for a 'suitable helper', Adam was seeking for someone who would be worthy enough to help him do what he could not do alone - to complement him and not to compete with him. This 'suitable helper' would fill up the lack in Adam's life and make it complete. And as Adam named the animals one by one, he came to realise to his dismay that no animal could be a 'suitable helper' for him. He realised that he needed a person and not a pet. He realised that to experience true companionship and completeness, he needed someone whom he could relate meaningfully, person to person. Adam found that he could not do this with any of the animals, and Eve came as a gift from God to fill up this lack in his life.

In the same way, married couples today need to treasure each other as God's good gift for each other. They should treasure each other dearly because God has brought them together in His own good time to make each other's life complete and sufficient. Just as no beast or bird could take the place of Eve in Adam's life, couples are to so treasure each other and not to go for poor substitutes. The real danger today is for couples to treasure possessions as more important than each other; to regard things as good substitutes for relationships. Though very few would actually rob a bank, many have been tempted to rob time from some significant relationships in their lives in order to possess some much desired things. Thus, people can become poorer relationally even though they may be richer materially. Couples do

¹⁴ John Sailhamer (1990:46) is of the opinion that the 'help' envisioned here is tied to the bearing of children. The implication here is that the review of the animals by Adam was an attempt to find one with which he could mate and produce offsprings. This interpretation is not only offending, but also incorrectly ignores the broader meaning of 'help' intended here.



well to view Adam's experience as God's corrective for today. In spite of the many options presented in the animals, Eve was Adam's best option for filling his lack in life because she came as God's gift for him. In the same way, one is to treasure his/her spouse as God's gift - not as someone you have to live with because there are no other options, but as someone you cannot live without because he/she is God's good gift.

In vv 21-22, one sees how God fashioned Eve from a rib taken from Adam's side. The Lord put a deep sleep over Adam and then performed a divine surgery.¹⁵ When the man awoke, God brought the woman to him.

Adam declared in v 23: 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called "woman," for she was taken out of man.'

Gerhard Von Rad (1972:84) describes the 'first wedding' this way:

Now God himself, like a father of the bride, leads the woman to the man. The man in supreme joy at once recognises the new creature as one belonging completely to him, and he expresses his understanding immediately in the proper name that he gives the new creature.¹⁶

Adam had finally found the 'suitable helper' he was looking for in the person of Eve. In fact, neither would be complete without the other. Without Adam's rib, there would be no completion in the making of Eve. Without Eve, there would be no completeness in the life of Adam. Such is the nature of their complementary partnership.¹⁷ Also, Adam's words in v 23

¹⁵ Claus Westermann (1987:21) is of the opinion that 'the creation of the woman from one of the man's ribs is not intended to be a factual description.' Rather, it is only a depiction to 'ground the intimate relationship between man and woman in the process of creation itself.'

¹⁶ In the naming of the animals in Gn 2:20, the emphasis is not on use of words but on inner appropriation by recognition, thereby intellectually objectifying each animal. However, when man names woman in Gn 2:23, it is the verbal expression of that inner appropriation (Von Rad 1972:83).

¹⁷ Ross (1988:126) points out that to call Eve a 'suitable helper' for Adam is to imply that she is his counterpart in that they correspond physically, socially and spiritually. She would be his fitting complement in view of her relative difference but essential equality with him. In practical terms today, this means that a man lives with his wife by his presence and participation at home; that a man knows his wife by being sensitive and communicative toward her; that a man honours his wife by his appreciation and esteem of her.

Westermann (1987:21) understands 'helper' in its broadest sense - not only in work and procreation, but also in all aspects of human existence. Eve suits Adam in that there is 'mutual self-understanding in conversation, in silence, in openness to one another.'

testify to the dignity of the woman - she is not of inferior substance, but of 'bones and flesh' like Adam. She is taken neither from Adam's head nor foot. Hence, she is neither superior nor inferior to Adam. But she comes from Adam's rib taken from his side so that she is 'exactly on the same level with him as far as being a creature of God is concerned' (Leupold 1942:135).¹⁸

God intends man and wife to live side by side as partners in life. They are to work out all differences and conflicts together as counterparts on the same side, not as competitors on different sides. As counterparts in life, man and wife are not to walk behind each other for there is nothing to hide from each other; they are not to walk ahead of each other for there is nothing to run away from each other. But they are to walk beside each other because they are to stand by each other 'as long as they both shall live.' Westermann (1987:21) declares that the relationship between man and woman as portrayed in Gn 2 is to be a 'lifelong association that comprises all facets of life; it includes maturity and old age, and lasts until death.'

It is appropriate to mention at this point that the theology of marriage has gone through many redefinitions over the years. For example, John Calvin's early theology of marriage was grounded in the Lutheran doctrine of the two kingdoms - the heavenly and the earthly. He had argued that marriage was only relevant to the earthly kingdom. Christians should be a part of it, not for salvation or sanctification, but for protection against lust. However, in later years, Calvin shifted his stand and grounded his theology of marriage in the doctrine of covenant. He used this doctrine not only to depict the relationship between God and man, but also that between husband and wife. Since God is the one who brings man and woman together in covenantal relationship, He expects faithfulness and sacrifices in keeping that relationship (Witte 1997:94-95).

¹⁸ Wenham (1987:70) argues that the fact that Adam named Eve 'indicates that she is expected to be subordinated to him' though they are equal in nature.

Calvin asserted that the only ground for divorce was adultery. Should the marriage be dissolved on the ground of adultery, he urged that both parties be given the liberty to remarry (Witte 1997:101).

Calvin also forbade the 'separation from bed and board' in the marital relationship. He said: 'A married man is only half a person, and he can no more separate himself from his wife than cut himself into two pieces.' In the case of a protracted separation, Calvin preferred to end the marriage on the ground of presumed adultery by one party (Witte 1997:103).

Calvin also claimed that marriage had three purposes - for mutual love, for mutual procreation, and for mutual protection from lust. Hence, he considered sexual dysfunction as one reason for nullifying a marriage (Witte 1997:105).

Unlike Calvin, Christian thinkers in the 1700s (Enlightenment Period) began to perceive marriage as contractual rather than covenantal. They (Witte 1997:196-97) argued:

The essence of marriage was the voluntary bargain struck between the two parties. The terms of their marital bargain were not preset by God or nature, church or state, tradition or community. These terms were set by the parties themselves, in accordance with general rules of contract formation and general norms of civil society.

It is evident here that these Enlightenment thinkers viewed God and the church as unnecessary in the establishment of a marital relationship between a man and a woman. This understanding was rooted in a new theology emerging during that period - that of deism, individualism and rationalism. In fact, this model has actually spurred the twentieth-century revolution of Western marriage law (Witte 1997:197-98).

Today, many couples are willing to spend much time, effort and resources to have a grand wedding, yet can be so unwilling to do the same to ensure a great marriage. Perhaps, some view the wedding as only a one-time event and they do not have to commit themselves to work at it for life. Others, on the other hand, are less motivated to work on their marriage

because they realise it is something for the long haul. They have to work hard on it yet the results are often not instant. In a highly pragmatic world when results are slow in coming, the temptation is to stop trying and to look for other options.

When God first instituted marriage in Gn 2:18-23, He did not bring man and woman together just for a one-time event in a wedding ceremony, but for a life-long commitment in marriage. And they are to honour this life-long commitment by treasuring their spouse as a gift from God and treating each other as partners in life together.

3.1.4 Ephesians 6:1-4

1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

2 'Honour your father and mother' - which is the first commandment with a promise -

3 'that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.'

4 Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

In this text, Paul addresses the family and he begins with the children.¹⁹ He says in v 1: 'Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.' Hence, Paul declares at the very outset that a properly functioning family is the training ground for the proper respect of authority. Children are to learn at home that certain lines must be drawn, certain expectations must be met, and certain people must be respected and obeyed.

The word 'obey' (*hupakouo*) in Greek is actually a composite of two words - 'under' (*hupo*) and 'hear' (*akouo*). Thus, 'to obey' literally means 'to under hear'. This implies that one cannot really obey unless he submits himself to what he is hearing. Obedience carries with it the idea of hearing with the intent to carry out what has been said.

¹⁹ More specifically, Paul is here speaking to children who are still dependent on their parents for guidance and provision in life. O'Brien (1999:440-41) suggests that 'children' here primarily stresses relationship rather than age. The text probably has in view young children who are learning and growing up. However, adult children could even be included here since, in those days, paternal authority in the family would only cease at the time of the father's death.



Paul also stresses that it is 'right' for children to obey their parents. This does not mean that such obedience is merely fitting or suitable. Rather, it is an actual duty to be carried out, implying that children need to recognise that some things have to be accepted even if they do not fully understand them at the time (Wood 1978:81). Such obedience should not only flow from the feeling of love, gratitude and esteem for one's parents. More importantly, it should flow from one's reverence for the Lord. It is 'right' in that when a child so obeys his parents, he so pleases the Lord. Such obedience to parents is 'right' because it keeps the child in right relationship with the Father in heaven.²⁰

However, Paul does make an important qualification here - that such an obedience is to be 'in the Lord'. It is not to be some kind of blind or absolute obedience whereby one obeys against Scripture and the Christian conscience. To obey 'in the Lord' is to obey in those things that are consistent with Christ and Scripture. Leon Morris (1994:190) adds that the Christian child of non-Christian parents should obey them as long as the Christian faith is not opposed or harmed. Otherwise, the child is to obey Christ rather than parents so that their obedience will still be 'in the Lord'. However, even this refusal to obey one's parents should be done in a spirit of love, not of defiance or rebellion.²¹

One common problem faced by many young Christians in Singapore is the objection by their non-Christian parents to their baptism. The reason is that these parents view baptism as a kind of initiation rite that totally cuts them off from their children.²² But some of these young Christians have insisted on getting baptised, resulting in much conflict with their parents.

²⁰ O'Brien (1999:442) suggests that such an obedience is 'right' because it is in conformity to the Old Testament commandment which follows in vv 2-3. In other words, such an obedience is not merely good, but more importantly, godly in essence.

²¹ This is good advice for young Christians in Singapore as many of them have non-Christian parents. These young believers are commonly called 'first-generation Christians'.

²² Perhaps, these parents see baptism as something like the Buddhist practice of shaving off one's hair when one enters monkhood. The shaving of hair is an initiation rite which marks the separation of one's world from that of one's family.

Applying Paul's teaching on obedience 'in the Lord', young Christians in Singapore will do well to note that while desiring to be baptised is good, it is sometimes best to delay it because of certain family situations. After all, Scripture does not command a precise time for one to be baptised. However, if the parents demand that Jesus Christ be denied and renounced, the child must not give in and comply.

In vv 2-3, Paul cites the fifth of the Ten Commandments. To honour in v 2 is more than just to obey. It is to respect and esteem; 'the form love assumes towards those who are placed above us by God' (Wood 1978:81).²³ For children, they do well to remember that though they may outgrow the obligation to obey their parents when they become adults, they will never outgrow the call to honour them.²⁴ Even as grown-up people, children are called not to forget and neglect their parents.

There is some uncertainty as to what Paul means by describing this call as 'the first commandment with a promise.'²⁵ It is best to understand Paul as asserting this call to be 'the first commandment' not in terms of being the first to be mentioned, but in terms of being one of foremost significance (Wood 1978:81).²⁶ Indeed, the foremost significance of this commandment can be better appreciated from an opposite perspective by considering the effects of dishonouring one's parents. These are often related to an undisciplined and rebellious lifestyle of waste and vice.²⁷

²³ A Skevington Wood comments on this verse and is here quoting Lenski.

²⁴ Like the king of a nation, the father could not be dishonoured by his family members in the first-century Mediterranean world. He was above criticism in that the family member who disobeyed him would only stain himself/herself (Malina 1981:42).

²⁵ The problem here is that this fifth commandment does not appear to be the first of the ten with a promise attached. The second commandment in Ex 20:4-6 seems to carry a promise too, but Morris (1994:191) says that it is a statement of what God will do rather than a promise.

²⁶ The rabbis had regarded this commandment as the most weighty of all. In the original Greek, the absence of the article before *protos* ('first') supports the idea that this commandment is 'one of first importance' rather than 'the first in sequence.' Morris (1994:191) points out another possible understanding of what is meant here - 'For children this is the first commandment to be learned ...'

²⁷ In OT times, a stubborn and rebellious son would face the wrath of the law and be stoned to death (Dt 21:18-21).



The foremost significance in this commandment can also be seen in the promise in v 3 - 'that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.'²⁸ Francis Foulkes has suggested that it would be wise not to interpret this promise in an individualistic and literal sense. He comments:

It is not necessary to take the promise in an individualistic sense, or as a literal promise of longevity. Although the singular pronoun was used in the original, it is doubtful if the spiritually minded, even in the Old Testament days, regarded its greatest significance as a personal promise for those who showed filial piety. Then, as in any generation, it could be seen that the strength of family life, and the training of children to habits of order and obedience, were the means and the marks of the stability of a community or nation. When the bonds of family life break up, when respect for parents fails, the community becomes decadent and will not live long (Foulkes 1980:65).

Hence, the thrust in vv 1-3 is directed at bringing across this one important point: disobedience to parents is a mark of social disintegration, and Christian families must act to prevent the collapse of order in their society (Wood 1978:80).

Having admonished the children, Paul turns to the parents in v 4 with these words: 'Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.'²⁹ To be parents worthy of obedience and honour, Paul first admonishes them not to 'exasperate' (*parorgizo*) their children.³⁰ To exasperate here is to provoke to anger or to induce resentment. Parents are not to provoke their children into a perpetual state of anger or resentment. As an act of concern for their children's well-being, parents are to carefully consider how their words and actions will affect the young.

²⁸ In citing this OT reference, Paul replaces 'that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you' in Ex 20:12 to 'that you may enjoy long life on the earth' in Eph 6:3. The land in the original OT reference is that which God has promised Israel. Since Paul is speaking to Christians and not to Jews in Eph 6:3, he changes the wording so that a 'specific assurance to the Jews becomes a generalisation for Christians' (Wood 1978:81).

²⁹ Paul calls on fathers here as they are the heads of their families. But it is likely that he directs what he has to say to mothers as well.

³⁰ This apostolic injunction was revolutionary in the first century because a father then had absolute authority over his family members (Morris 1994:192). The stress here is not on exercising paternal authority, but on respecting the dignity of children by not using excessive harshness in fatherly control. Children are not merely things over whom the father has legal rights, but they are really human beings with their own rights (Lincoln 1990:409).

In today's society, there are a number of ways in which parents can exasperate their children:

- *Fault-finding*: This causes the child to lose heart because the parent never seems to be happy with what he/she has done. Careless and biting words from the parent can easily crush the child's spirit.

- *Unreasonable demands*: These can frustrate the child because they are either beyond his/her ability or too many to handle at any one time. An unreasonable demand can also take the form of forcing the child into the mould of another person.

- *Double standard*: When the parent disapproves of the child for a certain behaviour but affirms another child for the same behaviour, confusing signals are sent.

- *Unkept promises*: The child will feel slighted and not taken seriously when the parent fails to keep a promise.

- *Parental absence*: When the parent fails to give time to the child or absents himself/herself at important events, the child will feel badly neglected. Parental presence is a powerful symbol of care and connectedness to the child.

To be parents worthy of obedience and honour, Paul goes on to mention two important things - 'training' (*paideia*) and 'instruction' (*nouthesia*). What Paul has in mind is imparting discipline in righteous living ('training') and correcting by word of mouth ('instruction') [Wood 1978:82]. These two aspects of domestic education imply the use of reproof, advice, encouragement and life example as means of child development. Today's Christian parents will do well to remember that their children's spiritual upbringing does not begin and end in church. Rather, what children learn in church about faith and righteous living must be reinforced at home by the words and actions of their parents. It is in the home that Christian education for children begins and continues.

Parents must seriously commit themselves to this dual task of training and instruction. The problem with today's affluent society is that many parents adopt a pampering attitude toward their children. Charles Swindoll (1987:106-07), President of the Dallas Theological



Seminary, warns that such an approach can backfire, and lists out twelve ways which can make a child delinquent instead of obedient:

- When your kid is still an infant, give him everything he wants. This way he'll think the world owes him a living when he grows up.
- When he picks up swearing and off-colour jokes, laugh at him, encourage him. As he grows up, he'll pick up 'cuter' phrases that will floor you.
- Never give him any spiritual training. Wait until he is twenty-one and let him decide for himself.
- Avoid using the word 'wrong'. It will give your child a guilt complex. You can condition him to believe later, when he is arrested for stealing a car, that society is against him and he is being persecuted.
- Pick up after him - his books, shoes, and clothes. Do everything for him so he will be experienced in throwing all responsibility onto others.
- Let him read all printed matter he can get his hands on ... let him feast his mind on garbage.
- Quarrel frequently in his presence. Then he won't be too surprised when his home is broken up later.
- Satisfy his every craving for food, drink, and comfort. Every sensual desire must be gratified; denial may lead to harmful frustrations.
- Give your child all the spending money he wants. Don't make him earn his own. Why should he have things as tough as you did?
- Take his side against neighbours, teachers, and policemen. They're all against him.
- When he gets into real trouble, make up excuses for yourself by saying, 'I never could do anything with him; he's just a bad seed.'
- Prepare for a life of grief.

Children are the Lord's gift. He wants them to observe His commandment to obey and to honour their parents. And therein lies the Lord's commandment to parents as well - to be worthy of their children's obedience and honour, and to glorify Him by bringing them up in the

knowledge, the way and the fear of the Lord. It will indeed grieve the Lord if Christian parents, especially fathers as representative heads of their families, fail to do this.

3.1.5 Genesis 12:1-5

1 The LORD had said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.

2 I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great and you will be a blessing.

3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.'

4 So Abram left, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran.

5 He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.

Abram had already settled down in Haran with his father's household when God called him to leave the place in v 1. He was already very successful with many servants, and much possessions and land. But just when he thought he could comfortably spend the rest of his life in Haran, God had to come and disturb everything by saying: 'Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.'³¹ As the eldest son, he was in a position to enjoy much of the inheritance and influence in the family.³² But God had to spoil it all with His ill-timed instruction. It is important to note that though God's imperative had specified that Abram was to leave his land, his relatives and his father's household, nothing was said about the land to which he would go. It does seem that 'divine imperatives seldom give the details of what is to happen, although they often specify what is

³¹ Brueggemann (1977:15) views Genesis as portraying 'land theology' - in Gn 1-11, people presumed upon the land and were eventually expelled from it; in Gn 12-50, they looked forward to the land yet to be possessed and were empowered by this anticipation.

³² As the eldest son, Abram was mentioned first when the sons of Terah were named in Gn 11:27. The Masoretic reading of Gn 11:32 assumes Terah to be alive throughout most of Abram's life. On the other hand, the Samaritan reading makes Terah 145 years old when he died, thereby supporting the interpretation that Abram left Haran after his father's death (Wenham 1987:274).

not to be done' (Ross 1988:262). Hence, in Abram's case, he was called to journey as a man of faith and not as a man of fortune.³³

Indeed, to be a true man before God is to have the faith to release the things that symbolise one's control in life, to act obediently even without full knowledge, to be submissive to God's way, and to be God-dependent. But this goes against the very grain of what many would view as being a true man - to be in control, to know as much as possible before acting, to be assertive of having one's own way, and to be self-dependent. Such a view reflects the need for certainty, but as Ray Pritchard (1995:37) has wisely cautioned, your 100 % certainty may not equal 100 % of God's will for you, that is, when you think you are very certain on your part, you may already be very mistaken about God's best for you.

Von Rad (1972:161) mentions that by obeying the Lord's call, Abram replaced his faith in secured locality with faith in divine sovereignty. He says:

Abraham obeys blindly and without objection ... remains dumb ... becomes a kind of model ... to leave home and to break ancestral bonds was to expect of ancient men almost the impossible. It is the reader himself who has to say that this departure also represented a 'change of faith.'

Wenham (1987:274) points out that what makes Abram's decision to uproot himself that much more exemplifying was that he was not confronted with a crisis situation. His leaving was not a desperate running away from trouble, but a deliberate forsaking of his comfort zone.

If Abram is to be one's example of a true man before God, then it means that one is to act in obedience to God's way even if one does not first know it all. You may plan and calculate as best as you humanly can, but when you are still faced with some unknowns, you

³³ When Abram gave up his place in his father's household, he was placing his security, survival, identity and future in the hands of God. It is highly probable that Abram's family shared in the polytheism of the ancient world at that time. Hence, when God called, Abram might have viewed Him as a personal deity who was willing to be his 'divine sponsor'. In other words, when Abram left his country, he had no other deities to depend on but God Himself (Walton & Matthews 1997:35-37).

take that step of obedience in God anyway. You do what is humanly possible and you leave the impossible to God.

Abram's obedience also exemplifies that to obey God may mean letting go of some earthly riches in life. But the greatest accomplishment of a true man is not winning all the earthly riches in this life, but not losing faith and hope in God. When God called Abram out of his own country, He was calling him to a new journey, to 'burn some bridges', to lose some earthly riches, and to obey in spite of apparent losses. Yes, a man is true to God when he regards his greater accomplishment as being a man of faith rather than a man of fortune, learning to release his symbols of control in life and follow God even without knowing everything.

Archaeologists affirm that Haran was a first-class, flourishing city when Abram was there (Archer 1974:220).³⁴ In other words, Abram was not called by God to leave a backward place, but one that was highly affluent and civilised. And v 4 says that 'Abram left as the LORD had told him.' So, was Abram wise to leave such a place of great promise to somewhere he hardly knew anything about?

The answer is found in vv 2-3 where Abram actually left Haran after receiving a great promise of blessing from God.³⁵ Of course, this is very much a spiritual blessing that points ultimately to Jesus Christ coming from the nation of Israel to bless all mankind as the Messiah who gives eternal life to those who believe in Him. And Abram would open this blessing to the nations of the world. Consequently, 'no one would be blessed apart from the blessings given through Abram and his seed.'³⁶

³⁴ However, Brueggemann (1977:18) believes that Abram was asked to leave presumably barrenness for a more promising future. He draws this conclusion from Gn 11:30 which says that Sarai was barren.

³⁵ The term 'all peoples' in v 3 does not imply that every individual will be blessed, but rather, 'every major group in the world will be blessed' if they give due respect to Abram and his descendants (Wenham 1987:278).

³⁶ Because of the *niphal* (reflexive) form of the verb *wenibreku*, v 3 can be interpreted to read 'all the families of the earth will bless themselves' (depending on how they treat Abram and his seed). But since the form of the verb can also be taken as a passive, most translations have it as 'will be blessed in you'. In fact, the Septuagint

What does it mean when Abram left the flourishing city of Haran with this great promise of spiritual blessing? It means that when God called Abram out, He did not want him to live merely for earthly riches but to live daily with a sense of divine mission. Abram was to constantly remind himself that God had a mission for him that would not only affect him and his descendants, but also the whole world. Thus, Abram was not looking for another city designed and built by men when he left Haran, but one designed and built by God. Hebrews 11:10 affirms that Abram 'was looking forward to the city with foundations whose architect and builder is God.' He set out in this new journey with a heavenly perspective.³⁷

There are many opportunities for a man to make it good in this life. Abram's example reminds him that while capitalising on these opportunities, he should not merely be working for his own earthly kingdom, but for the Kingdom designed and built by God. For man whose natural tendency is to find his self-esteem in earthly accomplishments, this is a good reminder. On one hand, many Christian men are high achievers in the sense that they have climbed and reached the top of the ladder of success. On the other hand, these same people are poor performers before God in that when they have climbed and reached the top of the ladder of success, they fail to use their influence to make a difference for the Lord. A possible reason for them not taking their faith too seriously is that their down-to-earth instinct often causes them

translated this verb as a passive, and this is also the version in Acts 3:25 and Galatians 3:8. This interpretation of the verb as a passive seems to 'harmonise better with the idea that salvation would go to the world through Abram's seed, Jesus Christ.' And the idea of curse in v 3 has to do with God removing this blessing from those who treat Abram and his faith lightly with disrespect (Ross 1988:264).

It has been commonly argued that a passive sense of the verb conveys a broader theological significance in that it points to God's plan of blessing all nations through the seed of Abraham. On the other hand, the reflexive sense would make Abraham as merely a reminder of God's blessing (Sailhamer 1990:114). Claus Westermann (1987:99) takes the reflexive sense of the verb, but suggests that there is little difference between the passive and reflexive sense in the final analysis. He said: 'If the "families of the earth" wish to be blessed by naming the name of Abraham, this translation implies, they will indeed receive a blessing.'

³⁷ Gn 12:5 says that Abram and his family left Haran with the 'people they had acquired.' Allen Ross (1988:265) suggests that it is unlikely that the word 'people' (*nepes* in Hebrew) refers to slaves. It certainly does not refer to children since Sarai was barren then. Hence, Ross hints that the word probably refers to proselytes. This implies that Abram was already sharing his faith when he was in Haran, proselytising others to the Lord.



to view religion as somewhat redundant in life. Consequently, they become merely career-minded for themselves, not mission-minded for the Lord (Pritchard 1995:73). They live only for their time, not for God's eternity. But Abram's example teaches that a man is true to God when he regards his greater accomplishment as being a man of faith rather than a man of fortune, always mindful of his mission to advance God's Kingdom in the midst of many opportunities to make it good in this life.

3.1.6 Mark 10:35-45

35 Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. 'Teacher,' they said, 'we want you to do for us whatever we ask.'

36 'What do you want me to do for you?' he asked.

37 They replied, 'Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.'

38 'You don't know what you are asking,' Jesus said. 'Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptised with the baptism I am baptised with?'

39 'We can,' they answered. Jesus said to them, 'You will drink the cup I drink and be baptised with the baptism I am baptised with,

40 but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.'

41 When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John.

42 Jesus called them together and said, 'You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them.

43 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,

44 and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.

45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'

In Mk 10:32-34, we find Jesus going up to Jerusalem with His disciples. Jesus was resolved to go though He already sensed the danger ahead. The disciples realised that something important was going to happen in Jerusalem which would culminate in all that Jesus had taught about the Kingdom of God. But it is likely that they did not quite understand what Jesus was saying to them. They could have misunderstood that Jesus was soon to assume earthly power and glory in Jerusalem. Also, it is likely that they had the thrones that Jesus



talked about in Mt 19:28 on their minds when they went up to Jerusalem with Him.³⁸ They were anticipating these thrones in an earthly sense. What they were asking and fighting for in Mk 10:35-45 was actually based on what Jesus had promised them earlier. Hence, the Lord did not condemn them for their ambitious desire to sit on these thrones and to be great. What Jesus did in this text was to redefine the meaning of 'greatness' from God's perspective.

In v 37, James and John made known their ambition to the Lord with these words, 'Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.' These were prime positions of honour, rank and power.

Responding to the asking of James and John, Malina and Rohrbaugh (1992:245) have this to say:

The behaviour is in line with the nature of a faction: members are related to the central personage, Jesus, but not to each other. Here brothers, related to each other because of family ties, approach the central personage on their own behalf, disregarding the others ... This is how factions work in the Mediterranean.

In response, Jesus asked them in v 38, 'Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptised with the baptism I am baptised with?' When Jesus talked of drinking the cup and His baptism, He was referring to His suffering and death on the Cross - an experience that He was willing to accept and endure on behalf of sinful men.³⁹ By talking of the cup and His baptism, Jesus was expressing His great ambition to bring the world under His Lordship even if it was by way of suffering and death.

But there was an easy way for Jesus to achieve this same great ambition without going through suffering and death. And He knew of it even in the beginning days of His public

³⁸ In this verse, Jesus said to them, 'I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on His glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.'

³⁹ In the OT, the cup is a common metaphor for God's wrath and judgment on human sin and rebellion ('e.g.' Ps 75:8; Is 51:17-23; Jr 25:15-28; Ezk 23:31-34; Hab 2:16; Zch 12:2). Also, Jesus called His passion a baptism because He understood His own baptism by John the Baptist as an expression of His solidarity with sinful men and His willingness to be judged on their behalf (Lane 1974:380-81).

ministry. But this easy way was not God's way. In fact, it was Satan's way. In Mt 4:8-9, we read of how Satan tempted Jesus by showing Him 'all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour,' and then said to Him, 'All this I will give you if you will bow down and worship me.'

But Jesus refused and rebuked the devil, 'Away from me, Satan! For it is written: "Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only"' (Mt 4:10). He was bent on achieving His great ambition by following the hard way of God rather than the easy way of the devil. He knew that it would amount to nothing if He achieved His great ambition but, at the same time, ended up not worshipping and serving God.

Hence, when Jesus asked James and John if they could share in His cup and baptism, He was not merely asking them a question. He was actually challenging them to achieve whatever ambition they might have in God's way. It is likely that both James and John were ignorant of the deep implication in Jesus' question when they answered, 'We can' (v 39).⁴⁰ Jesus seemed to take them at their words and said to them, 'To sit on my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared' (v 40). You have to read the parallel account in Mt 20:20-28 in order to fully understand the implication in Jesus' words here.

In Matthew's account, James and John actually made their ambition known to Jesus accompanied by their mother. John MacArthur (1988:236) points out that a little comparing of the gospel accounts reveals that the mother of James and John was Salome whose husband was Zebedee, and she was also a sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus.⁴¹ This connection would make James and John cousins of Jesus, and their mother an aunt of the Lord. This then helps

According to Malina and Rohrbaugh (1992:246), the 'cup' refers to 'the limited and fixed amount of whatever God has to offer a person in life.'

⁴⁰ The answer of James and John received no criticism from Jesus who used it as an opportunity to show His foreknowledge of their suffering and fate for the gospel's sake (Gundry 1993:578).

⁴¹ See Mt 27:56, Mk 15:40 and Jn 19:25.

one to understand why James and John would get their mother to speak on their behalf in Matthew's account - they wanted to use this family connection to get Jesus to give what they desired. This then clarifies why Jesus said to them, 'To sit at my right or my left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.' In essence, what Jesus was saying is this: 'Do not resort to human favouritism in your ambition to attain position of greatness and prestige. But trust that God in His impartiality would give the deserving ones their rightful places just as He has prepared for them.'⁴² If James and John were truly able to share in His cup and baptism, Jesus would expect them to work toward their ambition just like Him - not compromising their integrity by taking an easier, faster but God-dishonouring way.

Christian men today would also do well to note this expectation of Jesus. Their masculine instinct often sets them out to seek for positions of greatness and prestige. While such ambitions are not necessarily wrong, they must not be pursued at the expense of Christian integrity. The so-called smarter and shorter way to the top may lead one to a life of crime and dishonesty. Hence, just as Jesus had admonished James and John, a man is to do his honest best to achieve his ambition, and he is also to accept what God will eventually work out as His best for him even if it means not being 'number one' or 'number two'.

Ambitions often cause tension and animosity. This happens even among the twelve disciples. When the other ten heard what James and John had asked of Jesus, 'they became indignant' (v 41).⁴³ They were angry with James and John for beating them in asking Jesus what they too wanted for themselves. Also, by asking Jesus to grant them the prime positions

⁴² Human favouritism often denies the most deserving of their rightful places. We use different labels for it today - corruption, collusion and nepotism - but they all mean the same thing basically. Such a practice is an attempt to undermine God's way.

⁴³ This was an old problem. Earlier in Mk 9:33-34, they had argued about who was the greatest among themselves.

of honour, James and John were implying that they were better; and this added more fuel to the anger of the other ten.

It is against this backdrop of tension and animosity that Jesus called the twelve disciples together in v 42. He went on to teach them that as they aspired to be great, they were not to lord or rule over one another like the Gentiles, but to work at being a servant and slave to one another (vv 43-44). A servant's role is to give of himself in serving others; a slave's role is to work for the benefit of his master. Hence, Jesus taught His disciples that true greatness would be found in the one who would serve and give of himself for the benefit of others. In pursuing their ambition to positions of greatness, Jesus wanted them to imitate Him as exemplified by His own life of servanthood and sacrifice in His messianic ambition (v 45).

While the world views greatness as the ability to rule and control others, Jesus redefines it as the ability to serve and give to others. Jesus as the Perfect Man has demonstrated with His own life what a truly great man is - one who always bears an attitude of servanthood. Indeed, the greatest achiever in the Lord's sight is the man who is never too important or successful to serve and give of himself for the benefit of others. Instead of controlling others in order to protect his best interest, a truly great man empowers others so that they can attain their best in life. As far as Jesus is concerned, a man diminishes himself when he focuses on self-elevation and forgets about servanthood in his life.

3.2 Sayings of Classical Church Figures⁴⁴

3.2.1 St Augustine (354-430).⁴⁵ Though he did not condemn the opportunities that material riches could offer, Augustine did caution against placing the desire for material riches above that for God's will in one's life. He (Augustine 1972:18) said:

⁴⁴ The church figures featured in this section are selected based on their significant contributions at some specific 'turning points' in church history.

⁴⁵ Aurelius Augustine is esteemed today as the Father of the Western Church. His thought dominated the Middle Ages. Both the Reformation and the Catholic Counter-Reformation were really discoveries of his

Thus a good servant would regard the will of God as his great resource, and he would be enriched in his mind by close attendance on God's will - not would he grieve if deprived in life of those possessions which he would soon have to leave behind at his death.⁴⁶

Augustine was much against self-indulgence in material success. He (Augustine 1972:41-42) exhorted that material blessings should be used decently '... with moderation, with restraint, with self-control, with reverence' Otherwise, material success would result in a major failure in that it would bring about '... a moral corruption far worse than all the fury of an enemy.'

Augustine did not deny that man had a valid need for material things in order to live out his earthly existence. But these should be seen as blessings from God, and thus, man should draw himself closer to God even as he sought them (Augustine 1972:392).

Augustine was not advocating that we worship God for the sake of worldly riches. That would amount to using God for the purpose of worldly enjoyment. Rather, he stressed that one should use worldly riches to enrich and enjoy his/her worship of God. Thus, Augustine (1972:636) had this to say concerning man's love for the physically and materially attractive:

Now physical beauty ... if it is loved in preference to God, the eternal, internal and sempiternal Good, that love is as wrong as the miser's love of gold, with the abandonment of justice, though the fault is in the man, not in the gold. This is true of everything created; though it is good, it can be loved in the right way or in the wrong way - in the right way, that is, when the proper order is kept, in the wrong way when that order is upset.

While one feature of today's success syndrome is busyness in one's work, Augustine had called for a 'life of leisure.' But this is not a call to idleness, but to put one's preoccupation in life in proper perspective. As Augustine (1972:880) had said, 'The attraction

thinking. Augustine was born at Thagaste in modern Algeria. He became the Bishop of Hippo in 396 until his death (Lane 1984:41-42).

⁴⁶ He was responding to what Paul said in 1 Tm 6:9 about falling into temptation as a result of wanting to become rich.

of a life of leisure ought not to be the prospect of lazy inactivity, but the chance for the investigation and discovery of truth' Augustine saw that even more important than man's material well-being was his immaterial well-being, that is, the wellness of his soul.⁴⁷

Indeed, one recurrent emphasis in the wisdom of Augustine on the notion of being successful is this - one turns material success into a major failure in life if he/she merely enjoys it without using it to enrich our worship of God and to advance His will.

On the topic of marriage and family, Augustine (1972:584) interpreted 'man and woman' as a reference to sexual partners, and not as '... a distinction between the ruling element and the ruled' He stressed that '... it would be a manifest absurdity to deny the fact that male and female were created for the purpose of begetting children' In fact, Augustine had a high view of children for he undoubtedly believed that they were God's blessed gift.

Augustine viewed sex in marriage as for the purpose of procreation and not for pleasure. He argued that to procreate was to fulfil God's command to 'be fruitful and fill the earth,' but to derive pleasure is to gratify the lust in oneself (Geisler 1982:212-13).⁴⁸

In writing his *Confessions*, Augustine spoke with gratitude about his godly mother who out of grief for his errant ways, had prayed and exhorted him to walk the right path.⁴⁹ It may not be too far-fetched to conclude that Augustine would endorse the importance of parental influence because of his experience with his own mother and his high view of children.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Augustine viewed man as made up of soul (immaterial) and body (material). Thus, he considered the human soul as the same as the human spirit.

Augustine viewed both men and women as created with rational souls. However, men possess the ability to dominate while women only represent the nature to be dominated. Hence, he regarded women as lacking 'the image of God and are related to God's image only by being included under male headship' (Ruether 1996:97).

But Augustine did not intend to speak of female inferiority. Rather, he regarded the female role as only different from that of the male, and her submission to man was only an expression of her obedience to God (Ruether 1996:101).

⁴⁸ In *What Augustine Says*, Norman Geisler quotes some of what Augustine had written in his works.

⁴⁹ Read Books III, VI, VIII and IX of *The Confessions Of St Augustine* for an idea of how Augustine's mother (Monnica) had impacted his life.

⁵⁰ This writer has found very little reference to marriage-family life in his readings of Augustine.

On issues related to manhood, Augustine talked about them by addressing the three loves of a 'right' man before God. First, this man is one who loves God by living according to His divine standard. In fact, '... man was created right, on condition that he should live by the standard of his creator, not by his own, carrying out not his own will, but his creator's. Falsehood consists in not living in the way for which he was created' (Augustine 1972:552).⁵¹ Hence, a man's accomplishment is mere vanity if it is not attained in the way of God.

Besides his love for God, the 'right' man is one who loves others. Honour and power in this life are not necessarily bad for him because he can use them to promote the well-being of others. Hence, Augustine (1972:880) shared this concerning the ambition to be in places of honour and power:

... what is to be treasured is not a place of honour and power in this life, since 'everything under the sun is vanity' but the task itself that is achieved by means of that place of honour and that power - if that achievement is right and helpful, that is, if it serves to promote the well-being of the common people ... according to God's intention.

The third love of the 'right' man is that of self-love. Commenting on Paul's call in Gl 6:4 to take pride in oneself, Augustine (1972:199) said that a 'true man' was one who took pride in all that he did because he '... go for honour, glory and power "the right way", without trickery and deceit.' Augustine (Geisler 1982:202) approved of this kind of self-love:

Man, therefore, ought to be taught the due measure of loving, that is, in what measure he may love himself so as to be of service to himself ... He is to be taught, too, in what measure to love his body, so as to care for it wisely and within due limits

But Augustine also cautioned that self-love could be in the form of love for human praise. He (Augustine 1972:203) warned that one should not try to be 'good' in order to win the praises of man for he should only desire to please God and gain His approval.

⁵¹ The man who does not live by God's standard is termed an 'animal man' by Augustine (1972:553) because of his carnality.

And a valid kind of self-love also does not permit one to be mastered by the things in life. How then should a man love himself with the things he pursues or possesses in life? The Augustinian answer is:

... with perfect readiness serve the Lord whom he loves, the highest peace; and as regards all other things, must either rule them as subject to himself, or treat them with a view to their subjection (Geisler 1982:204).

In sum, a man who reaches his 'right and good' stature before God is not one who simply shuns possession, position and power in life; so heavenly minded that he sees no earthly use in these. Rather, Augustine described such a man as one of temperance and fortitude even with his earthly ambitions and accomplishments:

First, then, let us consider temperance, which promises us a kind of integrity and incorruption in the love by which we are united to God. The office of temperance is in restraining and quieting the passions which make us pant for those things which turn us away from the laws of God and from the enjoyment of His goodness, that is, in a word, from the happy life.

The love, then, of which we speak, which ought with all sanctity to burn in desire for God, is called temperance, in not seeking for earthly things, and fortitude, in bearing the loss of them (Geisler 1982:205).

3.2.2 Martin Luther (1483-1546). At a time of bustling economic activities and when success was measured very much in material terms, Luther (1962:250) sounded his warning against greed:

When the price of goods is not fixed either by law or custom, and you must fix it yourself, here one can truly give you no instructions but only lay it on your conscience to be careful not to overcharge your neighbour, and to seek a modest living, not the goods of greed.

However, in responding to what is meant by 'the worker deserves his wages' in Lk 10:7, Luther advised that a worker should not unfairly shortchange himself. Honest efforts deserve fair returns. He (Luther 1962:251) said:

In determining how much profit you ought to take on your business and your labour, there is no better way to reckon it than by computing the amount of time and labour you have put into it, and comparing that with the effort of a day labourer who works at some other occupation and seeing how much he



earns in a day. On that basis figure how many days you have spent in getting your wares and bringing them to your place of business, and how much labour and risk was involved; for a great amount of labour and time ought to have a correspondingly greater return.

Luther also cautioned against making oneself vulnerable to corrupt practices in work and business. He (Luther 1962:272) called for an uncompromising stand for honesty and integrity in view of excessive profiteering in his time:

This is why no one need ask how he may with a good conscience be a member of a trading company. My only advice is this: Get out; they will not change. If the trading companies are to stay, right and honesty must perish; if right and honesty are to stay, the trading companies must perish.⁵²

On the matter of marriage and family, it must first be noted that Luther held a high view of marriage. In fact, he considered marriage as the natural and needful thing for most people. He viewed singlehood as a special calling and work of God, and said thus: 'Therefore, priests, monks, and nuns are duty-bound to forsake their vows whenever they find that God's ordinance to produce seed and to multiply is powerful and strong within them' (Luther 1962:18-21).

Luther exhorted a man to take delight in his wife and learn to accept her as God's gift in spite of her imperfections. He (Luther 1962:38-39) said:

Many *have* wives, but few *find* wives. Why? They are blind; they fail to see that their life and conduct with their wives is the work of God and pleasing in his sight. Could they find that, then no wife would be so hateful, so ill-tempered, so ill-mannered, so poor, so sick that they would fail to find in her their heart's delight and would always be reproaching God for his work, creation, and will. And because they see that it is the good pleasure of their beloved Lord, they would be able to have peace in grief, joy in the midst of bitterness, happiness in the midst of tribulations, as the martyrs have in suffering.⁵³

While most men today, and even in Luther's time, would consider homemaking too demeaning for them, Luther (1962:40-41) offers this corrective:

⁵² The trading companies in Luther's time obviously engaged in corrupt and dishonest practices, resulting in excessive profiteering by them.

⁵³ In the same way, this is also how wives should view their husbands.



Now you tell me, when a father goes ahead and washes diapers or performs some other mean task for his child, and someone ridicules him as an effeminate fool - though that father is acting in Christian faith - my dear fellow you tell me, which of the two is most keenly ridiculing the other? God, with all his angels and creatures, is smiling - not because that father is washing diapers, but because he is doing so in Christian faith. Those who sneer at him and see only the task but not the faith are ridiculing God with all his creatures, as the biggest fool on earth. Indeed, they are only ridiculing themselves; with all their cleverness they are nothing but devil's fools.⁵⁴

Luther regarded children as God's 'greatest good' in marriage. As an act of responsible stewardship toward this blessing, he (Luther 1962:46) urged parents to guide their children unto godliness and to exercise their rightful control over them:

But the greatest good in married life, that which makes all suffering and labour worthwhile, is that God grants offspring and commands that they be brought up to worship and serve him ... Most certainly father and mother are apostles, bishops, and priests to their children, for it is they who make them acquainted with the gospel. In short there is no greater or nobler authority on earth than that of parents over their children, for this authority is both spiritual and temporal.

Parenting that is pleasing to God directs itself at shaping the child with proper discipline. Indeed, Luther (1989:636) spoke harshly against spoiling children:

You could do no more disastrous work than to spoil the children, let them curse and swear, let them learn profane words and vulgar songs, and just let them do as they please. What is more, some parents use enticements to be more alluring to meet the dictates of the world of fashion, so that they may please only the world, get ahead, and become rich, all the time giving more attention to the care of the body than to the due care of the soul. There is no greater tragedy in Christendom than spoiling children.

Though against spoiling children with material indulgence, Luther did remind the fathers of his time that their 'first and greatest obligation' was to provide for the material needs of their families.⁵⁵ He said this so that fathers would give priority to their homes and not be negligent toward their family members (Luther 1962:259).

⁵⁴ Similarly, Luther also calls on wives to view their family duties toward husbands and children as 'truly golden and noble works.'

⁵⁵ Though this instruction is specifically about meeting financial needs at home, it can be applied to the other family needs as well.



On the matter of manhood, if the natural tendency of man is to find his worth in accomplishments, is it then right for him to work hard and well for them? Luther would encourage a man to work hard and well, even to aspire to an office of great influence. But then, material possession, human praise and earthly power are not to be his ultimate goals. Luther (1959:272) speaks of a higher motivation for the man:

... the heart is right when a man says: Even though I should receive a living from it, I have not let it go at that, but rather, because God has called and commanded me to this office in order to administer it faithfully and diligently to his praise and the salvation of souls, I do this gladly from the heart for the sake of the Word. In doing this I do not seek love, friendship, honour, and thanks from the people; it rather issues from the heart and performs this before it receives honour, money, or favour, although if these come and follow, I may have and receive them without sin.

Luther exemplified this higher motivation in his own life. Like a true man himself, he overcame much odds and achieved some great successes that had permanent effects on human history. Hence, Luther's courage and conviction typify the passion of a man after God; the will of one who accomplishes great things for God's glory and others' good.⁵⁶

3.2.3 John Wesley (1703-1791).⁵⁷ In the midst of all the choices and opportunities that promise a good life today, Wesley calls for a deliberate submission to the will of God by

⁵⁶ Martin Luther was born at Eisleben in eastern Germany. He was working at becoming a lawyer but after a narrow escape from death, he became an Augustinian monk at Erfurt and studied theology there. Luther later became a professor of theology at the University of Wittenberg. All this while, he understood God as one who judged and weighed his merits in life. But one day, he saw the meaning of 'the righteousness of God' in a new way. It is not the righteousness by which God condemns us, but that by which He justifies us by faith. Luther then understood righteousness as a gift given to the believer by God. Consequently, he discarded the idea that we must do our very best before God will help us. He became particularly outraged by the belief that one's sins could be forgiven simply by the purchase of an indulgence. He wrote 95 theses against this belief and practice, and these aroused great interest in all Germany. Also, unrest was stirred up over the excessive taxes paid to the Church in Rome. This hurt the papacy financially and steps were taken to silence Luther. In 1520, Luther was excommunicated for his open rebellion against papal authority. In 1521, Emperor Charles V ordered him to recant his 'heresy' at the Diet of Worms, but Luther replied, 'Here I stand, I can do no other.' After Worms, his supporters kidnapped him while he was on his way home because they feared for his life. They kept him in a castle called the Wartburg. There, Luther translated the Bible into German for the common people. In the later days of Protestantism, Luther disagreed strongly with the Swiss reformer Zwingli. This led to the permanent division of the Protestant Church into Lutheran and reformed camps. Luther is especially remembered for his doctrine of justification by faith alone in Jesus Christ (Lane 1984:127-31).

⁵⁷ John Wesley was born in Lincolnshire, England. He studied at Oxford and later became a Fellow of Lincoln College. There, he co-founded the Holy Club which was for people who seriously wanted to live out their religion. In 1735, Wesley went to Georgia as a missionary, but was quickly exposed of his lack of assurance in



'taking up our cross.' He defines this 'taking up' as 'voluntarily suffer what it is in our power to avoid; when we willingly embrace the will of God, though contrary to our own; when we choose what is painful, because it is the will of our wise and gracious Creator' (Wesley 1979a:109).

Many people today work hard to succeed in life, but unfortunately, at the expense of their health. While they may consider this a lofty sacrifice, Wesley (1979a:127) has this to say:

But this it is certain we ought not to do; we ought not to gain money at the expense of our health. Therefore, no gain whatsoever should induce us to enter into, or to continue in, any employ, which is of such a kind, or is attended with so hard or so long labour, as to impair our constitution. Neither should we begin or continue in any business which necessarily deprives us of proper seasons for food and sleep, in such a proportion as our nature requires ... And, if we are already engaged in such an employ, we should exchange it, as soon as possible, for some which, if it lessen our gain, will, however, not lessen our health.

Competition is one reality which one has to face in the business world today. With globalisation, competition has been very much intensified. The danger is that one may resort to unethical practices in order to come out tops. Wesley (1979a:127-28) stresses the need to uphold integrity and proper ethics in work and business:

Other businesses there are which, however innocent in themselves, cannot be followed with innocence now ... for instance, as will not afford a competent maintenance without cheating or lying, or conformity to some custom which is not consistent with a good conscience: These, likewise, are sacredly to be avoided ... for to gain money, we must not lose our souls.

We cannot, consistent with brotherly love, sell our goods below the market-price; we cannot study to ruin our neighbour's trade, in order to advance our own; much less can we entice away, or receive, any of his servants or workmen

his own salvation by a Moravian pastor. He returned to England in 1738, and recorded these words in his journal on 25 May while reading Luther: 'I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation. And an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.' Wesley then began to preach salvation by faith in Jesus Christ, but this was not well taken by the Church of England. It was a time of moral and religious decline. Wesley (and other evangelical preachers) had to preach in open places as church pulpits were closed to them. Consequently, the gospel was spread to the masses and Britain experienced the Evangelical Revival. Together with his younger brother, Charles, John Wesley formed the Methodist Church because of the increasingly hostile attitude of the Church of England (Lane 1984:168-69).



whom he has need of. None can gain by swallowing up his neighbour's substance, without gaining the damnation of hell!

But Wesley does support diligent and honest work as the 'first and great rule of Christian wisdom.' He (Wesley 1979a:130) urges people to cultivate a spirit of excellence in their work:

Gain all you can by honest industry. Use all possible diligence in your calling. Lose no time ... Never leave anything till to-morrow, which you can do to-day. And do it as well as possible ... Let nothing be done by halves, or in a slight and careless manner.

And as one succeeds in life, there is this tendency to upgrade to better things or to impress others. To this, Wesley (1979a:131) cautions against the ills of being discontent with what we already have:

Do not waste any part of so precious a talent, merely in gratifying the desire of the eye, by superfluous or expensive apparel, or by needless ornaments. Waste no part of it in curiously adorning your houses; in superfluous or expensive furniture; in costly pictures, painting, gilding, books; in elegant rather than useful gardens.

Lay out nothing to gratify the pride of life, to gain the admiration or praise of men ... Men are expensive in diet, or apparel, or furniture, not barely to please their appetite, or to gratify their eye, or their imagination, but their vanity too ... But do not buy their applause so dear. Rather be content with the honour that cometh from God.

While not against material success, Wesley does envisage that it can lead people down the slippery path of indulgence and discontentment if it is all that matters in their lives. He (Wesley 1979b:8-9) exhorts God's people to 'gain all we can and save all we can in order to give all we can.'⁵⁸ Hence, God's people are to counter greed with the grace of giving.

⁵⁸ It has been documented that the Wesley home was destroyed by fire one day. The family lacked the financial resources to recover from this loss. Hence, as a result of Wesley's own policies which forbade personal savings, his seven children and three sisters lived the rest of their lives in debt. This left deep emotional scars in them (Schneider 1994:173-74).

On family life, Wesley has much to say about parent-child relationship. In the area of discipline, he strongly believes in not spoiling the child by sparing the rod. But such disciplining is to be done in love and only after other attempts have failed:

Your children, while they are young, you may restrain from evil, not only by advice, persuasion, and reproof, but also by correction; only remembering, that this means is to be used last, - not till all other have been tried, and found to be ineffectual. And even then you should take the utmost care to avoid the very appearance of passion. Whatever is done with mildness; nay, indeed, with kindness too. Otherwise your own spirit will suffer loss, and the child will reap little advantage (Wesley 1979b:80).

In a similar vein, Wesley (1979b:92) advocates the shaping of a child's will early in life:

A wise parent, on the other hand, should begin to break their will the first moment it appears ... The will of the parent is to a little child in the place of the will of God. Therefore studiously teach them to submit to this while they are children, that they may be ready to submit to His will when they are men. But in order to carry this point, you will need incredible firmness and resolution; for after you have once begun, you must never more give way.

Wesley also encourages parents to exemplify simplicity before their children in their own lifestyle. 'Instil diligently into them the love of plain dress, and hatred of finery. Show them the reason of your own plainness of dress, and show it is equally reasonable for them,' he (Wesley 1979b:106) said to parents.

Though many parents would view leaving much behind for their children as a responsible and loving act, Wesley (1979a:132-33) calls for prudence:

If I had one child, elder or younger, who knew the value of money, one who, I believe, would put it to the true use. I should think it my absolute, indispensable duty, to leave that child the bulk of my fortune; and to the rest just so much as could enable them to live in a manner they had been accustomed to do. 'But what, if all your children were equally ignorant of the true use of money?' I ought then ... to give each what would keep him above want; and to bestow all the rest in such a manner as I judged would be most for the glory of God.

Even in life's many choices and opportunities, parents play an important role in guiding their children to make not just good, but godly, decisions. Specifically, in a child's choice of a vocation in life, the lament of Wesley (1979b:84) is this:

'In what business will your son be most likely to love and serve God? In what employment will he have the greatest advantage for laying up treasure in heaven? I have been shocked above measure in observing how little this is attended to, even by pious parents! Even these consider only how he may get most money; not how he may get most holiness!'⁵⁹

Though living in a long gone generation, Wesley's wisdom still finds relevance in today's dual-income families. To those working parents who depend on housemaids to care for their children, Wesley (1979b:96) gives this stern instruction:

Your servants, who will not understand your plan, will be continually giving little things to your children, and thereby undoing all your work. This you must prevent, if possible, by warning them when they first come into your house, and repeating the warning from time to time. If they *will* do it notwithstanding, you must turn them away. Better lose a good servant than spoil a good child.⁶⁰

And there is this question of being a man of God: Can a Christian man be well acquainted with the world and yet be after God? Wesley believes this is possible if one takes care to increase in the grace of God. He (Wesley 1979a:461) prescribes the practice this way:

'But the persons in question are useful to me, in carrying on my temporal business. Nay, on many occasions, they are necessary to me; so that I could not well carry it on without them.' Instances of this kind frequently occur. And this is doubtless a sufficient reason for your contracting an intimate acquaintance with them. And you here need to take the utmost care, 'lest even by that converse with them which is necessary, while your fortune in the world increases, the grace of God should decrease in your soul.'⁶¹

The true measure of a man is not in the quantity of his possessions, but the quality of his stewardship. And Wesley (1979b:355-56) so contrasts a 'rich' man with a 'poor' man:

⁵⁹ In jest and sarcasm, some godly parents are said to desire that their brightest child becomes a doctor and their dullest one becomes a pastor.

⁶⁰ Working parents must still be responsible for instilling right values in their children even if there is caregiving help by maids, grandparents or child care centres.

⁶¹ The implication is that one must be prepared to forego worldly gains in order not to compromise his Christian position. To increase in the grace of God is also to do more good, by the grace of God, with the more we have.



But a man may be rich that has not a hundred a year, nor even one thousand pounds in cash. Whosoever has food to eat, and raiment to put on, with something over, is rich. Whosoever has the necessaries and conveniences of life for himself and his family, and a little to spare for them that have not, is properly a rich man; unless he is a miser, a lover of money, one that hoards up what he can and ought to give to the poor. For if so, he is a poor man still, though he has millions in the bank; yea, he is the poorest of men

3.2.4 Charles Spurgeon (1843-1892).⁶² Even in Spurgeon's time, business activities were very much an accepted way of livelihood. Men were especially drawn to the challenges in the business world. Though he recognised the validity and value of economic success, Spurgeon did warn, especially Christian men, not to allow their diligence in business to become an indulgence in greed. He (Spurgeon 1977b:327-28) said:

There is a laudable pursuit of gain, without which business would not be properly carried on; but there is a line, scarcely as broad as a razor's edge, between diligence in business and greediness for gain. We can so easily pass from the one into the other, that we may hardly be aware of it ourselves. When a man is increasing his investments, when he is enlarging his warehouse, when he is employing a larger number of persons than formerly, or even when he is bemoaning the depression of his trade, and his heart is aching because he has to do only half as much business as before, covetousness may insinuate itself into his conversation ... 'Let your conversation - your daily conduct - be without covetousness.' Any brother here - and it is to the brethren mainly that the temptation comes, I think, - any brother here may have present need of such a warning as this.

Spurgeon also exposed a popular myth in his time - the belief that one would be contented if only there was a little more. But the reality, then and now, is that the desire to gain or possess a little more often does not lead to contentment, but to an insatiable appetite for more. Spurgeon (1977b:328) exhorted people to be happy with what they already had:

⁶² Charles Haddon Spurgeon was born at Kelvedon, Essex. His father was a Congregational minister. In 1850, Spurgeon was converted and rebaptised as an adult believer. After his baptism, he joined a Baptist church in Cambridge and soon discovered his gift as a preacher. He later pastored the Baptist church in New Park Street, Southwark, London. The chapel proved too small for the great crowds who came to hear Spurgeon. Hence, the Metropolitan Tabernacle, costing 31 000 pounds was eventually built. Spurgeon preached there from 1861 till just before his death. He was Calvinist in theology though he attacked both extremes of Protestant theology at that time (hyper-Calvinism and Arminianism). He also clashed with the Anglicans and his fellow Baptists, accusing the former of inconsistency in their view of baptism, and the latter of 'modernist' theology. Despite these controversies, Spurgeon is still esteemed as a great preacher and his printed sermons are still read by many (Douglas 1992:636).

It is supposed by most persons that they could be content if they were not exactly what they are, and where they are: but the precept exhorts them to be content with their present circumstances. If they had a little more they would be satisfied; but that is not the contentment to which we are exhorted: it is written, 'Be content with such things ye have' ... I once thought that a million would satisfy any mortal man; but I have been assured by one who has considerable experience in that direction that he who has one million is unable to see any reason why he should not have two or ten ... So far as earthly things are concerned, he is the happiest, nay, he is the richest man, who is content with such things as he has.⁶³

Spurgeon preached on God's perspective of success in one's life - not in terms of always having one's desires fulfilled, but in terms of trusting in God's goodness in all circumstances. He (Spurgeon 1977b:356) pointed out that this trust would grant a sense of sufficiency in life:

When God's will and our will are contrary to one another, we may be sure that there is something amiss with us. We are never right till God's will becomes our will, and we can honestly say, 'The will of the Lord be done.' Therefore it is a sad thing when a Christian man cannot say, 'I have enough;' but it is a very sweet thing when he can truthfully say it. Then does he really enjoy life, - when he thanks God for health, and also for sickness, - when he thanks God for gains, and also for losses ... He proves then that he does not follow God for what he gets out of him ... but that he follows God out of sincere love to him, because God is his Master, and he belongs to him. It is true blessedness, a little heaven begun below, when the Christian, looking all round, can say of all temporal things, 'I have enough.'

In the area of family life, Spurgeon preached much on how parents were to discharge their responsibilities. He asserted that the best thing which parents could give to their children was the truth about God. Indeed, for Spurgeon, the sweetest confession of children before their parents would be these words: 'We would join with the people of God for we trust we belong to them' (Spurgeon 1977a:421).

Many men are fretful about the future as they feel responsible in providing well for their families. While this sense of responsibility is commendable, what is undesirable is the

⁶³ The Bible verse quoted is taken from Heb 13:5.

shifting of trust from God to self. Fathers are to provide for their families by first trusting in the paternal care of God themselves. Spurgeon (1977b:344) puts it this way:

Many a man lies awake at night desiring to increase his income, not because he is ambitious to be rich, but because he is haunted with the fear of being poor. Gifted, perhaps, for the present with competency, he is still scared with dire forebodings - 'What will become of my family if I die?' 'Or should such and such a source of income be dried up, and it is very precarious, what then will become of my household? What then?' Full many are not content with such things as they have because of the dread of a distant season of trial is constantly harassing them.

'He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.' The censure, therefore, falls where this sacred pledge is unheeded ... If God would have thee live by the day, why dost thou want to gather enough for seven days at once? If thy Father bids thee trust him, why dost thou distrust his paternal care? Use prudent thrift by all means; do not waste what he gives, nor heedlessly forget that you will have wants on the morrow as well as to-day; but abstain from fretfulness, abjure murmuring, and abhor every tendency to unbelief

Many busy fathers today are in danger of sacrificing their families. They may unknowingly neglect family needs and the spiritual upbringing of their young at home because of their busyness elsewhere. Spurgeon (1977c:355) issues this rebuke:

May I next ask you to look into *your own house* and home? It is a dreadful thing when a man does not cultivate the field of his own family. I recollect in my early days a man who used to walk out with me into the villages when I was preaching. I was glad of his company till I found out certain facts, and then I shook him off ... He had many children, and these grew up to be wicked young men and women, and the reason was that the father, while he would be at this meeting and that, never tried to bring his own children to the Saviour. What is the use of zeal abroad if there is neglect at home? How sad to say, 'My own vineyard have I not kept!' Have you never heard of one who said he did not teach his children the ways of God because he thought they were so young that it was very wrong to prejudice them, and he had rather leave them to choose their own religion when they grew older? ... Cultivate a child's heart for good, or it will go wrong of itself, for it is already depraved by nature.

One way in which parents can influence their children is by example. In fact, godly values will be better grasped by children if piety is modelled before them at home. Thus, Spurgeon (1977c:355-56) reminds parents of their high calling to be spiritual models to their children:



May fathers and mothers set such an example of cheerful piety that sons and daughters shall say, 'Let us tread in our father's footsteps, for he was a happy and a holy man. Let us follow our mother's ways, for she was sweetness itself.' If piety does not rule in your house, when we pass by your house we shall see disorder, disobedience, pride of dress, folly, and the beginnings of vice.

And with special reference to the father as a model and nurturer of godly values at home, Spurgeon (1977c:369) adds:

I have known this sin find people out *in their families*. There is a Christian man: we honour and love him, but he has a son that is a drunkard. Did his good father ever bear any protest against strong drink in all his life? No; he did not like the blue ribbon, of course. I will not dispute about total abstinence, but I do not feel much astonished at a boy drinking much when he sees his godly father drink a little regularly. Every man should labour by precept and example to put down intemperance, and he who does not do so may be sure that his sin will find him out.

On the subject of masculinity, man generally likes competition, and tends to capitalise on his opportunities and positions in order to outdo others.⁶⁴ In fact, Spurgeon himself speaks well of healthy competition, that is, that which spurs us to do our best to the glory of God. What Spurgeon (1977b:342-43) cautions against is to allow competition to breed envy and the evil to destroy others:

In some others this covetous principle shows itself in *envying others*. If others are better off, or more esteemed, they straightway seem to regard them as enemies, cannot think well of them, cannot wish them well, would almost rejoice to see them dragged down. I have known some poor people who were prouder still: and their envying of those who were better off has developed in them a pride of an almost ferocious character, akin to the fury of savages ... If the Lord has given you one talent, use it; but do not waste your time in finding fault with him who has five talents. If your Master makes you a hewer of wood, throw your strength into your felling and cleaving, do not throw the axe at your fellow-servant; and if he makes you a drawer of water, do not empty your buckets on your neighbour, but do your own service well, and bring what you have done and lay it at your Master's feet. This will be thankworthy: this will be Christlike.

⁶⁴ Spurgeon (1977b:350) did preach that a man ought to make full use of the opportunities and positions that God had bestowed on him.



Many Christian men have been tempted to compromise their Christian position in order to have a winning edge as they compete with others. To them, to succeed is to achieve the desired results; to show evidence of such fruitfulness. But Spurgeon begs to differ for he views faithfulness to God as more important than fruitfulness in one's labour. The true measure of a man is not so much in terms of his fruitfulness in all his labour, but in terms of his faithfulness to God in all that he has done. Thus, Spurgeon (1977b:350) so exhorts Christians to guard their integrity and faithfulness:

You will be master of the situation yet. 'Alas, sir, but I am threatened with the loss of my situation unless I will go contrary to divine commands.' Then do not flinch, but tell your heavenly Father about it. Commit your cause to him. Let not fifty places or five hundred people make you swerve from the course that faith dictates and duty demands. Appeal to God, and he will provide for you. Any temporary loss you may sustain will be much more than made up in the prosperity he awards you: or if not in that way, in the peace he vouchsafes you and the honour he confers on you in suffering for Christ's sake.

3.3 Thoughts of Contemporary Christian Thinkers

3.3.1 Richard Foster.⁶⁵ Foster points to 'the dark side of money' when he discusses the subject of success. There is a general tendency to downplay Jesus' radical criticism of wealth because it clashes with what is often considered to constitute an abundant life.⁶⁶ Foster (1985:21-22) advocates replacing fear of material deficiency with trust in God's sufficiency.

He also alerts one to two distorted views on wealth. The first is to view wealth as a sure sign of God's blessing and approval. Foster refutes this by pointing out that Jesus Himself has made it clear in Lk 6:24 that wealth itself is no assurance of God's blessing and approval. The second distorted view is to take money as only neutral, and is to be used as best as one can in order to be God's good stewards. However, Foster thinks otherwise for he sees money

⁶⁵ Richard Foster is an authority in Christian spirituality. He is also Associate Professor of Theology and Writer in Residence at Friends University in Wichita, Kansas. What he has written in his book, *Money, Sex and Power*, are gleaned and presented here as his thoughts on success, marriage-family life and masculinity. The views of the others in this section are presented as responses to Foster's thoughts on these subjects.

⁶⁶ These harsh words of Jesus are found in Mt 6:19; 19:24; Lk 6:24, 30; 12:15, 33; 16:13.



as not neutral, but as having a 'power' that can be demonic in character. Thus, he considers money as a power seeking to dominate and to inspire devotion in people (Foster 1985:23-26).⁶⁷

In fact, so perturbed is Foster (1985:28) about the god-like nature of money that he issues this warning:

For Christ money is an idolatry we must be converted from in order to be converted to Him. The rejection of the god mammon is a necessary precondition to becoming a disciple of Jesus. And in point of fact, money has many of the characteristics of deity. It gives us security, can induce guilt, gives us freedom, gives us power and seems to be omnipresent. Most sinister of all, is its bid for omnipotence.

In Jesus' radical criticism of the rich, Foster (1985:30-31) argues that this only makes sense when one understands the spirituality of money; that it is one of the 'principalities and powers' that must be conquered.⁶⁸

In spite of all his radical assertions, Foster (1985:46) does make an attempt to bring out the 'light side' side of money by saying that 'the call of God is for us to use money within the confines of a properly disciplined spiritual life and to manage money for the good of all humanity and for the glory of God.' He cites Jesus' call to use unrighteous mammon to make friends in Lk 16:1-13 as a teaching to use money to advance God's kingdom, not for economic benefits. Also, since there will be people in heaven, Foster (1985:54-55) interprets the instruction to 'lay up treasures in heaven' in Mt 6:19-21 as investing in the lives of people

⁶⁷ When Jesus uses the Aramaic term *mammon* for wealth, Foster interprets this as Jesus giving wealth a personal and spiritual character. Thus, when the Lord says in Mt 6:24, 'You cannot serve God and mammon,' He is personifying wealth as a rival god.

⁶⁸ Foster (1985:31-35) looks at how Jesus has criticised the prosperous fool (Lk 12:16-21), the wealthy man who shuns Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31) and the rich young ruler (Lk 18:18-30), and suggests some ways to conquer and redeem the 'dark side' of money:

- Create an atmosphere of confession concerning one's seduction by money ('e g' talking with someone honestly about this struggle with money).
- Keep in touch with the poor by feeling with and learning from them.
- Experience inner renunciation by holding lightly onto material possessions (see these as 'given by God, owned by God, and to be used for the purposes of God').
- Give gladly and generously to destroy greed in one's life.

with the money one has. Hence, he urges people to work not merely for money, but to enhance human life.⁶⁹ The whole emphasis here is to affirm human value above economic value, and to urge Christians to see their 'bottom line' in terms of human needs and not monetary needs (Foster 1985:64-65).

The attitude of Foster (1985:61) toward money can perhaps be best summed up by his own words:

Step on it. Yell at it. Laugh at it. List it way down on the scale of values ...
Money is made for taking, for bargaining, for manipulating, but not for giving.
This is exactly why giving has such ability to defeat the powers of money.

And drawing from what the Bible teaches in Phlp 6:6 & 11 and 2 Cor 6:10, Foster (1985:71) crusades for a lifestyle of simplicity:

We who follow Jesus Christ are called to a vow of simplicity ... It is not an option to take or leave depending on our personal preference ... Simplicity seeks to do justice to our Lord's many-faceted teachings about money - light and dark, giving and receiving, trust, contentment, faith.

By simplicity, Foster (1985:72-73) clarifies that he is not referring to rigid asceticism. Rather, he is referring to the discipline that exercises modesty and temperance while rejoicing in the gracious provisions of God. It involves voluntary abstinence from luxury and extravagance so that resources can be used to meet others' needs.

Foster does not seem to have a high view of money, and he discourages measuring life's success in terms of material wealth. His claims that money has a power of demonic nature and that Christians should take a vow of simplicity underscore his belief that money is at best a necessary evil in this fallen world.

On the subject of marriage-family life, Foster (1985:94) attributes the domination of women by men through the ages as a result of the Fall. It is not part of God's good creation.

⁶⁹ An example of this is to take up a job that has more life-changing potential even if it offers less pay and prestige.

In fact, the saying that 'the man shall rule over you' in Gn 3:16 is a curse from God. It is indicative that the original intent of God for marriage has been corrupted by the Fall.⁷⁰

Commenting on the distortion of sexuality after the Fall, Foster (1985:106) has this to say:

The notion of female inferiority is a false and soul-destroying doctrine ... The argument that, although the woman is not inferior to the man she is different from him and therefore necessarily subordinate to him, is not compelling. Differences are obvious, but they do not necessarily entail hierarchical arrangements.

We need to be reminded that the rule of the male *over* the female is not a description of pristine sexuality before the fall but of the curse of the fall ... Sexism is sexuality's distortion, not its wholeness.

Foster's understanding of gender roles in the family rests in his interpretation of Paul in Eph 5:21-23. He sees Paul as advocating the principle of mutual subordination and responsibility in the family. When Paul exhorts man and wife to 'be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ' in Eph 5:21, he is calling for Christ-like submission through sacrificial love. Foster (1985:158) sees Paul as moving from a patriarchal/authoritarian approach to a partnership/companionship approach in husband-wife relationship.

Paul breaks radically from the patriarchal/authoritarian system of the past in Eph 5:21 ('be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ'). However, he immediately reconnects with the tradition of the past in v 22 ('wives be subject ... for the husband is the head').⁷¹

In explaining this apparent ambivalence of Paul in Eph 5:21-23, Foster (1985:160) quotes the words of Elizabeth Achtemeier:

The passage ... has preserved the traditional view of the male as the head of the family, but that headship is a function only, not a matter of status or superiority. The understanding of the headship and of the wife's relation to it

⁷⁰ Foster (1985:105) sees sexism (the man's drive to dominate and control the woman) as a distortion of sexuality.

⁷¹ The word *kephale* ('head') has been translated by some to mean 'source', thereby distancing the passage from the hierarchical model for the man-wife relationship. Also, v 22 (as in the 21st edition of Eberhard Nestle's *Novum Testamentum Graece*) simply says 'wives to your husbands'; the verb 'be subject' or 'submit' must thus be supplied from v 21 (Foster 1985:159).



has been radically transformed. There is no lording over the other here, no exercise of sinful power, no room for unconcern or hostility toward the other. Instead there is only the full devotion of love, poured out for the other, in imitation of Christ's faithfulness and yearning and sacrifice for his church, and of the church's like response to him.⁷²

This headship of the man in the family imparts to him a certain measure of power. But it is a power that acts to serve others rather than to make others subservient. Foster (1985:232) sees this power as service and describes how it can be worked out in the home: 'Household duties are important because self-worth and a sense of contributing to the welfare of the family are important. Discipline is no small task, but it is one way we serve our children.'

Hence, Foster believes that man should love his wife as an equal, not to lord over her as an inferior. The original design of God for male and female is for them to express and enjoy equality. The headship of man in the family can only uphold this original intent if it is exercised under the 'law of love.' This implies that the man functions as head in a way that demonstrates his love toward his wife as an equal, that is, by way of mutual submission and shared responsibilities.⁷³

On the subject of masculinity, Foster focuses his discussion on power. He sees the desire for and the use of power as man's expressed tendency to control and dominate. Drawing a conclusion from the folly of Adam and Eve, Foster (1985:175) suggests that the sin of power lies in the desire to be more than what human beings are created for, that is, in their

⁷² Achtemeier, Elizabeth 1976. *The Committed Marriage*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press.

⁷³ Foster's thinking on the 'law of love' is also reflected in his views on divorce and remarriage. He (Foster 1985:145) comments that under the 'law of love,' divorce is allowable if the continuation of a marriage is substantially more detrimental than a divorce. However, he cautions that divorce should not be a convenient or first option. The exemption clause in support of divorce in Mt 5:32 and 19:9 is not meant to be a legalism, but an expression of the 'law of love.' On the matter of remarriage, Foster (1985:147-48) argues that Jesus is not against remarriage in Mt 5:32; 19:9; Mk 10:11-12; Lk 16:18 when He says, 'Whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.' Rather, Jesus was dealing with male aggressiveness in His time - a divorced woman would be treated like a 'used thing' by a man. Hence, Jesus spoke of remarriage as 'adultery' because of this attitude of contempt with which the man would relate with the divorced woman. In this light, Foster says that when the divorced person is 'substantially better off and the Kingdom of God more effectively advanced by remarriage, then the law of love dictates that remarriage can and even should occur.'

desire to be gods or like God. He (Foster 1985:178) warns that the man who aspires to be his own king and be accountable to no one is especially vulnerable to being corrupted by power. As power is most insidious when coupled with pride, Foster (1985:179-80) encourages men in positions of leadership to 'root themselves deeply in the experiences of ordinary life.' In fact, so convinced of the evil that comes with power is he that Foster (1985:191) calls for a posture of total renunciation - to be 'positionless and possessionless.' Having nothing becomes a man's greatest strength because he has nothing to lose and others can take nothing from him. Foster (1985:215) describes this strength as not of the world and illustrates it this way:

We are so often just like the disciples. We think the position guarantees the power ... The world is full of people who will do anything to get the position so they can have power over others. That is the kind of power that belongs to this world system. It is dependent on human authorisation, and its power is the power to dominate others.

But to the eye of faith positions in the human order themselves are really powerless, ignorant of the way of God and the life of spiritual power. Throughout the book of Acts, we see repeatedly the clash between powerless officials and official-less power.

The authority of Peter, John, and the others was shocking to everyone because they had no human credentials of authority. They had no degrees, no titles of distinction, no human authorisation. Since their ability (power) came from God, human authorisation was irrelevant.

But Foster does have some positive things to say to the man who wields power. He (Foster 1985:207-08, 211, 243) gives some pointers as to how a man can use power to lead/liberate and not dominate/manipulate:

- Use power to promote self-control, not self-indulgence in others. Teach discipline as the language of self-control, that is, do what needs to be done when it needs to be done.
- Use power to promote competence, not feelings of inadequacy in others. Empower and help others to realise their full potential.
- Use power to exercise *servant* leadership. Servant leaders see themselves as servants before they are leaders. This attitude guards against pride and does not despise the ministry of little things.

Hence, Foster believes in power, but only to use it to serve people as human beings and not to dehumanise them. He (Foster 1985:244) describes how a man should use power to serve others this way:

We serve them by a firm refusal to allow them to misuse and abuse us. To allow people to walk over us as one would a doormat is not service, but subservience.

Therefore, if others try to walk over us and take advantage of our serving spirit, we stand up to the abuse. Our concern is not to defend 'our rights,' for we have already given those by God. Firmly, we press others to respect all people - including us - as fully human.

Should a man then find his masculine worth in power? As far as Foster is concerned, the true measure of a man before God is not in his position of power, but in his posture of service. If he has any power at all, he is to use it to promote servanthood in himself, not subservience in others; to empower others to reach their fullest human potential, not to disempower them in dehumanising ways. The pursuit of service is valued more highly than the pursuit of status - this is the 'power' mark of a true man before God.

3.3.2 John Schneider.⁷⁴ In an attempt to provoke Christians to rethink about money and possessions, Schneider (1994:55) asserts that human beings are created to live, cultivate, dominate and care for a material world. Moreover, they are created to use and enjoy the fruits of this material world.

While Richard Foster may be greatly embarrassed to equate success in material terms, Schneider (1994:56) has this to say:

But the divine permission, 'You are free to eat from any tree of the garden,' ... conveys the vast, superfluous horizon of freedom for delight that God gave to human beings in the beginning. The whole view is one of almost embarrassingly extravagant delight and excess. God gave them not just the conditions for functional existence, but the conditions for majesty - within limits of course. Genesis presents a challenge to the time-honoured (and somewhat popular)

⁷⁴ John Schneider is professor of theology and chair of the religion department at Calvin College, USA. His thinking on materialism will be used as a response to Foster's view on material success.

Christian tendency to equate enjoyment of the superfluous with greediness and injustice. There is an enjoyment in the superfluous that is very good.

Schneider further adds that the picture of life in Eden before the Fall is an attack on poverty and meagreness. It impresses upon us that abundance, fruitfulness, excess and delight are the divinely determined conditions for a full life.

Though sin has entered into the world, God's covenant with human beings in relation to His other creation on earth still remains. After the Flood in Gn 8:21, God again establishes the ground as His good and sacred creation when he says, 'I will never again curse the ground because of humankind.' In Gn 9:1, the creation blessing to 'be fruitful and multiply' is given once again by God, and this time to Noah. The Lord also reinstates the dominion of human beings over animals and plants in Gn 9:3.⁷⁵ Also, in pronouncing capital punishment as a necessary means of restoring the dignity of human lives in Gn 9:6, God is reaffirming that human beings are bearers of His own image. Hence, Schneider (1994:63-64) concludes that though sin has entered the world, God still wants us to strive for the ideals of the good life which He has first spelt out in Eden.

Moving on to explore the Jubilee practice in Lv 25, Schneider argues that the idea of equal distribution of wealth is alien here. He gives the following reasons:

- The Promised Land was not divided equally among the Israelites. In fact, the Levites were given no land at all.
- The first-born sons were given twice more than the other sons (Dt 21:17), and daughters were given nothing at all.
- On the Day of Jubilee, each was not given according to needs. Many of the poorest got nothing ('e g' aliens, sojourners, non-Israelite debtors and slaves). The rich were not required to sacrifice their luxuries for the poor. In fact, the non-Israelite would be disinherited. Thus, Jubilee restored properties to the original owners, whether they needed them or not.

⁷⁵ This dominion now includes the killing of animals for food.

In the light of this understanding, Schneider (1994:72-73) declares that the ‘liberation of people from poverty was not the explicit and driving logic of Jubilee.’ He (Schneider 1994:75) sees the movement in Lv 25:18-19 as one from sojourning with the Lord to receiving a life of abundance in the land, and says this pertaining to the Jubilee release:

The purpose of the release was to protect the Israelite families from poverty and to empower them for both lives of redemption action and delight in the abundance of the land.

Schneider also disagrees that the law of tithing in Dt 14:28-29 teaches simpler living for the sake of the poor.⁷⁶ He counters that these two verses must be understood in the larger context of Dt 14:22-29. Only then will we see that the picture of delight and blessing in the bounty of the Promised Land. This picture depicts the tithe as something for the feast of thanksgiving; an expression of gratitude and service to God and others. Thus, the tithe has nothing to do with a theology of obligations or simpler living. Rather, it points us back to the ideals of Eden in which God calls human beings to live with an ‘immodest passion for the good things in life.’ But this passion must be tempered by a concern for the poor because God’s good abundance for us is where our ‘delight and compassion embrace’ (Schneider 1994:78-79). Elaborating, Schneider (1994:81) comments:

The rich are not commanded to give the ‘extras’ to the poor, but, from their position of power and blessing, they are required to nurture compassion in their hearts and so to institute laws that express the grace of God to the poor.

Turning to Am 6:4-7, Schneider suggests that the moral judgment upon Israel is not against the material enjoyment in a time of hunger. Rather, the judgment is upon a ‘demonic narcissism and self-absorption’ because the leaders of Israel, in their enjoyment of the good things in life, ‘do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph.’ Their sin here has to do with a lack of grief for the suffering of those so near to them (Schneider 1994:88). Indeed, what the rich

⁷⁶ He is actually responding to Ronald Sider who has written the book *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*.

need is not to be impoverished, but to be impressed with the concern of God for the less fortunate near them:

The rich must be liberated, not from riches, but from the mind of the serpent. They must have the mind of God, the true Lord, who is their servant. They must strive toward the light of the exodus vision and recover the spirituality of redemptive power, which turns delight instantly to love (Schneider 1994:89).

Moving into the New Testament, Schneider looks at the encounter between Jesus and Zacchaeus in Lk 19:1-10. Zacchaeus did not give away all that he possessed, but only half. Though he applied the Old Testament code of justice to himself, he determined his own requirements concerning how much to give. Unlike the rich young ruler who would not face his lack of righteousness, Zacchaeus wanted to come clean before the Lord. In Lk 19:9, the Lord pronounced that salvation had come to him. Zacchaeus was accepted by Jesus not because he became poor in wealth, but poor in spirit (Schneider 1994:135-37).

Commenting on the parable of the rich fool in Lk 12:13-21, Schneider believes that the root problem of this man is not in his possessions in life, but his philosophy of life. Schneider (1994:148-50) insightfully describes this warped philosophy:

The story of the rich fool (in its context) suggests that it was not the creation of financial security nor the retirement and its pleasures that Jesus judged as greedy foolishness. The man's foolishness was rather in his philosophy of life ... We must recall that Jesus aimed the parable primarily at the covetousness of the two brothers. They are thus our point of entry into its primary meaning.

The brothers had lost their father ... But the two brothers were not wise men, they were fools. They squandered the rare moment of grief that could bind them. All they could think about was money. In their craving for security they had lost the real treasure of love. They had gained an inheritance, and lost their souls.

The brothers were not wrong to want an inheritance. They were wrong to 'covet' it, to make it the end of their existence. So with the rich fool ... When his buiding project was through, his *human* project was finished too ... His life ended there, with the barns.

This parable sounds an alarm ... Too easily our productive work becomes an end unto itself - an idol - and financial success brings the strange paradox of poverty in our relationships. The parable reminds us that our relationships are



the real tests of our success. They are the bottom line. They are the real treasure.⁷⁷

Schneider also calls one to view money realistically in this world. He says that as 'money flows through the economic systems of the world, like a river, it will inevitably pick up pollutants along the way.' However, this does not mean that you shun these worldly systems. Rather, it requires that you actively engage them in redemptive uses. Money may not be one's master, but it certainly must be one's servant in bringing release to people. In this way, one serves God. This is what Jesus means when He says in Lk 16:9, 'Use worldly wealth to gain friends' (Schneider 1994:159).⁷⁸

In the parable of the ten pounds in Lk 19:11-27, Schneider hears the call of God to His people to display the courage to be fruitful in the worldly realms of wealth and power. As they so *enlarge* themselves through the creation of wealth and power, they also make their Master and His domain stronger and bigger. Conversely, this parable is a stern warning to those who are timid, thereby becoming fruitless in the economic world (Schneider 1994:161-62).

Unlike Richard Foster, John Schneider looks at material wealth in a very positive way. Taking a journey through the Bible, he argues that it has always been God's design for human beings to enjoy His abundance since Eden. But one must embrace both delight and compassion at the same time, that is, enjoy with an eye on the poor around so that they too can experience

⁷⁷ The absence of meaningful relationships in the life of the rich fool could be detected - Jesus depicted him as a lonely figure who talked to himself.

⁷⁸ Espousing a sociological interpretation of this parable, Malina (1981:34) points out that in the first-century Mediterranean world, honour is acquired not through possessions but through benevolence. Thus, money and goods are really means to honour when these are generously given to those in need. Keeping material wealth to oneself is, therefore, frowned upon as a foolish act. Adding further, Malina (1981:77) says:

... the honourable man feels he has a right to fulfil his inherited role, hence a right to economic and social subsistence. The right to subsistence - to the preservation of one's status in all the dimensions of the ideal man's role - is the active moral principle in peasant societies. In other words, the only time our first-century villager or non-elite urbanite will rebel is when his subsistence is taken away. And should this happen, rebellion is not for the purpose of achieving some higher standard of living or some new social status, but only to return to normal subsistence levels.

Hence, in Malina's view, the rich fool in the parable is so described only because in accumulating wealth, he actually brings dishonour upon himself.

God's grace. In provoking a rethink about material wealth, Schneider tries to lead one not into a form of carnal hedonism, but an expression of godly materialism. To him, success becomes stultified if it is restricted to creating and enjoying wealth. Material success must bring a man to a higher level of awareness and action - to grieve and care for the unfortunate near him.

3.3.3 George Knight, III.⁷⁹ While Richard Foster tries to downplay the headship of man in the home by stressing much on mutual submission and responsibility between man and woman, Knight is definitely more forceful in his assertion of male headship and female submission. He uses two New Testament texts, Eph 5:21-23 and Col 3:18-19, as the primary basis of his argument for husbands and wives as analogues of Christ and the church.

Knight sees the exhortation to 'submit to one another' in Eph 5:21 as a general call to mutual submission. He points out that Paul uses the middle voice here to stress on what one does to oneself - one submits oneself to others. Knight (1991a:166) further adds that this submission is a 'voluntary yielding in love, characteristic of the Christian community and is urged elsewhere in the New Testament.'

After stating Eph 5:21 as a general principle of mutual submission, Paul then applies it in specific household roles in Eph 5:22-23. However, Knight (1991a:168) notes this significant point as Paul moves from the general to the specific:

It is sometimes urged that mutual submission alone is in view ... Since, however, verse 21 is a transition verse to the entirety of the sections on household responsibilities, consistency would demand that the sections on children and parents and on servants and masters also speak only of mutual submissiveness and not of different roles. Since this is self-evidently not so for the section on children and parents, on the one hand, and masters and servants, on the other, the implication is that distinguishable roles and specific submission are also taught in the section on husbands and wives ... Paul still calls the husband 'the head' of the wife and therefore the one whom she should submit in everything (verses 22-24). Thus this section cannot be teaching only

⁷⁹ George Knight is administrator, dean and professor of New Testament at Knox Theological Seminary. His thinking on marriage and family presented here is based on his two contributions in the book, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, edited by John Piper and Wayne Grudem. Knight's view on marriage-family life will be used as a response to Foster's thinking on the same subject.

mutual submission rather than the specific submission of wives to husbands in the overall context of mutual submission.

Knight also claims that the passages in the New Testament that deal with the relationship between the husband and his wife invariably urge the wife to 'submit to' her husband.⁸⁰ This submission is based on what God has first designed for man and woman, not on a superior-inferior relationship. Hence, this submission of the wife to her husband is 'an appeal to one who is equal by creation and redemption to submit to the authority God has ordained' (Knight 1991a:168-69).

In discussing the extent of this submission, Knight (1991a:168-70) espouses his thinking as follows:

- This submission rests on the basis that the husband is the 'head' of the wife. Since Paul says that 'the husband is the head of the the wife *as* Christ is head of the church' in Eph 5:23, it is evident that the husband has authority over his wife just as Christ has authority over His church. Hence, Paul is speaking of headship here as authority (leadership), not source. The apostle sees male headship as divine design just as Christ headship over His church is as well.⁸¹
- As stressed by Paul in Eph 5:22-24, the wife is to submit to her husband 'in everything.' The implicit expectation is that it must not result in disobedience to God. It also does not mean that the wife stops thinking and acting out of her own initiative and creativity. Rather, in her willingness to submit to her husband's headship 'in everything,' she is always desiring to share her thinking and acting with him.

In view of this extent of the wife's submission to her husband, Knight (1991a:171-76) elaborates on what he thinks should be the attitudes of the man as he exercises his headship:

- *The attitude of love:* Paul uses the word *love* six times in Eph 5:25-33 to signify the man's duty to his wife. It is interesting to note that Paul here does not call on the man to be head over his wife, but to love his wife.⁸² Paul exhorts the man to love his wife as Christ loves His church (vv 25ff) and as one loves one's own body (v 28). This love also expresses itself in self-giving (v 25), in concern for the other's good (vv 26-27), and in nourishing and cherishing the other person (v 29).

⁸⁰ See Eph 5:22; Col 3:18; 1 Pt 3:1; Tt 2:4-5. The same verb *hupotasso* is used in all these verses and it is a 'submission in the sense of voluntary yielding in love.'

⁸¹ See how Paul refers to Gn 2:21-24 in 1 Cor 11:8-9 to point out this divine design of male headship.

⁸² Man's role as head over his wife is only addressed by Paul to the woman, *not* to the man, in Eph 5:23.

- *The attitude of respect:* In Col 3:18, the wife is to submit as is 'fitting in the Lord.' This places such a submission as according to what God has first designed at creation, not as a result of the Fall. In other words, this submission affirms the distinguishable roles for man and woman as ordained by God from the very beginning. On the other hand, the headship of the man must not be negative or oppressive if it is to be 'fitting in the Lord' too. As Paul warns in Col 3:19, this headship must be one of respect rather than repression since it is over one who is his equal in creation and redemption, and 'one flesh' with him. Also, Paul alludes to marriage as picturing the eternal relationship between Christ and His church in Eph 5:31-32. This then supports the headship of the husband and the submission of the wife as being rooted in creation and for all time, not just something 'irrelevant and old-fashioned' for our present time and culture.⁸³

Knight (1991b:345-46) laments that sin has distorted the design of God for man-woman relationship as evident in the 'spirit of the age' today. In fact, one already reads of this in Gn 3:16 when God says to Eve after the Fall, 'Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.' The man now will seek to dominate in an unloving, oppressive manner ('rule') and the woman will seek to master over her husband ('desire'). All this corrupts the divine design for male headship and female submission in marriage. In spite of this corruption by sin in the husband-wife relationship, Knight (1991b:347-48) urges Christians to keep the following roles in proper perspective:

- *Man as breadwinner and provider:* In Gn 3:17-19, Knight sees God defining the main calling of man as breadwinner and provider for his family. The woman's role is mainly in caring for the children and home (see also Pr 31). Paul also calls on women to 'bear children and keep home' (1 Tm 5:14), and to be 'busy at home' (Tt 2:5).

- *Woman as worker outside the home:* For woman to be 'busy at home' does not mean that she cannot work outside the home. In fact, Pr 31:10-31 depicts a woman who does well by working beyond her domestic chores - she works to care for her children, to support her husband's involvement in the community, and to seek to help the poor and needy (vv 20, 21, 23, 27). However, the woman's first calling in Pr 31 is not to seek her worth by pursuing a career, but to serve her family (vv 28, 29, 31).⁸⁴

⁸³ Though the master-slave relationship is mentioned together with the husband-wife and parent-child relationships by Paul in Eph 5:22-6:9, it is not because slavery has any permanent moral justification like the other two relationships. Paul is only addressing the master-slave relationship because it fits into the household setting of the day. Hence, each relationship mentioned by Paul in this text must be understood according to how absolute and permanent Paul has intended it to be (Knight 1991a:176-77).

⁸⁴ Some guiding questions for a working woman are:

Knight's thinking on marriage-family life can be wrapped up using his own suggestions on how male headship and female submission can be practically worked out in the following areas (Knight 1991b:350-51):

- *Decision-making*: The man must not give up his leadership role at home. But he needs to balance his leadership with honour for his wife as one equal to him in creation and redemption. One way for him to do that is to initiate the search for mutually agreeable decisions with his wife after discussion, prayer and studying the Word. In the absence of a consensus in any matter, the man exercises his leadership by making the decision, and the wife submits to that decision (unless it is intrinsically evil).⁸⁵

- *Caring for children and home*: The direct management of children and the home belongs to the woman (see 1 Tm 5:14 and Pr 31:26-27). However, it must be noted that the husband is also called to 'manage his own household well' (1 Tm 3:4-5), and to be responsible for instructing and overseeing his children (Eph 6:4). What this implies is that the man must not adopt a totally 'hands off' approach in home life. Rather, there should be mutual dependence and cooperation in home life without blurring the distinct roles that God has for husband and wife.⁸⁶

3.3.4 Craig Keener.⁸⁷ Keener argues for a socio-cultural reason as to why Paul deals more explicitly with woman submission in Eph 5:18-33. He asserts that there was a general mistrust of eastern cults, 'e g' the cult of Cybele and the cult of Isis, reflected in ancient Roman literature. Keener (1992:139) writes:

The Roman aristocracy felt that their power base increasingly threatened by social changes occurring around them. These changes included the upward mobility of socially inferior elements, such as former slaves, foreigners, and

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- Is it really beneficial to her family when she works outside the home?
 - Does working outside the home help her husband in his calling from God?
 - Does working outside the home bring good to others?
 - Can she work outside the home without neglecting her primary calling as wife and mother?

⁸⁵ For example, in matters related to work outside the home, it must be remembered that the man's work should take precedence over the wife's since his primary calling is to be provider and that of the wife is to be homemaker. Thus, when necessary, the man must decide that his wife stops work to care for the home, and she must be willing to submit to that decision.

⁸⁶ Knight (1991b:351) has this to say pertaining to the primary roles of husband and wife:

The direct care and supervision of the children is the specific calling of the wife/mother ... It would be unnatural in the normal family setting for the husband/father to assume this task and to surrender the task of 'breadwinning' to his wife. This is not to say that he is not to be as concerned and as involved in the training of their children as she is, but rather that he does so in correlation with his responsibility as the primary provider.

⁸⁷ Craig Keener is professor of New Testament at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Philadelphia.

women. Foreign religions were sometimes suspected of aiding what the aristocrats viewed as a subversion of the appropriate moral order.

Hence, it is not too far-fetched to surmise that the Roman elite would also have viewed Christianity as some kind of a foreign superstition that could subvert the morality of Roman women. Quoting a story by the ancient historian, Josephus, as to how a Jewish man had tricked a Roman woman to part with her money, Keener relates how this resulted in hostile feelings toward Christians - the wrath of Emperor Tiberius was aroused and he ordered all Jews to be banished from Rome. Henceforth, Christianity was regarded as a subversive, Judaistic cult in the Roman world (Keener 1992:141).

Keener (1992:142) also suggests that there was a great willingness for women in the Roman world to convert to Christianity. This 'turning of a wife from her husband's religion was viewed as an especially subversive ploy on the part of foreign religions.' Consequently, increased hostility toward Christians was aroused. Paul did not want the church to be viewed as an immoral cult, threatening the stability of families in the Roman Empire. Hence, he wrote Eph 5:18-33 with emphasis on wife's submission in order to quell anti-Christian sentiments in the Roman world.

The new freedom in Jesus Christ which Christianity advocated was also viewed as a threat to the Roman upper class. This elite group regarded such a teaching as a subversive attempt to change the socially accepted positions of slaves and women in the family. Keener (1992:145-46) observes this after studying various 'household codes' in ancient Roman and Jewish writings:

The family was held to be the basic unit upon which society was built ... Groups accused of undermining the moral fabric of Roman society thus sometimes protested that they instead conformed to traditional Roman values, by producing their own lists, or 'household codes,' fitting those normally used in their day.

It was likewise natural for Greek-speaking Jewish writers to dwell on the proper ways to act in various relationships. To the extent that they needed to

demonstrate their lack of subversiveness to Roman society, their use of household codes became all the more important. If they could demonstrate the 'orthodox' character of their family practices, they would have answered a critical charge levelled against them by powerful members of the surrounding society.

Thus, Keener (1992:147) concludes that Paul wrote Eph 5:18-33 to defend Christianity as a teaching that respected the cultural values and norms of the Roman world. He emphasised wife's submission in the text since it was an essential part of Christian witness in the then dominant Greco-Roman culture.⁸⁸ Paul was strategically appealing to the powerbrokers so that Roman hostility toward Christians might be reduced. His 'household codes' in Eph 5:18-33 were written as a 'long-range response to basic Roman cultural objections to the gospel' pertaining to the position of women, especially in the family.⁸⁹

What Keener has suggested is somewhat akin to the experiences of some Christians in Singapore, especially those from ethnic Chinese families. He says that the Romans had misunderstood the freedom that Christians enjoyed in Christ, and thus, had mistakenly branded them as 'subversive' to established family structures and traditions. He further suggests that Paul deliberately emphasised wife's submission in Eph 5:18-23 so as to correct this mistaken notion about Christians; to argue that Christianity was really pro-family, not anti-family.

Singapore is a secular country in which Christianity is one of the many religions, but not the major one in terms of numbers. However, Christians have contributed significantly in the areas of economics, government and social concerns. They do not have problem being accepted at the public, societal level. But at the private, family level, some ethnic Chinese Christians have been labelled 'anti-family' like the Christians in Paul's time as suggested by Keener. They are from homes where other family members, especially the parents who belong

⁸⁸ Carolyn Osiek (Jan/1996:2) of Catholic Theological Union concurred that this was in line with 'Hellenistic teaching and Roman sensibilities about the ordering of domestic life as model for public life.'

⁸⁹ Though individual members were free to have their own faith alongside that of the family, the exclusive claims of Christianity must have brought about much tension in the family, especially when the wife of a non-Christian man became a Christian (Osiek Jan/1996:15).

to the older generation, are not Christians. These older ones would brand Christianity as a Western religion since they view it as the faith of the white people, and by implication, not congruent to Chinese values.

Chinese values have a high regard for honouring one's parents. So do the teachings of the Bible. But there is one main reason why Christianity is mistakenly viewed as anti-family in some ethnic Chinese homes. In Chinese folk religion, there is a practice called ancestral worship. In this practice, dead ancestors are revered and worshipped. Such reverence and worship of the dead is closely intertwined with respect and honour for them. But while Christians have no problem respecting and honouring the dead for their lives and contributions, they cannot revere and worship them. They can only revere and worship God.

This position immediately clashes with an important tradition in ancestral worship, which is the offering of incense sticks to the dead at the family altar. Since this is not only an act of respect/honour, but also of reverence/worship, Christians would rightly refuse to comply with this traditional ritual in the family. Unfortunately, this refusal has offended other members in the family who charge Christians for lacking the virtue of doing good to their ancestors. Thus, they are being labelled 'anti-family' since they refuse to observe this important family tradition.

When Keener suggests that Paul emphasises wife's submission in Eph 5:18-23 to argue that Christians are really pro-family, it is akin to what some Chinese Christians in Singapore have tried to do. For example, instead of offering incense sticks to the ancestors, they would show their respect by observing a moment of silence at the altar. Another example is that of a home where the Christian has the power to make decisions in the family (such as the eldest son who takes over when the father has died) - this person may decide to replace the ancestral tablet on the family altar where the dead is worshipped with a photograph of the dead and a

plaque with Bible verses. This substitute can go a long way in reassuring the non-Christians in the family that the dead is still fondly respected and remembered though not worshipped; that Christianity is really not anti-family.

3.3.5 Leo Perdue.⁹⁰ Like Keener, Perdue also believes that biblical texts will be better understood when we study them with sensitivity to the related socio-cultural contexts. Both believe in going behind the foreground of the text in order to better understand the mind of the biblical writer.⁹¹

Perdue (1997a:163) points out that family life in Israel had been directly and indirectly impacted by other cultures, namely, that of Egypt, Mesopotamia, Canaan and the Hellenistic world.

Three features have been highlighted by Perdue (1997a:166-67) as major characteristics of family life in ancient Israel and early Judaism:

- *Household as family*. The family was multigenerational with two or more households, related by kinship and marriage, living together in a housing complex. Also, family structures were patrilineal (sons perpetuate the family line), patrilocal (woman married into man's family), and patriarchal (man as head).⁹²

- *Household members as economic contributors*. All members were expected to provide the needed labour for the survival of not only the household concerned, but of the whole family chain as well. The family that we know of in ancient Israel and early Judaism belongs largely to the rural, agrarian kind.⁹³

⁹⁰ Leo Perdue is professor of Hebrew Bible and dean of Brite Divinity School, Texas Christian University.

⁹¹ In Keener's case, he may have imposed too much deductions and implicit evidences into his interpretation of Eph 5:18-23 as he tries to reconstruct the scenario based on his research into the background of the New Testament world.

⁹² Osiek (Jan/1996:11) says the same about the family in the days of early Christianity:

Households and family units included children, slaves, unmarried relatives, and often freedmen and freedwomen or other renters of shop or residential property ... Household ownership and management was not restricted to a single nuclear group and its dependencies; there are known examples of houses owned and occupied by brothers ... each with his own dependents. Women headed households, too, both singly and with other women. Therefore, it would seem that, in spite of the strictly patriarchal legal structure of families, there was a great deal of variety in the composition of actual households

⁹³ Land was very important to the family because without it, the family could not exist as an entity and the household could not survive. Naturally, work and other aspects of family life were largely centred on activities in the land(fields) and in the household itself (Perdue 1997a:169-70).

- *Household solidarity.* Members relate to one another interdependently for the purpose of survival and continuity. Hence, group interest often preceded individual interest. This spirit of solidarity also embraced one's clans or tribes in order to impart a wider sense of community.

Gender roles in the family of ancient Israel and early Judaism can be generally specified in the following ways:

- *Males:* Their functional roles would include procreation, agricultural labour, education, judicial decisions, religious instruction and practice, and protection. The father exercised headship over the family till his death or he became physically/mentally incapable. Thus, even married sons and their families were to submit to the father's authority (Perdue 1997a:180).⁹⁴

- *Females:* Women were to submit themselves to men primarily as wives and daughters. However, women in biblical and early Jewish literature did demonstrate great influence over men, especially in the area of the home (see Pr 31:10-31). The woman was the one who would produce children to work and to be heirs. 'The mother's own economic tasks, beyond providing care, were necessary for family survival. She managed the household and loved and cared for her husband and children.' Hence, tradition and law required that she be respected and obeyed (see Pr 19:26; 20:20; Ex 20:12; Lv 19:3; Sir 3:1-16) [Perdue 1997a:181-82].

Perdue cautions that we must be aware of the limits of social history when using the Old Testament to explain family life for today. He (Perdue 1997b:244) said:

Yet to examine what the Hebrew Bible has to say about the family to contemporary, believing communities does not mean that an exegesis of biblical passages dealing with the household can lead directly to the formulation of absolutist, propositional, moralistic truths from scripture⁹⁵

In order to judiciously use the Old Testament theology of the family for today, Perdue (1997b:250-51) lists out three assumptions:

⁹⁴ Children were expected to honour their parents not only in terms of obeying them, but also caring for them in their old age and providing them with a proper burial at death (Perdue 1997a:190).

⁹⁵ The social history of Israelite and Jewish family life is limited because: the portrayal of the family as one knows it is incomplete; the family in Israelite and Jewish culture was dynamic and not static. Hence, it is unwise to understand the Israelite and Jewish family in the Bible by removing it from the socio-cultural moorings of its past.

- *A reconstruction of the social history of the family must first be done.* This is because the family in ancient Israel and early Judaism had gone through significant changes over a period of some 1 200 years.⁹⁶

- *An accommodation of these social understandings within a larger framework of Old Testament theology and ethics must be done.* Specifically, the family must be interpreted and understood in the wider theological context of covenant and obligation.⁹⁷

- *A critical evaluation of the Old Testament's description of the household must first be done before applying it to define the present.* One reason for this is that the socio-economic world today is so radically different from that of ancient Israel and early Judaism. The family then was largely placed in a rural, agricultural context, but the family today has been greatly impacted by industrialisation and technology.⁹⁸

In a nutshell, to better understand and apply the biblical teachings on the family for today, Perdue issues a call to exegete not merely the biblical text, but more importantly, to exegete the biblical text in the context of its socio-cultural world.

3.3.6 Rob Palkovitz.⁹⁹ Changes in the culture of fatherhood in America can be traced over four historical stages. Palkovitz (1996:313-16) outlines these periods as:

- *Colonial:* During this period, fathers acted as advisors and instructors in the bringing up and education of children. They were also the providers of material needs, controllers of properties, and even executors of veto power in matters of courtship and marriage. Fathers then were vested with great responsibilities and exercised great influence on children.

- *Industrial Age:* During this period, fathers invested much of their time and energy away from home. Hence, mothers became the key parent, but man was still 'head' by virtue of his role as the primary provider. In fact, 'being fully a

⁹⁶ Perdue believes that these changes came about largely out of practical necessity. He (Perdue 1997a:177) said: 'Perhaps it is best to say that the household in ancient Israel and early Judaism was both a pragmatic necessity and a traditional form that still allowed for some variations.'

⁹⁷ In the New Testament, some of Jesus' teachings seem to undermine family values for the sake of the gospel. For example, He taught His disciples to ignore the sacred duty of burying a dead father (Lk 9:59-60), to forget about looking back and saying farewell to one's family (Lk 9:61), and even to hate their family members (Lk 14:25-26). But all these radical teachings must be understood in the context of Jesus' new covenant with His disciples and their obligation to Him as their Lord - the cost of discipleship might sometimes demand that they must choose against family in order to be loyal to the Lord. In such times, they had to stand with and for one another as members of the Lord's family. Indeed, the 'boundaries of kinship are not removed but reset ... not so much by blood or social structures as by Baptism and Eucharist' (Osiek Jan/1996:22-23).

⁹⁸ Also, unlike today, the idea of the home as a place of privacy was alien to the function of the home in the days of early Christianity. In fact, the home then was not a refuge from work, but rather, it was an important place of commerce and hospitality (Osiek Jan/1996:12).

⁹⁹ Rob Palkovitz is associate professor of family studies at the University of Delaware.

father meant being separated from one's children for a considerable part of each working day.'

- *Twentieth Century*: The image of the father as provider of the family was even stronger during this time. Work took priority over family. It is said that as far as men were concerned then, 'success in the good provider role came to define masculinity itself.'

- *Contemporary*: Besides his role as provider, man today is called to be involved and to participate actively in family life. This new style of fatherhood has been termed 'androgynous fatherhood'. The androgynous father involves himself in a more intimate and expressive way with his children. He minimises the distinctions between fatherhood and motherhood, and those between sons and daughters.¹⁰⁰

But there are many barriers to the androgynous style of fatherhood today. Palkovitz

(1996:318-20) points out some of them:

- *Sense of incompetence*: Such feelings in caregiving inhibit the man from involvement because of the fear of failure. This in turn brings on a vicious cycle in that less involvement results in even less competence.

- *Gender socialisation*: Traditional masculinity has to do with being strong, independent, competitive, emotionally restrained and achievement-oriented. All these features are very much opposed to many aspects of involved parenting. For the man, to suppress these masculine features is to risk being ridiculed by one's male peers.

- *Work-family tension*: It is never easy to balance the demands of work and family. Many men choose to lean more toward their work because they want to provide well for their family members. Also, late marriages, which are common today, have resulted in many men becoming fathers at a time when they are trying hard to establish their career.

- *Cost-benefits considerations*: To spend more time with the family may require the man to work less outside the home. This reduction in working time may affect the economic and social standing of the family. Hence, involved parenting on the part of the man often depends on the values and aspirations of his family, especially if he is the primary provider.

¹⁰⁰ Max Stackhouse (1997:68), professor of Christian ethics at Princeton Theological Seminary, has this to say about the contemporary female mindset:

Women increasingly feel themselves to have callings in at least two covenanted communities: They want to be loving wives and mothers in the family and to be responsible producers and earners in the public world of work.

As work outside the home changed, work at home changed as well ... the adults living in the household shared a remarkable number of the tasks. While some things were differentiated by gender ... many tasks were gender-neutral

In the light of all these barriers, Palkovitz is of the opinion that though the culture of fatherhood has undergone changes over the years, the conduct of fatherhood remains very much the same. Though the contemporary context may call for androgynous fatherhood, the typical father today is still very much like the traditional father of old. In fact, Palkovitz (1996:320) comments that it is difficult to state with certainty at this point that more paternal involvement will indeed result in stronger homes.

To solve the injustices in family role divisions today, Palkovitz suggests the need to go beyond a superficial adjustment to the culture of fatherhood. He stresses that a deep-seated transformation in man and woman is needed whereby each can truly appreciate who he/she is before God. Only then can a person relate to God and others out of love - he/she obeys God not as keepers of God's laws, but as lovers after God's heart. When such a transformation takes place, 'people no longer need to focus on equity ... because by God's grace they are able to walk a truly other-centred, loving life' (Palkovitz 1996:324-25).

3.3.7 David Seamands.¹⁰¹ Richard Foster has pointed out that man has this tendency to find his masculine worth in power. He further comments that this use of power should be directed at serving others rather than being served by others. He calls this the power of servanthood, not of status. But while Foster sees servanthood as a positive expression of power, Seamands cautions that all this doing good for others can lead to something negative - falling into the performance trap. From a counsellor's perspective, he leads one to see how a

In fact, Stackhouse (1997:69) comments that, unlike the preindustrial days, it is now difficult to insist that man works outside ('e g' harvesting the fields) and woman works at home ('e g' cooking in the kitchen) based on biological and physical attributes. Technology today has made men more capable at domestic chores and women more capable at corporation work. And with the rise of dual-income families in America and the availability of professionalised caregiving sanctioned by government, Stackhouse (1997:74) sounds out this timely caution: 'The stewardship and guidance of the parent-child relationship and the modelling and intimacy it involves are not subject to the ordinary laws of political economy.'

¹⁰¹ David Seamands is a former missionary and pastor. He is now professor of pastoral ministries at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky. In this discussion on masculinity, his thinking will be used to respond to Foster's exhortation for men to value servanthood more than power.



performance-based life is often opposed to divine grace. Seamands (1991:28) claims that the performance orientation in many Christians is because they only believe in a theology of grace, but not live it out.

Identifying the barriers to grace in the lives of many Christians, Seamands (1991:31-33) points a finger at the following cultural trends:¹⁰²

- *Self-reliance*: This is the tendency to brag about one's independence and freedom from the need to be helped by others.¹⁰³

- *Individualism*: This encourages one to 'do your own thing.' Even religion is seen as just a way to discover and realise oneself, and not to experience God's grace and extend it to others as well.

- *Activism*: This stems from the spirit of optimism today which promises that 'you can do/be/get anything you really want to if you work hard enough.' Great performances, like good works and servanthood, are seen as the reasons why we are loved and accepted by God. This view is obviously opposed to the idea of divine grace which defines that all our doing should be responses to, rather than reasons for, our being loved and accepted by God.

The contemporary church is also not spared when Seamands (1991;35-38) charges it for preaching three 'false gospels':

- *Gospel of success*: A successful church today is often measured in terms of the size of its facilities, the amount of its annual budget and the numbers of people in attendance. The bigger these figures are, the more successful the church is deemed to be. Also, victorious Christian living is dependent on how actively or how well one performs in church ministries. Divorced people who suffer from broken marriages and elderly folks who cannot be more participative in church life are often marginalised as 'failures.'

- *Gospel of individualism*: The lack of a genuine atmosphere for meaningful relationships in the church has caused many to be hesitant to be known by others. The fear to share problems and weaknesses has resulted in many hurting people putting up an artificial and superficial front in church.

- *Gospel of legalism*: The heavy emphasis in contemporary preaching on keeping rules and laws has sent mixed messages of unconditional love and performance-based acceptance. These confusing messages have caused many

¹⁰² Though he is talking of the situation in American society, this writer can detect the same ills in the Singapore context.

¹⁰³ Seamands (1991:32) says this of the self-reliant spirit: 'The ideal of self-sufficiency ... causes many Christians to take the very means of grace and put them on the performance treadmill.'

to be frustrated because they do not feel being approved by God in spite of all their doing.

Seamands traces this bent toward performance-based acceptance way back to Eden in Gn 3:4. There, Adam and Eve refused to accept their human limitations. They wanted to be like God and be His equal. Seamands (1991:61) describes their folly this way:

But they tried to be *like* God, they not only failed to become *more* than they were, but actually became *less*. They could not achieve the glory and perfection that belongs only to God. Instead, they lost the only kind of perfection they had - a gift granted to them, as beings created in God's likeness.

Thus, man faced the disapproval of God at that point in creation history. And since then, being performance-oriented (perfectionistic) has signified his desperate attempt to regain his lost sense of approval before God and others. This desperate attempt to gain acceptance has resulted in what Seamands terms as a 'superself' image in man. This 'superself' image is characterised by three needs (Seamands 1991:99-102):

- *Need to be perfect*: The person tries harder and harder to please in order to secure love and acceptance from others. But he is never satisfied with his own performances, resulting in him always trying to live up to the demands of that 'superself' in him.
- *Need for a scapegoat*: In order to protect his perfect 'superself' image, the person has to shift blame on someone or something else. This often proves detrimental to relationships in his life.
- *Need to prove oneself*: This is the result of much anger and resentment in the person. His real need is not to be accepted by others by proving himself with a vengeance, but to forgive himself and others, and to experience the forgiveness of God. In other words, he must accept and develop his real self, and not try to show a false self of superiority/success.

Drawing from his own experience in counselling, Seamands concludes that many people suffer from low self-esteem because they engage in a 'comparison game which puts the stress on doing.' Their sense of worthlessness is the result of feeling that they have lost to others in this comparison game. Hence, a man with low self-esteem will say to himself, 'I am worthless and unacceptable and the things I do just reveal to others what I really am.' This is

tragic because it is not just a self-attack on his doing, but also on his being as a person (Seamands 1991:158).

Seamands draws attention to the fact that the sense of low self-esteem comes from within the person. Hence, it is futile to try and solve it with something external, like affirmation and recognition from others. Seamands (1991:161-62) prescribes healing grace, not better performances, as the cure for damaged self-esteem. He calls on the person to face up to the pain in him and his own reactions to it; to come to a deeper level of openness and honesty with God and himself concerning that pain. Seamands suggests that the worst pain be remembered, be relived, and most of all, be relinquished to God in forgiving, surrendering prayer for '*when God saw us at our worst, He loved us the most.*'¹⁰⁴

Basing on his own experience in counselling, David Seamands (1991:160) thinks that men are more performance-oriented than women. And many Christian men who seek to serve and do good to others have fallen into the performance trap. Seamands calls them not to exercise their masculinity by restlessly trying to prove their worth, but to rest in the worth already given them by divine grace. The man who pleases God is not merely one who performs well, but more importantly, he is one who has experienced profoundly that God has already accepted him by His grace. Thus, this man does things, and does them well, because he wants to express his gratitude to God and to extend His grace to others as well.

3.4 Chapter Summary

The insights and views presented in this chapter on success, marriage-family life and masculinity are not meant to be an exhaustive expression of the normative Christian traditions. Rather, they are drawn from various sources to give a cumulative Christian understanding of these topics.

¹⁰⁴ The feelings associated with the pain can be shared either alone with God or with someone else.

3.4.1 A cumulative Christian understanding of success. The salient assertions are:

- Success is to be and do one's best with all the opportunities that God has given. In the process, one is deemed successful when he/she has allowed God to be the leader and guide in all his/her being and doing.

- Success is also more than just being and doing well in material terms. It has to do with achieving the goals that God has for one materially, spiritually and morally. Indeed, success is not just the attainment of material blessings, but also embraces the responsibility to live for God spiritually and morally in one's world of abundance and opportunities. Material gains are not success if they are the fruits of greed and dishonesty. On the other hand, the honest and diligent worker receives the reward he deserves without shame, and should not even shortchange himself unfairly in material terms.

- The danger of material success is that it can lead to self-indulgence of the body. But the wellness of man's soul (immaterial) is more important than that of his body (material). In fact, money is not neutral as it has the power to be demonic in character and become a rival god. When this happens, the trust in God's sufficiency is replaced by the fear of material deficiency.

- Though material wealth brings with it a host of temptations, it is not to be despised because human beings are created to use and enjoy the fruits of this material world. The picture of life in Eden before the Fall is an attack on poverty and meagreness. It impresses upon us that abundance, fruitfulness, excess and delight are the divinely determined conditions for a full life. And in the observance of the Jubilee in the Old Testament, 'liberation of people from poverty was not the explicit and driving logic.' In fact, some of the poorest got nothing on the Day of Jubilee. In actuality, this observance symbolised the receiving of a life of abundance in the Promised Land. It was a time to keep and enjoy one's material blessings without shame and guilt. In Lk 19:9, Zacchaeus did not give up all his wealth yet he found acceptance in the Lord. Indeed, acceptance in the Lord is not to become 'poor in wealth,' but 'poor in spirit' as one realises his lack of righteousness before the Lord.

- Another example of 'godly materialism' is found in 'The Parable of the 10 Pounds' (Lk 19:11-27) which challenges one to be fruitful and successful in the worldly realms of wealth and power. Through these two means, one can advance God's Kingdom as he/she advances himself/herself. Material success must bring one to a higher level of awareness and action - to grieve and care for the unfortunate near him/her. The rich fool in Lk 12:13-21 was faulted not because of his possessions in life, but his philosophy of life. He made material success as his ultimate end and became poor in relationships. Hence, relationships are a person's bottomline and the real tests of his/her success.

- The belief that 'one would be contented if only there was a little more' is a myth because genuine contentment is rooted in relationships, not things. Hence, people are to be happy with what they already have materially. As far as God's perspective is concerned, success is not always having one's desires for things



as counterparts on the same side, not as competitors on opposing sides. Man and his wife are not to walk behind each other for there is nothing to hide from each other; they are not to walk ahead of each other for there is nothing to run from each other. But they are to walk beside each other because they are to stand by each other 'as long as they both live.'

- 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, and 'one flesh' with him. He seeks to reach mutually agreeable decisions with his wife, but in the absence of a consensus, he exercises his headship by making a decision, and the wife submits to it (unless it is intrinsically evil). The wife's submission to her husband does not mean that she stops thinking and acting out of her own initiative and creativity. Rather, in her willingness to submit to her husband 'in everything,' she is always desiring to share her thinking and acting with him. Just as Christ's headship over His church is for all time, man's headship over his wife is also for all time here on earth.

- In their relationships with their children, man and wife must remember that they are to be parents worthy of obedience and honour. They are not to provoke their children to anger or induce resentment in them with their words and actions. Also, worthy parents take the development of their children seriously. They do this by means of reproof, advice, encouragement and personal example. Disciplining and modelling are two great services a parent can render to his/her child. Indeed, it is in the home, not the church, that Christian education for children begins and continues.

- Worthy parents also maintain in focus their primary calling from God. For the man, his primary calling is that of breadwinner and provider (Gn 3:17-19). However, he is also called to 'manage his own household well' (1 Tm 3:4-5), and to be responsible for instructing and overseeing his children (Eph 6:4). This implies that the man must not be so engrossed in work life that he adopts a totally 'hands off' approach in home life. 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 involvement can genuinely benefit her family and others without undermining her primary calling to the home (Pr 31:10-31).

- There should be mutual dependence and cooperation in home life without blurring the distinct roles of headship and submission that God has ordained for husband and wife respectively. However, care must be taken when using Scripture to argue for these role distinctions as they may only be so because of the socio-cultural setting during a particular period in biblical history. Hence, the reason for such distinctions may be to reflect the identity of God's people in a positive way. Simply put, these distinctions may be just descriptive of desired/existing Israelite, Jewish or Christian home life at a time in biblical history, rather than prescriptive for all times. In the final analysis, man and woman need to observe their roles at home not as keepers of God's laws, but



servanthood. And as far as Jesus is concerned, a man actually diminishes himself when he focuses on self-elevation and forgets about servanthood.

- *Man of esteem by grace:* A low self-esteem comes from within the person. Hence, it is futile to try and solve it with something external, like affirmation and recognition from others. The cure for damaged self-esteem is to be found in God's healing grace, not in better performances or louder applauses. Grace calls the hurting man to face up to the pain in him and his own reactions to it, to come to a deeper level of openness and honesty with God and himself, and then to relinquish that pain to God in forgiving, surrendering prayer. Indeed, the performance-oriented man is exhorted not to work himself restlessly to prove his worth, but to restfully accept that worth is already given him by God's grace.

This cumulative Christian understanding of success, marriage-family life and masculinity will serve as a reference for the next chapter in which an attempt will be made to dialogue with secular thinking on the same subjects.

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.

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).

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

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.

- 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 purpose 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:

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.

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, exchange 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).

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 temporary¹⁵

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

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.

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.

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

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 competition 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.

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

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.
- Success is the reward of a few though the dream of many; excellence is available to all though rightly understood only by a few.
- 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.
- 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.
- To grow in *agape* love is not to try and outdo others so that you can glorify yourself.

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

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

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 Institute 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

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

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).

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 competitively 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 being⁴⁰

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

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

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 (Php 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

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

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

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:

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

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.

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

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 -

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:

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

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

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 different 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.

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 psychology 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

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 et 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.'

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

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 responsibilities 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

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

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 Clinical 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

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' -

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:

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 negatively 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.

⁷⁸ *The Straits Times (Home Section)* 15 November 2000. Make bold moves for the family, urge MPs, p113.



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. On 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 Christianity 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

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

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.

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.

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

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

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

⁹³ *The Straits Times (Home Section)* 18 November 2000. Christianity popular among Chinese here, p17. 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 corruption 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 Broolsma (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.
- 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. Broolsma 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 individuality 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.

- *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.

- *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.

- *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.

CHAPTER V

STRATEGIC PRACTICAL THEOLOGY: UNDERSTANDING WORK-FAMILY COMPLEXITIES FACED BY CHRISTIAN MEN IN SINGAPORE

5.1 An Opinion Poll: Attitudes of Married Christian Men in Singapore toward Work and Family

This opinion poll is not meant to be a comprehensive survey. Rather, it is aimed at getting an indication of some attitudes of Christian men toward their work and family. This exercise is carried out by using a questionnaire to test the validity of three assumptions (see Annexure IV). The three assumptions are: i) the Christian man's view of success is very much influenced by the achievement-oriented culture in Singapore; ii) the Christian man in Singapore cares much about his family, but he tends to do so materially rather than emotionally; iii) the Christian man in Singapore still holds to the traditional views of masculinity (see Chapter I, pp12-13). The target group is Christian men who are married and working, and have dependent children.

Two evangelical churches of different denominations were selected for this opinion poll because a high proportion of the men there can be categorised as 'average working men with young families'.¹ A total of 117 questionnaires were distributed and 60 completed ones were returned, giving a 51.3 % response.²

¹ These two churches will be identified as Church A and Church B. Church A has a congregation of about 300 worshippers while Church B has about 150.

² Of the 95 questionnaires distributed to Church A, 46 were returned. There were 14 responses from Church B out of the 22 questionnaires given.

5.1.1 Tabulation and interpretation of responses. Tables will be used to give a quick overview of the statistical data. Selected statistics will be given special mention and interpreted with reference to the three assumptions being tested.³

TABLE 12: Ages of Respondents

Age	No (%)
Below 25 yrs	0
25 - 35 yrs	6 (10%)
36 - 45 yrs	42 (70%)
46 - 55 yrs	12 (20%)
Above 55 yrs	0

An enormous 70 % of the respondents are between 36 to 45 years old. This is the stage of adulthood during which a man is either busy building on his career or reaching the peak of his career.

TABLE 13: Occupations of Respondents and Spouses

Occupation	Respondent No (%)	Spouse No (%)
Professional/Technical	28 (46.6 %)	7 (11.7%)
Business/Financial	6 (10%)	7 (11.7%)
Administrative/Managerial	10 (16.7 %)	9 (15 %)
Educational	5 (8.3 %)	2 (3.3 %)
Clerical	1 (1.7 %)	1 (1.7 %)
Others	10 (16.7 %)	34 (56.6 %)

Majority of the respondents are in professional/technical (46.6 %) and administrative/managerial (16.7 %) types of employment. This implies that they are generally earning good incomes and holding demanding jobs.

As for the spouses, many of them are classified under the 'Others' category (56.6 %). However, what is interesting is that most of the wives under this category are actually housewives/homemakers - 29 of them. This in turn computes into a high 48.3 % of the total number of respondents' spouses (that is, 29 out of 60).

³ The total number of respondents from both churches is 60.

barely in their teens - 48 % of them are between 7 to 12 years old.

The statistics do indicate that many of the respondents are reluctant to have more children. Though these men are generally well qualified with well-paying jobs, the demands of

the workplace as well as the desire for personal freedom seem to discourage them from having more children, even if their wives stay at home to do the caregiving. Also, the high percentage of children between 7 to 12 years old points to a great need for their fathers to be involved with them during these formative and impressionable years.

TABLE 16: Responses to Statements 1 to 4 in Questionnaire

Statement	Agree Strongly No (%)	Agree No (%)	Neutral No (%)	Dis-agree No (%)	Dis-agree Strongly No (%)
1. I compete with others so that I can stay ahead of them.	0	9 (15 %)	19 (31.7 %)	23 (38.3 %)	9 (15 %)
2. I compete with others so that I can bring out the best in myself.	6 (10 %)	25 (41.6 %)	16 (26.7 %)	9 (15 %)	4 (6.7 %)
3. I measure achievement in terms of getting the desired results.	8 (13.3 %)	35 (58.3 %)	5 (8.4 %)	8 (13.3 %)	4 (6.7 %)
4. I measure achievement in terms of experiencing the satisfaction of having tried hard.	25 (41.6 %)	24 (40 %)	5 (8.4 %)	6 (10 %)	0

These four statements have been designed to test the assumption that the Christian man's view of success is very much influenced by the achievement-oriented culture in Singapore.

Though majority of the respondents disagree that they compete to stay ahead (38.3 %), an almost equally high percentage of them choose to be 'neutral' (31.7 %). 41.6 % of them claim that they compete with the desire to bring out the best in themselves. This corresponds with the finding that most of them either agree strongly (41.6 %) or agree (40 %) that the satisfaction derived from knowing that they have tried hard is already achievement enough. However, what is really revealing is that 58.3 % of them qualify themselves by agreeing that getting the desired results determines their measure of achievement.

Summing up the whole picture, what may be implied is that there is this desire to work hard and to excel in one's undertakings. The motivation behind this spirit of diligence and excellence is not only to stretch and bring out one's potential, but also to get the desired results. These results are related to competing and winning over others though this motivation

may not be openly stated or verbally expressed. Thus, the findings do validate the assumption that the Christian man's view of success has been greatly influenced by the achievement-oriented culture in Singapore.

TABLE 17: Responses to Statements 5 to 8 in Questionnaire

Statement	Agree Strongly No (%)	Agree No (%)	Neutral No (%)	Dis-agree No (%)	Dis-agree Strongly No (%)
5. I work hard at providing well for my family so that they can be materially comfortable.	8 (13.3 %)	38 (63.3 %)	10 (16.7 %)	4 (6.7 %)	0
6. I work hard at relating closely with my family members.	20 (33.4 %)	32 (53.3 %)	8 (13.3 %)	0	0
7. I expect my family members to be understanding when work takes me away from them.	9 (15 %)	35 (58.3 %)	14 (23.4 %)	2 (3.3 %)	0
8. I enjoy doing things <i>with</i> my family more than doing things <i>for</i> them.	24 (40 %)	25 (41.6 %)	10 (16.7 %)	1 (1.7 %)	0

Statements 5 to 8 are designed to test the assumption that the Christian man in Singapore cares much about his family, but he tends to do so materially rather than emotionally.

There is a tremendous affirmation from the respondents in that majority of them support the importance of family intimacy. They either agree (53.3 %) or agree strongly (33.4 %) that they work hard at relating closely with family members. Besides, 41.6 % affirm that they enjoy doing things *with* their family while another 40 % even affirm this strongly. However, work is also important to the respondents, and 58.3 % of them have no qualms in agreeing that they expect their family members to be understanding when work takes them away from home. It does imply that these men view work life as having priority over home life. Another dominant figure is that 63.3 % of the respondents affirm that they work hard to provide well for their family materially.

The findings do reveal that family is important to many of the respondents. They try hard to improve the quality of their family life. However, they also value highly their work. In fact, work gets the nod when there is a clash of priority with the home. The reason can be

attributed to the fact that these men consider the provision of material comfort as their key role in responsibly improving the quality of their family life. Should they fail at work, financial hardship will creep in, and family togetherness and intimacy will only be an illusion. Thus, these men expect their family members to be understanding when they answer the demands from work because they are 'sacrificing' for family's sake. Again, the findings here support the assumption that the Christian man does care much about his family, but he tends to do so in material terms.

TABLE 18: Responses to Statements 9 to 12 in Questionnaire

Statement	Agree Strongly No (%)	Agree No (%)	Neutral No (%)	Dis-agree No (%)	Dis-agree Strongly No (%)
9. I fail as a man if I cannot be the sole breadwinner in my family.	12 (20 %)	14 (23.3 %)	11 (18.3 %)	19 (31.7 %)	4 (6.7 %)
10. I lead my family by sharing substantially in home responsibilities.	19 (31.7 %)	33 (55 %)	7 (11.6 %)	1 (1.7 %)	0
11. I fail as a man if I have integrity of character but no influence of control.	8 (13.3 %)	22 (36.7 %)	11 (18.3 %)	15 (25 %)	4 (6.7 %)
12. I lead my family by listening to their views before making decisions that will affect our home.	22 (36.7 %)	35 (58.3 %)	3 (5 %)	0	0

These statements are designed to test the assumption that the Christian man in Singapore still holds to the traditional views of masculinity. The findings here are perhaps the most 'eye opening.'

31.7 % of the respondents disagree with the traditional view that man is to be the sole breadwinner of the family. However, 23.3 % agree and 20 % agree strongly that they would have failed as a man if they cannot be the sole breadwinner. This means that a total of 43.3 % stand on the side of the traditional view.

As far as home responsibilities are concerned, 86.7 % affirm that they share substantially in these (31.7 % agree strongly and 55 % agree). This seems to contradict the traditional view that the home belongs to the domain of the woman. But there is a strong likelihood that these men are viewing home responsibilities not so much in terms of domestic

chores. Based on the findings already mentioned, it is likely that they are giving heavy weightage to their breadwinning role.

Though a high 25 % disagree that one fails as a man if he has integrity of character but no influence of control, 50 % affirm that a successful man is one who has both integrity and influence; character and control (13.3 % agree strongly and 36.7 % agree). Thus, virtue and power are both seen as important essentials in a successful man. The message seems to be this - a truly successful man not only gets things done, but gets them done the right way.

As far as decision making in the home is concerned, the respondents are clearly non-traditional. Unlike the traditional, autocratic head of the house who directs and expects to be obeyed, 95 % of them indicate that they adopt a consultative approach in family affairs (36.7 % agree strongly while 58.3 % agree). They are willing to listen to their family members before finalising any decision, especially in the major concerns of the home. This is a more democratic style of home management.

Interpreting the statistics here is not as straightforward as the earlier attempts. Though many of the respondents have indicated their choice of man as sole breadwinner, a significant number of them have indicated otherwise. It is also interesting that most of them have indicated that they help out substantially in home responsibilities. It is quite puzzling how being the sole breadwinner can afford them the time to help out substantially at home, unless breadwinning is viewed as a heavy family responsibility. Putting the pieces together, what may be implied is that breadwinning occupies a high place in the mindset of these men - if they cannot be the sole breadwinner, then at least the primary breadwinner. This of course is quite contrary to the rising trend of dual-income families in Singapore where even women contribute significantly to the family economy. But the Christian man seems to want to stay clear of this trend. It may be that man's role in breadwinning is viewed as the biblical pattern.

Also, majority of them have indicated that they believe integrity and influence go hand in hand. A successful man is not only one who knows what is right, but also able to correct what is wrong. Hence, just like the traditional male, the power to control in some sense is what makes many of the respondents feel masculine. However, when applied to the home situation, many are prepared to consult and listen to the views of their family members before any major decision. They still want that traditional 'last say' but are willing to say it only after a democratic process. They seem to stand for the belief that man is given sole headship at home, yet he is to exercise it by way of shared leadership with others in the family. Besides imbibing this idea from secular management, it is also likely that they are so convicted because they are either taught or understand this to be the biblical pattern.

In a nutshell, the Christian man as represented in the opinion poll seems to regard himself as a non-autocratic breadwinner in relation to his family life. Is the assumption that the Christian man in Singapore still holds to the traditional views of masculinity valid then? Using the poll as a preliminary instrument, one can say that it is not valid in the ethnic or cultural sense because non-autocracy in family headship is not traditionally Asian in perspective. On the other hand, one can say that it is valid in the Christian sense because being non-autocratic is consistent with teachings on male headship in Christian traditions.

5.1.2 Summary of conclusions. Based on the statistical findings in this opinion poll, some conclusions can be made:

- The Christian family man is generally a person with good education and holding a well-paying but demanding job.
- Though he can afford economically to bring up more children, he chooses only to have only one or two. This is because he is well aware of the demands in building up a family.
- The Christian family man is generally under pressure to compete and excel in his work. He is caught up in a culture that often presses for results in terms of not only doing one's best, but also winning over others. Thus, he is constantly tempted to focus on this-worldly pursuits and conquests.

- Though he values his family, he often does so in material terms. This then helps him to justify placing work as more important than family when there is a clash of priority. The challenge is for him to work on the emotional aspects of being intimate and nurturing at home.

- Being constantly influenced by a result-oriented and materialistic culture, the Christian man is generally quite confused as to how he can be a man of God and a man in the world at the same time. On one hand, he values earning power, control and the right to have the 'final say' in the workplace. On the other, he sees the need for non-monetary passion, integrity, sharing with and listening to others, especially in the home. The consolation is that while he may often be tempted to follow the world in his work, he tries hard to be 'traditionally Christian' as a family man - to provide well for his family, listen to them as their head, involve them in major decision making, and participate in family life.

All these conclusions point to some prevailing values that are influencing the mind and thinking of the Christian man in Singapore. To better understand the socio-cultural forces that Christian men have to constantly contend with in their work and family, data from qualitative interviews with some individuals will be documented in the next section. These interviewees are viewed as conversational partners sharing their complex stories.⁴

5.2 Conversational Partnerships: Understanding Work-Family Complexities of Some Christian Men

5.2.1 Environment of complexities. Singapore is called an 'unlikely nation' for good reasons. Her lack of land, natural and human resources are not favourable to her becoming a nation. But the fact that she has become not merely a nation, but a thriving one, makes her an 'exceptional state' now in existence. However, the lack of the same resources means that while her nationhood exists, her vulnerabilities remain. Hence, it is understandable that as far as the makers of national policies are concerned, living in Singapore must of necessity be pressurising.

⁴ In conducting and documenting these interviews, the approach taken is adapted from: Rubin, Herbert J and Rubin, Irene S 1995. *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.

No slowing down. When asked if it would always be like living in a ‘pressure cooker’ in Singapore, Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong answered:

It would always be in Singapore. You can’t slow down. If I may give an example. Let’s take the port of Singapore. Can you slow down? Why do you want to work 365 days a year and 24 hours a day? Slow down. Relax. Tanjung Pelepas will take over. West Port will take over. And then what do we become?

In this game, if you’re not No. 1 or No. 2, you are nothing.

So we have to be realistic.⁵

Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew also reminded Singaporeans of the vulnerability of the nation to economic and political shake-ups globally and regionally. Though the nation’s economy grew an unexpected 10 per-cent in the year 2000, he cautioned the people not to be complacent but to work harder: ‘... I’ve never gone for “Tomorrow will be a sunny day.” We work to make tomorrow a sunny day.’⁶

No over-protecting citizens’ jobs. To further underscore how hard Singaporeans are expected to work, the nation’s Trade and Industry Minister, Brigadier-General George Yeo, warns:

There’s always temptation in an economic downturn to say ‘out first with the foreign workers and protect the jobs for Singaporeans’. I would caution against such an instinct because the reason why we are attractive to many foreign investors is the assurance we give them that ... if they need engineers, accountants, cartoonists, if you can’t find them in Singapore, you can bring them in ... If in an economic downturn, we suddenly say, well, you are foreign, you go out first even though he may be doing a good job, this will unravel the reputation that we have built up painstakingly over the years.⁷

Work-related travel encouraged. In its 2001 World Competitiveness Yearbook, the Swiss-based International Institute for Management has ranked Singapore as No. 2 for

⁵ *The Straits Times* 24 January 2001. Face To Face With The PM, pH3.

⁶ *The Straits Times* 31 January 2001. 5 % growth probable, says SM Lee, p6.

⁷ *The Straits Times* 12 July 2001. Retrenching foreigners first will only hurt locals, pH7.

competitiveness for the fifth consecutive year. However, Singapore this time slips in two key areas - business efficiency and infrastructure.⁸

In quick response to this slip, the Government announced almost immediately that it would ease exit control measures for men who were reserves in the military, police and civil defence force. This would make it easier for them to travel abroad for work. Passport validity for these men would also be extended from nine months to ten years. Another significant change that was announced is the waiver of a monetary bond for youths who had yet to serve their national service, but had to accompany their parents abroad on overseas employment.⁹ This monetary bond used to be a banker's guarantee of S\$75,000 or 50 % of the parents' income, whichever is higher. With the announced change, a bond by deed and a legal agreement by the parents would suffice.¹⁰

Impact of work-related travel on wives. These concessions may sound good to men as they consider taking up job opportunities overseas, and which is one infrastructure value that the Government hopes to inculcate in people in its effort to keep Singapore's competitive edge. However, two academics have recently cautioned how the push for globalisation and regionalisation can affect the family adversely. In a study, Dr Brenda Yeoh of the National University of Singapore and Dr Katie Willis of the University of Liverpool have concluded that women in Singapore often end up losers when their husbands go overseas to work. For example, they cite that in two out of three cases, the family moves with the man when he goes overseas. This often means that the wife gives up her job to take care of the family in a new country. When she returns, she is often unable to find a job, and thus, goes on being a stay-at-

⁸ For business efficiency, Singapore fell from 6th in 2000 to 10th in 2001; for infrastructure, from 3rd in 2000 to 5th in 2001 - *The Straits Times* 25 April 2001. S'pore No. 2 again for competitiveness, p4.

⁹ National service in the military, police or civil defence force is for males who have reached age 18.

¹⁰ *The Straits Times* 27 April 2001. Easier travel for NSmen from May 1, p6.

home mother and wife. Consequently, the difference between men's and women's roles has been deepened, for better or worse.

Dr Yeoh said:

Inevitably, the regionalisation drive puts an extra burden on women - whether they stay behind for the sake of the children's education or they go along with their husbands.

Their households are women-centred as husbands become visible players in the workforce.

The go-regional policy becomes one that helps men more than it does women.¹¹

Challenge of 'woman power'. Benny Bong, president of the Society Against Family Violence and executive director of the Counselling and Care Centre, has this to say about Singapore men: 'Men struggle to cope with the fact that women are now income-earners, well educated, more confident of their own positions in life. Some men can't cope with the fact that women are making decisions about their own relationships and sexual life.'¹²

Stressed and restless young. Anthony Yeo, clinical director of Counselling and Care Centre, further points out another dilemma in home life:

Children feel they are not enjoying their childhood and worry too much about their studies to think of having fun, which is a fundamental element for parent-child bonding.

It does not help if one government ministry is promoting family life, while another seems to be demanding time and commitment to other pursuits that could work against family togetherness.

Perhaps a comprehensive approach is needed to send a clear, consistent message that family life is paramount. This may require some rethinking about upholding the constant striving for economic excellence.

There must be a way to experience a world-class home without necessarily having a world-class economy.¹³

¹¹ *The Straits Times* 25 April 2001. Wives lose out when husbands go regional, pH3.

¹² *The Straits Times (LIFE! Section)* 16 January 2001. Male Order, pL4.

¹³ *The Straits Times* 6 March 2001. Promote marriage in a realistic way, p19.

In fact, it has been reported recently that the competitive lifestyle has increased markedly the number of stressed up children (some even as young as pre-schoolers) seeking psychiatric help. The report says:

The number of young psychiatric patients multiplied 3 1/2 times between 1990 and 1998, and this trend will continue if the children's pressure-cooker environment does not change ... Most of the young patients have anxiety disorders and behavioural problems that stem from the fear of school, exams and failure. Two thirds of these patients were in primary school or pre-primary centres. Latest figure show that 20,000 children sought help in 1998, compared with just 5,600 in 1990.¹⁴

The drive to remain competitive and stay on top is also affecting the thinking of the young in Singapore. Today, there are some 450 000 teenagers who were born in the last millennium and growing up in the present one. These are known as the Generation-M. What are their values like? Below are some samples:

Christopher Lim, 18: 'My generation is definitely more self-centred than my parents', and that's because we have always been told to place ourselves before others, starting from school. There is also the need to be at the top.'

Elaine Chow, 19: 'I will probably not live in Singapore all my life. Not only do I want to see the rest of the world, I also do not feel any sense of belonging. I don't have much family here and, besides family, Singapore doesn't have very much to offer me.'

Goh Teow Lim, 17: 'While the country is prosperous, we are content to let the Government carry on without question. But if things take a turn for the worse, I don't think we would be able to make any political judgments. We wouldn't know how to, having never done so.'¹⁵

The overall portrait of these youths is that of an ambitious and self-centred generation. They grow up in homes and a culture whereby the drive to excel has material comfort and self interest as the highest stakes.

¹⁴ Commenting further on the situation, Dr Tan Chue Tin, consultant psychiatrist at Mount Elizabeth Hospital, says in the same report: 'The school system is very result-oriented. As a result, parents became anxious and push their children to succeed, sometimes beyond their means' - *The Straits Times* 2 March 2001. More S'pore children seeing psychiatrists, p1.

¹⁵ *The Straits Times* 3 May 2001. Goodbye Gen-X, hello Gen-M, p112.

Dr William J Doherty, professor of Family Social Science and director of Marriage and Family Programmes at the University of Minnesota, sounded this caution at the Singapore Family Forum 2001 organised by the Ministry of Community Development and Sports: 'We need a counter-culture to stop this capitalistic culture. We cannot abandon it, but we must contain the force of this culture. Families cannot be taken for granted.'¹⁶ Indeed, many Christian homes are not spared from the powerful influences of these values.

5.2.2 Profiles of conversational partners. The purpose of these conversations is to better hear and understand work-family complexities in the life experiences and stories of some Christian men. It is not the intent here to arrive at any definitive indicator. The conversational partners are of diverse backgrounds and have to deal with different work-family complexities in their everyday lives. They are between ages 40 and 50, sharing and reflecting on their experiences even as some of them contemplate reengineering their own lives.

TABLE 19: Profiles of Conversational Partners

Code	Age	Education	Occupation	Years Working	Wife's Education	Wife's Occupation	No. of Children (Ages)
M1	43	Tertiary	Teacher	22	Tertiary	Homemaker	2 (13,9)
M2	50	Tertiary	Estate Manager	28	'O' Level	Supervisor	2 (23,19)
M3	40	Tertiary	Auditor	16	Tertiary	Homemaker	3 (8,6,5)
M4	46	Tertiary	IT Manager	18	Tertiary	Homemaker	1 (12)
M5	41	Tertiary	Military Officer	21	Tertiary	Computer Programmer /Analyst	3 (14,11,3)
M6	44	'O' Level	Home-manager	26	Tertiary	Accountant	2 (16,13)

¹⁶ *The Sunday Times* 27 May 2001. When work is a threat to family values, p39.

5.2.3 Hearing the stories. The data gathered from the conversations can be categorised under four main themes - realities in the workplace; attempts in family involvement; alternatives in child caring and housekeeping; perceptions of success.

Realities in the workplace: There are some 'givens' which one must be prepared to struggle with in a meritocratic work culture that demands both diligence and excellence. Such struggles faced by the conversational partners are described below.

Competing to show results. Through the conversations, a number of stress-inducing factors in the workplace can be identified. One of them is that of competing to show results. M1, who is now a teacher in a secondary school, has spent almost 20 of his 22 working years in the armed forces. He says this as he looks back at his military days:

I had been with the military for 20 1/2 years. I was asked to do more project-oriented assignments. But I am more a relational and people-oriented person. Doing projects is not my cup of tea. Also, I had always wanted to teach. The military gave older soldiers like myself the opportunity to be a teacher ... to help them remain gainfully employed through a 'second-career' change.

M1 reveals that the big projects which he had undertaken usually required much logistics, and that he first began his military career as a counsellor. Recalling further, he adds:

I could be stressed out (by these big projects) and feel pressurised by these huge tasks. I felt frustrated in my soldiering career during times when I had to undertake big projects. I couldn't be entirely on my own anymore. I had to depend on others' support ... the outcome was not always in my control. I needed others to play their part too.

When I was working as a counsellor, the working relationship with my fellow counsellors was very cordial ... they were helpful. However, when I worked with people from another unit in a joint project, they were usually not very helpful ... were guarded and suspicious. This has to do with the fact that the military is a very rank-conscious organisation. Performances are important. People want to take opportunities to shine ... to compete.

But if competition is for the purpose of improving oneself, the system or the organisation, then it is healthy. But if it makes one become self-centred, selfish and indifferent to the welfare of others, then it is bad ... it affects relationships badly.

M2 feels that competition in the workplace will become increasingly intense in the days ahead. There is no running away from this 'rat race' as long as one is working in Singapore.

With a heavy heart, he laments:

The 'rat race' is very real in Singapore. We have no natural resources, except human beings. It is the fittest who will survive. If you have low education or any shortcomings, you better do something about yourself ... to catch up with other people.

The situation is even worse now - we have to compete with foreign talents who are working in our country if we want to keep our jobs.

It is difficult to move up by playing fair in this 'rat-race' society. Playing fair can even put you at a disadvantage. But I personally do not like to curry favour people in order to move my way up. Thus, the way I have chosen to move my way up is to go for qualifications - both in education and experience.

When I applied for the position of project manager in a construction firm, my friend was the boss. But I like to believe that I got the job based on my own merits - my previous experience as a senior project executive had given me the edge. My friend took me in not only because he knew me, but also because he was sure what I could do.

While acknowledging that competition in the workplace is almost unavoidable, M3 feels that he works better on the basis of cooperation. He describes his struggle this way:

Personally, I would like to do well through cooperation. But it is undeniable that competition will always be there - part and parcel of the working world. However, if competition is not something that I can control, but if it's healthy, then I can accept that.

Advancement is only for a limited few. Therefore, you have to make yourself stand out among your peers in order to be recognised by your superiors. So, you see colleagues, who are equal with you ability-wise, doing things that may seem not very ethical - using personal relationships; saying things about you behind your back; trying to gain favour by volunteering to do things on behalf of the boss. Such competition may seem unfair, but it may also not be wrong because people are only exercising their creativity in order to impress; to be recognised. Though I am not that kind of creative person, I accept that it is only reasonable for people to want to be ahead in life.

In the early part of my career, I enjoyed a good relationship with my peers. But when the assessment came, I was better appreciated by my boss ... I got promoted, and some peers began to talk bad about me because they had lost out.

On the other hand, there were times when my peers had worked hard, did well and were better appreciated by my boss. Initially, I didn't feel good but I had learned to accept it later. It is not natural of me to compete with that kind of intensity. But sometimes, I find myself doing it just to be part of the competing culture.

When you are with ambitious people, you find that they strategise how to achieve what they want. You need this kind of focused, competitive spirit to give you the edge with everything else being equal.

Looking back, my only disturbing question is this: 'How long will the company accept my kind of unconventional choice - that is - choosing to accept that having done my best is good enough for me?' Corporate conventions actually want us to compete to be the best. Hence, I think those who want to be less driven like me must be prepared to be by-passed and not complain about it.

While M3 has shared how he is prepared to pay the price for being less competitive, M4 points out that wanting to be more competitive involves a price as well. He tells the story of his pursuit to better himself in his working life:

I started work as a civil engineer with the Public Works Department after my polytechnic education. There, I came to see the real working world - interacting with people of different levels from technicians to contractors. I was assigned to the road division where I had to work under the hot sun in the day, and even doing night work if we had to avoid inconveniencing the day traffic.

I realised that this might not be the best place for me to work. It was not easy dealing with contractors - they were daily-rated workers, and that meant saying 'no' to them working on rainy days was to deprive them of a full day's wage.

I then decided to further my studies at a university in Montreal, Canada, in 1979. I went there wanting to further my engineering studies, and did a course in computer programming in my first year. I enjoyed this course very much because it was very analytical in nature - something I found both challenging and new. I also reckoned that computer skills would pave the way for me to more opportunities when I returned to Singapore. Hence, I switched from engineering to computer science after my first year.

The first job I took up on my return to Singapore in 1983 was with an oil company as an IT person ... IT is fast moving with lots of changes to be anticipated - the opportunities to learn and explore are challenging.

But today, on hindsight, it might have been too much to handle for me. Old technologies become obsolete quickly, but the need to keep changing and updated is the key challenge in the IT industry.

Besides being in demand and paying well, the IT industry provides challenges for self-development - that is - keep pace with changes; be innovative; maximise usage of resources; keep staff happy even as you stretch them.

But the demands are great because of tight schedules - you need to push people to the limit, and that's not the most pleasant thing to do. Also, the emphasis on results is always there - on time; within budget; meeting requirements. You must be prepared to put in additional hours if need be, including weekends and evenings.

When you are younger and eager to prove yourself, this kind of challenge may be what you want. But when age begins to catch up on you, and family commitment becomes more heavy, you may not have the stamina to continue to meet the challenge.

My present company, where I am doing project management, is an IT service provider. Therefore, the customer's interest always comes first - there's no way for you to stand still or slow down for your own interest ... you'll become irrelevant in no time.

M5 holds the rank of Major in the military, and has a somewhat different experience from the others. He works hard but does not feel the need to pressure himself to outdo other people. He shares:

I worked in the armed forces. Things are pretty structured - to put it bluntly, even if I don't do well, I still have my job. So, there's really no need for me to work for my survival in that sense - it's up to me as to how well or how much I want to do.

Yes, we do meet with all kinds of people here. But then, things are pretty structured here - we have command in place, and people are expected to obey orders. Another way to work is to persuade people until they understand.

But generally, people here are pretty well-disciplined ... there are consequences if they don't. This makes my job that much easier.

M6 has the most unusual occupation when compared with the others. He is a home-manager, or as he himself puts it: 'I am a full-time househusband.' His earlier experiences in the working world saw him go through three retrenchments. He sees himself as not so much a victim of competition, but of circumstances. He tells his story:

I started work young - after my 'O' level. Two years later, I was enrolled into national service. After that, I resumed working - my family was not well to do

and as the eldest child, I had to work very hard to help the family financially ... I hardly had time for leisure.

In 1978, I was retrenched as a manager with a fast-food restaurant because of an economic downturn. My next job was that of a storekeeper. But I experienced my second retrenchment in 1982 (I was married then). This then set me thinking ... I then decided to do a leadership course with a Christian organisation. After this course, I was recruited as an administrative assistant by this same organisation. In 1986, I again had to leave my job because the department that I was in had to be closed down.

I did not feel very down when I was first retrenched. But when I was retrenched a second time, I really felt depressed - I was then a family man and with no work, and with just an 'O' level education, jobs were not easy to come by for me. It was then that I decided to attend a full-time course in leadership for 6 months with a Christian organisation.

When I was retrenched a second time, I did some soul-searching. I knew that it was not because there was someone else better than me, or I was lazy at work. It was because the company was simply not doing well and had to fold up. In fact, I would consider myself a workaholic, always trying hard to work my way up.

Being pragmatic and not dogmatic. Another reality in the workplace is being pragmatic to accept what works. This implies that one must be flexible enough to change and adapt so as not to lose out; to survive in different environments. M1 shares his experience in his new career as a teacher:

I experienced a bit of 'culture shock' initially. I have been a teacher for more than a year already. The environment is different. Discipline is expected in the military, but my students are not so disciplined ... adjustment is needed on my part ... to accept things ... to change my mindset ... my style of communication.

M2 feels that it is not easy to stand firm on one's principles of right and wrong in the workplace today. He shares of two experiences in which he was sidelined because he tried to stand on his principles rather than to be pragmatic:

I started work as a technician in a statutory board in 1972. I spent 9 years there. I learned much about estate management - how to deal with people, contractors; how to meet the needs of occupants of buildings; how to be submissive to my boss; how to attend to the public. I soon found out that I was quite weak in the area of public relations. But I was not given any grooming in this area. Until today, this is still my weak area.

On one occasion, some people complained about illegal hawking in a certain place which was under my charge. I wanted them to be specific, but they tended to exaggerate things. That caused me to lose my temper and I became very unfriendly. I was told off by my senior who then took over the case and attended to the complainants.

Because of my hot temper, I was easily irritated. I was young then, only about 20. But I had wanted people to be truthful and not exaggerate things. My senior was actually trying to cool down the situation.

We were a public service company; we were not to antagonise our clients ... the customers are always right. But I thought then that this was not fair to us. On the other hand, if we were to sell our services, then we would need good public relations.

On another occasion some years later, I clashed with my immediate boss - the property manager - when I was a property officer with a private firm. He then complained to the GM about me. So, I had to tell the GM my side of the story. The property manager accused me of sabotaging him.

The clash was over the matter of getting competitive quotations for some renovation works. My boss, the property manager, was getting only his friends to quote ... I felt that he was only favouring his friends ... other people were not given the chance to tender. I disagreed with him over this; I was not happy with him.

In the end, it was clear that one of us would have to leave the company. My property manager had an advantage over me - he had a higher qualification - a degree - while I had only a polytechnic diploma.

I felt that it would be very miserable for me if I continued to work for a boss whom I could not see eye-to-eye. I decided that the best thing to do was for me to resign.

But after some hard knocks in the workplace over the years, M2 agrees that he needs to be more realistic and pragmatic in life. He admits:

When you are younger, it is easier to change or switch jobs. But when you are older, such a change or switch becomes more difficult ... you have to be realistic here.

So, an older man like myself must learn to change himself instead of his job ... change the way you think, do things ... learn and try new things, like IT.

Of course, your level of qualification does help ... no high qualification, the situation will be more difficult for you. But again, you have to be realistic ... about the economic situation for example.

M5 can empathise with the reality that standing on what you believe has a price on one's career advancement. His own experiences with different superiors in the workplace go like this:

I have all kinds of superior - the caring and concerned ones, and the task-driven ones. I have no problem even with the task-driven ones because working hard is not a problem with me. My problem is with bosses who are political - you don't know what's on their mind even if you've worked hard.

I had such bosses before, and those times were difficult years. I didn't quite know what to do with them, except to cling on to what I believed was the right thing to do.

For example, I once had this boss who told me this: 'Working hard and delivering results are important. But playing hard with people is equally important.'

To him, to play hard with people is to join them in heavy drinking and other activities that I think are not right to my own convictions. As far as this boss was concerned, I was not doing well because I didn't join in these activities.

In the case of the family of M6, pragmatism rules as well, especially since his wife has a stronger earning power than he. In fact, the decision for him to stay home and for his wife to work outside was very much on pragmatic grounds. Looking at his family situation at that time, he decided not to stick to the old tradition of 'man works outside and woman stays home'. He explains:

My first child, Samuel, was one year old then, and was not in good health - he had asthma. My wife and I felt that one of us would have to remain at home to take care of our young son.

My wife was an accountant and it was difficult for her to give up that profession. We talked and prayed about the matter. We both felt that I should be the one to stay home.

I have since become a househusband until today. But for the past 7 to 8 years, I have also been a part-time taxi driver ... allows me to work flexi-time and to have time for our children as well.

Work above family. Though M1 is now enjoying more predictability in his work as a teacher, he remembers those times in the military when he had to put work above family. He

recollects that there were times when he had 'to be away from home for a day; a night; even a week if it was an overseas trip.' 'There were times when I was asked at the last minute to stay back to work,' says M1 and adding, 'I remember one occasion when I had to miss a family function because of this ... and felt very bad about it.'

M3 tells of a time when he made the deliberate choice to forego an opportunity for career advancement. He admits that this means that he will be by-passed when opportunities do arise in the future. However, he realised then that 'to take up that opportunity would take up too much time from me, even time from family.' 'I reckoned that this would not be healthy in the long run both for myself and for my family,' concluded M3.

Indeed, the refusal to put work above family must be carefully considered because of the interplay of roles and responsibilities in these two areas. M3 has this to say:

The struggle has always been how to balance my roles as worker, provider, husband and father. I am very conscious of all these roles - what will be the implications if I overemphasise on one of these?

For example, if I want to be the father whom I should be, I have to check how far I want to be a good worker in terms of taking on work load. On the other hand, I realise that if I am not a good worker, my career will be affected, and I will then not be a good provider. I see the need to keep a balanced interplay of all these roles and responsibilities.

M5 also has to deal with the need to travel in the course of work and with longer working hours from time to time. These demands inevitably affect family life. But he takes comfort in that he does not have to work harder and longer hours over prolonged periods. However, he answers the call of these demands with a positive attitude whenever it comes. In a matter-of-fact manner, he says:

My work is supposed to be from 8 am to 5.30 pm on a normal day. But to be realistic, I normally leave home not earlier than 6.30 am and return home not later than 6.30 pm.

My work also requires me to travel. In fact, 4 years ago, I had to be away in Russia for 6 weeks ... on the average in the last few years, I had to travel 3 to 4 times a year, each time for about 1 to 2 weeks.

I also get assignments that require me to work harder at certain times - for example, we were involved in the National Day Parade last year. But things have been quite manageable except for the occasional peak periods.

My wife and my two older kids have been understanding when I have to handle these peak periods ... the youngest one is still too young to miss me too much even when I'm away.

By God's grace, I don't have to work long hours for prolonged periods. In fact, my wife's schedule is right now more demanding than mine. If I don't check her, she'll come home after 8 pm every night!

Attempts in family involvement: The meritocratic work culture in Singapore naturally demands much of the working man's focus and attention. Hence, how much to be involved in family life does pose some uncertainty and confusion to him.

Desiring understanding from family. M1 takes his career seriously. But when work takes him away from family time, he seems to feel a sense of uneasiness. On the other hand, he also expects his family to understand his situation. He tells of his struggle here:

When I promised my children to be home for some play together, they really looked forward to my coming home. But when I told them later that I had been held back and could not be home to play with them, they were obviously disappointed.

I had broken my promise to them. I could sense their unhappiness, but I tried to explain to them. I then learned not to make promises to my children so readily.

Yes, there was a time when I unwittingly communicated to my family that they were not so important because of my enthusiasm to complete a counselling case. I was guilty of putting aside family. My kids could sense that I was shifting my priority from family to work. My wife also felt that I was overenthusiastic and overcommitted in my work.

But sometimes, it is just a case of bad timing - things happen at work just when the family needs you. However, my wife had been generally supportive of me. She could understand that as a counsellor, the nature of my work would demand irregular hours. Also, as a Christian wife, she subscribed to the biblical teaching of being submissive.

M2, whose wife is working, is also one who desires understanding from his family when he is faced with work-family conflicts. When asked whether work demands or family

needs are more important to him, M2 confesses: 'It depends on the

needs are more urgent at that point in time, then I'll put family first. But if the work cannot wait, then I'll see ... I'll see if my wife can handle the family need without me. If she can't, and the need must be attended to without delay, then I'll have no choice.'

M3 hopes that his family will understand that 'there will be peak periods during which I will be really stressed and strained.' 'Providing emotional support to the family during these times will be at a low point. But when the job becomes better managed, the emotional support from me will be more forthcoming,' M3 admits. Thinking a little deeper, he shares further:

My wife is very serious about my involvement in the family. In fact, she will openly remind me of this if I am spending too much time in my work. This may seem like nagging on her part, but it certainly helps me to keep things in perspective.

Of course, the usual frustration is that her reminding me seems to indicate that she doesn't understand the stress and strain that I am going through at work. We do have heated arguments because of such work-family tensions from time to time. But from hindsight, I think my wife has been a good indicator - telling me not to carry things at work too far at the neglect of our family.

Breadwinning and bonding. All the conversational partners have no problem accepting their role as head of the family. As head of the family, they see the importance in ensuring that the family needs are well met, especially the material ones.

M1 shared this with strong conviction when asked about his involvement in family life: 'Scripture says that I am to be the leader of my family and head of my household. I need to set an example for my family - in terms of being responsible for the material welfare of my family and the educational needs of my children.'

When further asked how he attempted to meet their emotional needs, M1 paused and then went on to say: 'My training as a counsellor has helped me to be a good listener to the concerns of my family members. I also take time to talk with my children while doing things together. I talk with my wife while dining and watching television together.'

M1 is also especially convinced that man should be directly involved in the breadwinning aspect of family life. He stresses: 'It is a matter of responsibility that man takes his role as breadwinner seriously. When I married my wife, she was already earning more than I. But who earns more is not really an issue with me. What's more important is what we do with the income we have; how do we spend it wisely. What's important to me is that I still have a part in bringing in money for the family.'

M2 is one who always challenges himself to work his way up. In the early years, it was more a way of proving his own potential. But when his children came, a new emphasis was added - to provide well for their material and educational needs. M2 recalls: 'I wanted to compete and climb up fast. But in those days, promotions were based on seniority - unless your senior was promoted, there's no way for you to take over his place. That's why I left my technician job and took up further studies ... I needed more money when my children came.'

While M2 focuses much of his story on the material well-being of his family, M3 feels that the emotional bonding among family members is important too. He enlightens: 'For me, emotional support for my family is in the form of interacting with the children - talking to them about their day. Also, I check with my wife about her day with the kids ... about their behaviour ... including household and maid issues and see how I can support her. In addition, I use family time on weekends to bond with my family - going to church together, interacting with other Christians, shopping ... and doing other things together.'

M4 has begun to ponder on the need to be a father-mentor as he observes the growing-up pains in his teenage son. Though still very much bound to his work as an IT manager, M4 thinks aloud of his desire:

Melvin is in his teenage years now. He is a people-person. He wants a sense of belonging when he is with people, and needs to feel accepted by them. Hence, it is important that he has a good foundation to help him handle peer pressure.

I would like to help him develop in certain character traits and values. At this point, my work has not allowed me to do so. But I do spend time playing with him - badminton, ball kicking, chess ... this helps to build bonding between us. Now, we even hug each other and call each other as 'friend'.

I am equipping myself through reading and seminars on how to impart values to him as his father. But as I have admitted, I do not have much time at this point to really get down to doing it.

I am not too sure if Melvin had felt the lack of a father figure in the past. But today, I do see the need for greater involvement on my part in his life. I think it is important to leave behind a good Christian legacy to my child - to cultivate a lifestyle of knowing God's call for you, and living out that call as a mission in your life.

Talking on the subject of a Christian legacy, M4 also wants to communicate more with his wife about journeying together, and to create a climate of family worship. He adds:

My wife and I are considering how we can be more involved in touching lives. She feels a strong call to work with children ... I am not too sure of my own passion as yet. But we need to see how we can fit into each other's passion. At this point, we need to communicate and pray more together.

As a family, we also need to make deliberate efforts to spend time together. Being first-generation Christians, we were quite ignorant of the need to build up a good Christian heritage in our family life - we did not have family worship time or things like that when we first started our family. Besides, the demands of work have always undermined the priority for the establishment of Christian rituals at home.

To sum up, I think a strong family life should include the following features:

- strong bonding
- good character building as reflected in the moral values of parents and children
- good economic management - that is - living within your means because material possessions do not bring economic freedom if we are overwhelmed by financial debts
- willingness to share and help others outside the family instead of being self-centred.

M5 is one who makes spending time with his family a very deliberate and consistent duty the moment he goes 'off duty' from his command position. Moreover, unlike the other conversational partners, he has a very strong family worship life at home. M5 enthuses:

I spend a lot of time with my family. In fact, the whole night is with them and for them once I reach home. This is the priority I give to my family. That's why I don't go for 'happy hours' except for the annual special celebration or event.

As I've said, my wife is busy during this period with a project that will stretch from this year till next - this makes it even all the more important for me to spend time with my children ... at least one of us must do it, but better still if both of us are there.

Dinner is usually over by 8 pm. I'll then take the youngest child and be with him till he sleeps. I'll read to him using the Bible and books that I have borrowed from the library ... at least he develops the discipline of sitting down and listening.

For the two older kids, I'll give them time when they need coaching. They are to come to me when they need help from me.

We also have family worship - devotion, singing and prayer as a family. But we don't have all these elements together all the time. Sometimes, we just have 5 minutes of prayer. On the average, we have family worship three times a week. A long session will be one hour while a short one will be 5 minutes.

We put a lot of emphasis on family worship. As a father, I make it a point to record down our prayer requests and answers ... this helps the family to see how God is working in our family.

My oldest child, Jonathan, was baptised last Sunday. This is one way we see the fruit of our labour in family worship over the years. For my wife and I, parenting is our responsibility. We are to take care of our children's material and spiritual well-being. This is not the primary role of the maid, or even the church ... we as parents are to teach our own children.

Seeking consensus in family decisions. The men do not portray themselves as crusaders of male dominance in the area of making decisions at home. In fact, all of them are very ready to consult with their spouses on family matters. As M1 puts it:

I am a person who prefers consensus ... I like to discuss matters. I don't want to dominate in decision-making. I would prefer to arrive at joint decisions with my wife on important concerns. If we cannot agree on something, I would prefer to differ the final decision till a later time ... examine why we cannot agree. When the matter at hand is appropriate to my children's ages, I would also allow them into the decision-making process.

M3 confesses that he is not a very decisive person. But knowir

major family decisions, he leans 'more on consensus and delegation in our family decision-making process.' M3 adds: 'My wife and I do discuss and agree on certain basic principles in relation to the disciplining of our children which either of us can carry out. In matters pertaining to finance, I do have the final say. My wife's contribution is more in the area of our children's behaviour and upbringing.'

M3 then continues to relate one precious lesson he has learned about his fathering role:

For 7 to 8 years, I was under the impression that it was my wife's responsibility to pass on good values to our children. But I heard a preacher one Sunday who challenged us with this question - 'What kind of spiritual legacy do we want to pass on to our children?' He made it clear that the father was to be the key person in this passing on of spiritual values to the children.

I then took it as a personal challenge - today, I am doing more Bible reading and explaining Bible lessons to my children ... I want to let them know that it is their father who has to take the lead in imparting good, Christian values to them.

My wife complements me very well because she spends more time with the children than I - she will feedback to me how our children are learning to apply those values.

I think my ignorance in the past concerning this matter has to do with the fact that I was brought up in a traditional Chinese family - where it is the mother's responsibility to teach values to the young.

But now I know I'm the leader in this regard, and together with my wife's help, I think this is a better proposition than what I had thought in the past.

Discussion is also the way M5 and his wife resort to in major family decisions. Though a senior military officer himself, M5 has never used his position as head of the family to command his wife to obey him. He describes their decision-making process this way:

My wife and I talk and pray over our family decisions. We also look at what's happening in our family. We acknowledge that as the husband, I am the head of the household ... my wife knows that and she's my helper. Together, we work out what we want for our family. My wife respects what I want to do for the family as head, and I respect what she wants to do as my helper.

For example, she wanted earlier to stay home for about a year when our second child was born ... but it didn't work out well for her. So, we try out things and make adjustments together. The important thing is to have time for our children, for each other, for friends, and for extended family members.

I believe strongly that as head of the household, I am responsible to take the lead and to act with my wife as helper. It is not a matter of telling her what to do, but hearing from her ... the wise thing is to listen to her; to get feedback.

There is this sense of mutual support and respect. I have never understood that a wife cannot work outside the home. I respect and honour my wife's need to be fulfilled as a person ... to allow her the choice to do what she wants as a person. Also, I have never understood that housework is only my wife's job. I'll help in whatever housework that needs to be done though we do have a maid.

As the only non-breadwinner among the conversational partners, it is interesting to hear how M6 heads his family and how his children view him. He has this to say:

Even though I was not the breadwinner, I did not lose my headship and leadership at home. Yes, my wife is the breadwinner, but I am the one running the finances because all the money comes to me. In other major decisions, we discuss them with each other.

Making the decision to be the home-manager does not seem to affect my children negatively ... not in their attitude toward me. In fact, it seems that what they enjoy is to have a parent full-time at home, regardless of whether it is the father or the mother.

In 1986, my wife made the decision to take one year of no-pay leave to stay at home for the family. This allowed me to be a full-time taxi driver for a year. But in the end, it seems that my children preferred me to be the one full-time at home with them!

This decision for me to stay at home for the family and children is mutually agreed between my wife and I. It was basically a practical one when we first made it - our son needed one parent to be with him full-time at home because of his asthmatic condition when he was young; the cost of living was rising rapidly; if we needed to depend on one income, then it would have to be my wife's since she was earning more than I.

However, if I am earning more and if my wife doesn't mind staying at home, then I am most happy to be the breadwinner. In fact, my wife has told me that since our children are now more independent, she wouldn't mind me doing some regular work. When my daughter enters her 'O' level in three years' time, I may seriously consider this. But right now, I am happy with the way things are.

Factoring children's needs into wife's full-time vocation. Should wives be working outside or be staying at home to care for the children? The men have no strong objection against their wives working - but not at the expense of their children's well-being. In fact, whether the wife works or stays home would depend how this affects the children.

M1's wife is professionally qualified, but she is now a homemaker and only freelancing as an accountant. He tells why:

My wife stopped work when our second child came. It was about 9 years ago. The reason being she wanted to give more time to the family. Moreover, our older child was about to go to primary school. Well, it does seem that taking care of family demands can be stretching for her as well.

On my part, I will take care of all the housework - cleaning up, washing dishes ... and all that. She will take care of the children's homework ... some sort of division of labour, but I am not doing the cooking ... she still cooks for the family.

I have learned to enjoy this since I can free her to take care of the children's education. Yes, much of the success of our children's education is due to my wife's contribution. And I have indirectly contributed to this success too by freeing her to do this.

Success of my children in their education is in terms of getting good results and going to a good school. But we realise that the child's ability is also important - we help them and they do their part.

My older son is very motivated, ambitious and self-competitive - he knows what he wants and he tries hard. He is now in the top secondary school in Singapore. If he can't be there, I think he would probably be more disappointed than us. We have to teach him to manage his own expectations.

If our children's education is at stake and they need help, dual income may not be the best thing. I would prefer my wife to support them by stopping work ... but she can still work part-time.

If the children are progressing well in their education and more independent, and if my wife wants to return to work and the opportunity comes along, I would support her decision to do so. But when the children are young, I would prefer my wife to be at home. She can return to work when time is right because I know she needs to develop herself as a person too, and not necessarily for the finance.

M2 has a dual-income family. Both he and his wife have been working since they were married. The main reason for this arrangement is finance - they want their children to be well provided for, especially in their educational needs. As M2 shares of his family situation, one can sense some regret because he would have preferred his wife to be at home with the children in their younger days. He reveals:

When I got married, I was hoping that my wife could stay at home to care for the family and raise the children in the biblical way. But when the children came. I realised that my income as a technician was not sufficient for the family. Hence, my wife had to continue working to supplement my income.

In fact, my wife had been working all along. She started off as a factory operator in an electronics firm ... the pay was low ... she was retrenched after 20 years. She then went to work in the service industry until today and is now a supervisor.

Both of us had to be working because our children were small and we needed the money for them. Now, they are much older ... but they still need our financial support for their studies.

But my personal preference is for my wife to stay home and care for the family and children's needs ... not so much because it is a biblical instruction. But I think that this would be the ideal arrangement - I work outside and she stays home for the family and children.

But in my circumstances, I had no choice ... my wife had to work even when the children were young ... but if I had the choice then, I would prefer her to be home for them.

But I am not against working wives. If I have the money to meet family needs and if my children are older, and if my wife wants to work for her sense of fulfilment ... I would be very happy to let her do so.

M3's wife once worked as an IT professional. Though she was still working when their first child came, she is now a homemaker, and has been so for the past 6 years. M3 talks about how that decision came about:

When our first child came. she was actually feeling guilty that she had to continue working. At that time, it was I who persuaded her to keep her work until we were more financially comfortable with one income. At that time, we had my father and a maid to help us out when both of us were at work.

When our second child came, she stopped work and has since stayed home to mother the children. But I must admit that to have my wife as a second income earner has always been attractive to me - it takes the load off me as the sole breadwinner.

I do realise too that for my wife to stay at home all the time with the children can be very stifling to her own personal development and fulfilment. It is important that she knows what is going on outside the home environment; that she interacts with other people; that she feels a better sense of self-worth.

Therefore, my wife has been doing part-time work since three years ago - she is an IT administrator in my children's school. This allows her to be well informed about our educational system, and prepares our children to meet the demands of the system accordingly. She enjoys it, being able to meet up with other people ... I'll let her have the final say as to whether she will return to full-time work in the future.

M3 and M4 share common features in that both have wives who are tertiary educated yet prefer to be homemakers. Like M3's wife, M4's wife also believes that her role is very much with child caring at this point in time. M4 says this of her:

We are only a family of three. Melvin is our only child because we are biologically not able to have another ... but it makes our single income a viable arrangement.

My wife stopped work when Melvin came. Anyway, she had never enjoyed herself in the working world. Rather, she prefers to help and interact with others in a non-employed capacity.

In Melvin's early years, my wife was the one who taught and imparted values to him since she was with him most of the time. This did strengthen the bond between mother and son.

Unless for economic reasons, she is not making any deliberate effort to go back to full-time work. However, she still feels fulfilled because of her involvement, interaction and networking with other people not as an employed worker, but as a concerned person. But should she one day decide to return to full-time work, I will not stop her from doing so.

For M5 whose wife is a computer programmer/analyst, the decision to continue working is one that has been carefully considered. How his wife feels about staying at home and how the children are progressing are important factors. M5 shares how he and his wife have arrived at the decision for her to continue working:

When our second child, Sarah, was born, my wife and I talked and discussed about how best to manage the family. We gave something a try - my wife stayed at home for about a year. She realised that that was not what she would want to do. She felt that she could be more productive working outside the home ... socially fulfilling for her and financially helpful to the family.

But we also looked at how our first two children, Jonathan and Sarah, were growing up ... we believed then that they were doing well (and even with our youngest child, Andrew, today) ... that both of them could manage well even with both of us working. In short, we are happy with the way we have trained and taught our children even though we are both working parents.

Alternatives in child caring and housekeeping: All the conversational partners have experienced using maids and/or grandparents as alternatives in child caring and housekeeping. They tell of the pros and cons of using these alternatives.

Maids. Though not denying the helpfulness of a maid in the home, M1 shares his reservations:

When our first child came, we had a Christian maid. But we realise that if we leave the maid to care for the housework and child, something is missing. The child may think that life is all about being served by a maid.

But the maid was helpful initially because my wife was adjusting to the new birth. Imparting good values to children is important in the long run. Help from maids and child care centres is only good at certain times when such support services are needed for family adjustments to changes. In fact, we put our first child in a child care centre for 3 to 4 years.

But we saw him picking up some bad values ... vulgar words, rudeness to parents ... probably by observing other children's behaviour. As for the maid, she can be helpful in housework, but don't depend on her to impart parenting values to the child. The tendency is that when a maid is there, we leave everything to her ... relax and not do our part.

M2 has no experience of having a maid in his family. But he stays on the negative side when asked how he feels about maids: 'I have learned from friends that children tend to pick up the (wrong) values of their maids. These helpers often give way to the children who then grow up without learning to respect people. Even worse, maids may abuse your children when you are not around - this has been reported from time to time in the papers.'

M3 has a maid at home. He agrees with M1: 'The maid can never take the role of the parents. My wife feels strongly about this. However, the maid can offer useful help in the housework, allowing my wife to parent and teach our children.'

Though his family has never had a maid, M4 confides his feelings when asked to comment:

We have never felt the need for a maid. But from my in-law's experience, I do acknowledge that a good maid is a great source of help at home, specifically with the housework and freeing others in the family to attend to other concerns.

But maids also spend a lot of time at home with the children. So, whether we like it or not, some of their values can be directly or indirectly imparted to the children.

Also, how adults treat their maids at home will in turn influence the way children regard these helpers.

Whatever it is, the responsibility of child upbringing rests with the parents, not with maids or grandparents.

M5's experience with a maid at home is largely a positive one. He describes the maid's role:

We have a maid. When my wife and I are at work, she is the person-in-charge in that she takes care of the housework. In the morning, she will prepare breakfast and then cook lunch for my two older kids when they return from school. But these two older ones are very independent and do not need much watching over.

She'll also take care of our youngest child, Andrew, while my wife and I are at work. But when I return home, I'll take over the care of Andrew.

So, our maid is very much a domestic helper in that she sweeps the floor, cooks the meals ... The parenting is left to my wife and me.

M6's experience with a maid at home in 1985 had been a negative one. The family had lots of problem with her. This then resulted in him staying at home full-time to care for the home and children. He explains: 'I was earning much less than my wife. By staying at home, I could help to save the cost of having a maid in the house.'

Grandparents. Though M1's children are never looked after by any grandparent, he seems to regard this option as better than having a maid do it. He explains:

I think getting grandparents to care for your children is better. A maid is only paid to do her job. But there are some maids who are good ... but rarely. So, grandparents is a good option for child caring provided they can and are willing. They must be happy to support your family need in this area.

M2 has mixed feelings about his children being cared for by their grandparents. He shares his experience with a tinge of sadness:

My mother-in-law was staying with us when our children were young. She helped us care for them. When she died, my mother came over to help us with the children during the hours when both my wife and I were at work.

My mother-in-law was not a Christian. I could see that some of the values that she was imparting to my children were not biblical. Hence, there were times I had to tell her off.

Perhaps, I am seeing the effects today - my children accepted Christ when they were young ... went to church with us ... attended Sunday School. But today, they have lost interest in church. Maybe it was a lack of biblical upbringing in their early years ... maybe it is the influence of peer pressure today. I am disappointed.

But the positive thing about it all is that having our children cared for by their grandparents in the early years had allowed us to work and be financially stable.

Like M1, M3 also feels that grandparents are better caregivers than maids because 'they have the necessary experience, and are likely to show more love because they are related to the children.' However, M3 believes that grandparents also cannot replace the parents themselves. He stresses: 'I have learned that values imparted by grandparents may not be always right too. They may dote too much on the children, encouraging them to become self-indulgent ... they may exercise favouritism, causing sibling rivalry. In short, even grandparents cannot take over the role of parenting.'

The grandmother of M4's wife lives near to where they are. As such, she has been a great help in taking care of their child whenever he and his wife need to be away from home.

Additionally, M4's mother-in-law is tutoring his son, Melvin, in the school subject of Chinese. He is grateful that these 'extended family members have enriched their family life with their sharing and helping.' He adds further: 'We are fortunate in that they leave family decisions to us ... they will not interfere in how we want to bring up Melvin. Some families may have elderly folks trying to influence the child's upbringing. This often brings conflict into the situation.'

Getting grandparents to help care for their children had also not worked out well for M6 and his wife. He recalls:

My son was asthmatic since young. We did try to get my mother to care for him initially. But we discovered that she had her own ways of doing things. Unfortunately, her ways had often brought regular asthmatic attacks upon my son. Hence, there were much misunderstanding between my wife and my mother.

Perceptions of success: All the conversational partners do not view themselves as failures. However, they do describe success in terms of different emphases. Their stories below will capture these perceptions.

Results matter. M1 has just switched to a teaching career after about 20 years as a counselling officer in the armed forces. This is because the military has a 'young' policy and those nearing age 45 are given the option of switching to a second career. M1 looks back at his military career with pride because it is a 'noble task to take care of fellow soldiers.' He shares of his ups and downs while serving in the military:

I counselled soldiers facing problems, especially family problems. I tried to help them resolve their issues in life. Sometimes, it had been tough ... I had to refer such cases. But there were good memories ... like seeing people improving their lives and having control over their lives. These were some indicators of success in my work as a counselling officer when I was with the armed forces.

I remember on one occasion, I was called to counsel a soldier who was contemplating suicide. I was activated and given the task of dissuading him from jumping down a high-rise building. It was scary. But I eventually managed to convince him not to jump. It was very satisfying even though it took me 3 1/2 hours!

On another occasion, I did not find out enough information about the marital conflict of a soldier. In my enthusiasm to help, I suggested some inappropriate solutions. In the end, I had to do damage control to help the couple to patch up again. I think I had failed on that occasion.

Looking back, I basically became frustrated whenever I couldn't see the end product appearing, or sensed that my best did not seem good enough. When support was not forthcoming from others; when deadlines were not met; when I had to answer to my superiors for delays, I began to question my own abilities.

Prestige of high education and position. M2 started work as a technician after completing his 'O' level. Over the years, he has worked himself up - gaining a polytechnic diploma and attaining the position of a manager. He relates his story:

I started work as a technician. Though I felt contented in my job as far as learning and exposure were concerned, I was ambitious. I wanted to climb the ladder of success. I did not want to remain a technician for life. That would mean not going anywhere. But I only had an 'O' level education then. I could not go anywhere. I would need a higher education to do that.

That spurred me on to do part-time studies at the polytechnic in 1979. I worked in the day and studied at night for the next 5 years. In 1984, I graduated with a diploma in estate management.

After I received my diploma, I went over to a private company as a property officer. I found that it was different from the statutory board that I had worked in previously. For one thing, there were less red tapes ... I made my own decisions and used my own initiatives. This was what I liked. My self-esteem was also improved. I was answerable to one boss - the GM. In my previous place, I had to answer to many people ... I am one who prefers not to be told what to do, but be allowed to use my own initiatives.

However, I have no dreams about going into business and be my own boss in spite of my desire for autonomy in work ... I myself have seen how businesses have failed. It is not easy, and you need lots of ready cash to back you up, especially in bad times. Hence, I have come to the conclusion that it is still best to work for someone; to be a wage earner.

I worked in this company where I was the property officer for 5 years before I switched again. I had not been promoted; I was ambitious and I wanted to climb up the ladder as high as I could.

In my next move, I went over to project management. I became the senior project executive of a corporation that was managing the construction of 6 golf resorts on Batam (an Indonesian island near Singapore).

After some time with this corporation, I went to work for a Christian organisation in its move to some new premises. I had actually wanted to help them part-time. But since they really needed a full-time person, I went over to join them for 2 years. After helping them to settle into their new premises, I felt that to continue with them would be quite unfruitful. Hence, I left this Christian organisation and joined a construction firm.

I was given the position of project manager - my highest achievement so far ... this was in 1996. Because I was good in paper work and legal matters, the firm promoted me to contracts manager, only just below the GM. I helped the firm to attend court cases. Some of our contractors had failed to pay their sub-contractors because of poor cash flow. These sub-contractors then sued our firm, and we in turn sued the contractors.

Looking back over the years, I can say that when I was young, I wanted very much to prove myself to people; to stretch myself so that I could be promoted. But I have never resorted to backstabbing others or try to curry favour my boss. But these underhand tactics are very real in working life.

But my perspective in life has changed somewhat because I am much older now. I realise that there is more to life than just positions ... I realise that I am looking for something more. And as a Christian, I am beginning to desire to go deeper into the Bible.

True to one's abilities and priorities. M3, by his own admission, does not like the cut-and-thrust competition in the workplace. He is by nature more bent toward cooperating with others and places great importance in family life. He shares how he has lost out but harbours no regret:

There are people who try to move their way up by playing politics. But ultimately, I think in our country, merits still count. If you use only relationships to get to where you are, but lack the necessary know-how and skills, your deficiencies will show up eventually. You'll then lose your edge to compete effectively. I would say that merits are still a more assured way of moving up in one's career.

Being a less competitive person, I have often felt inadequate to meet the challenge when given opportunities to prove myself. However, though I may have somehow lost out in my career development, I feel that my personal health is better - I don't have to sit uncomfortably in a high position, always feeling inadequate to do the job well.

I don't enjoy feeling pushed and being on my toes all the time. But there are some who enjoy intense competition because they like the push and the challenge. In my case, I have opted to be more cooperative and harmonious in working attitude.

I remember in 1999, I was given an opportunity to be the acting head of a division in my company. But I really felt uneasy because I know I had to handle much competition, expectations and uncertainties that would come with the job. So, I approached my boss and told him to get someone else.

It was a struggle - I was almost there, but because I didn't feel strong enough to cope with the added competition, pressure and expectations, I had to say 'no'. This seemed like not taking a good step forward ... not an easy decision.

But as I now look back at my decision philosophically, I feel comforted - I still have enough for my family and myself, yet without having to cope with misery day to day. I am convinced that this has been a wise decision personally. But from the corporate perspective, I have made the unconventional decision of not taking a step forward in my career path.

Yes, I aspire to be a good worker, but I am also mindful of my own ability - whether I can live up to what is entailed, and if not, I will not take up the challenge.

I also value my family highly and I am not prepared to compromise on that. My wife also does not expect me to provide the family with the non-essential luxuries in life. Because of this outlook, I have learned to say 'enough is enough'. Hence, we are basically a one-income family today. I personally feel that we are not a typical family in our contemporary society - most of my colleagues prefer the dual-income arrangement as it gives them better financial stability and standard of living.

M5 shares quite similar sentiments with M3 about success in life. Though their backgrounds and experiences are different, both emphasise on accepting one's abilities and priorities, and committing oneself to work one's best with these in view. M5 says:

Right now, I have been given a job which I can handle. In fact, I am somehow prepared in advance to take on new jobs that have come along over the years. I think I am alright at this point in time because I am doing a job that is within my capacity.

Looking back at my 21 years with the armed forces, I have had good opportunities and good jobs. And along also comes appropriate recognition - I am now a major. But if I am aiming to be a one-star general, it will be a different perception altogether.

Besides earning my bread and butter, my work has also helped to mould me as a person. For example, I am a very shy person ... in fact, I am an introvert. I am not comfortable standing in front and leading a discussion.

But I remember in 1982, I was given a project that required me to teach after I had returned from an overseas training stint. Fortunately, I was also given the

opportunity to be trained as an instructor, and this prepared me to handle teaching responsibilities in the workplace. Today, I am able to lead small groups or chair meetings though I am still an introvert by nature.

I am now a deputy commanding officer in an air-force unit with a number of people under me. I can see that my responsibilities have increased slowly ... in parts that I can handle.

I remember in 1988 I was given an assignment - to organise a productivity convention within the air force. I first thought that this was beyond me. But when I responded to the challenge and had gone through it, I realised that this was something I could do ... of course, with much dependence on God's enabling.

Besides accepting his abilities and doing his best with them, M5 also speaks about standing firm on his priorities:

I remember a time when I was literally thrown into the sea for refusing to drink. Though I do drink occasionally, I have difficulty consenting to drink myself silly ... cup after cup or bottle after bottle. Hence, to such demands, I'll say 'no' because one cup will lead to another ... one bottle will lead to another ... there's no end to it. I'll just have to stand firm and make my choice.

Of course, some of them today still tell me that I could have done much better if only I have played along with them in their fun. These are my bosses and superiors. But I don't see myself as losing out ... just standing firm on my priorities.

Though both my wife and I are working, we have already decided on our priorities within this arrangement. This means that we must learn to say 'no' to certain things if we are to have time for our children, for each other and for other people. That's why I am still not a full commanding officer and my wife is still not a manager.

Nevertheless, if I were to list some things as a measure of success in my life, they would include:

- affirmation by the air force in that I have been given a command position
- results in terms of seeing work done and achieving new targets
- help given to people in their times of need
- sense of doing things that are meaningful, regardless of the material reward and status they may bring.

Modest lifestyle rich in relationships. As far as M4 is concerned, to enjoy better financial stability and standard of living is not in terms of being able to make or service purchases of many possessions. In fact, M4 counters that having more possessions could imply

less financial freedom because of increased financial obligations in terms of loan servicing and maintenance. At this point in his life, M4 prefers to view success in terms of a modest lifestyle that focuses on relationships rather than possessions. He advocates:

At this point of my life, I am thinking about some readjustments in my life ... to slow down and give more time to my real passion in life (yet to be identified) ... more time for relationships. I realise that work is not everything; only a means to an end. For example, if I have fallen ill, the company will not be there to stand by me ... only my family and close friends.

But I will have to consider any switch today carefully ... how best to change my pace without going into too much uncertainties. Family stability is a key consideration. Yes, I am in a dilemma today - the pace of work will not get slower, but will pick up even more. In my plans to slow down, I will have to work out certain decisions. For example, I may want to sell our private property and move into public housing so as to free ourselves from financial debts.

So far, our one-income arrangement has worked out well for us though I must admit that I do feel the pressure as the sole breadwinner. But this allows my wife to have more time with our son and other people.

We have successfully opted for a modest lifestyle with one income all these years. To me, the basic essentials in a modest lifestyle would include:

- freedom from financial debts
- a roof above our heads
- enough food for family
- educational opportunities for children and personal growth
- budget for leisure
- decent savings
- some ability to give and share.

I would not consider a car as a basic essential in Singapore. But it's useful if one has to travel often. Otherwise, the public transport system is efficient enough ... buses, MRT trains and taxis.

Being practical, not popular. Most men will have difficulty describing themselves as having done well in life if they have been home-bound. But M6, who has experienced three retrenchments and has since been parenting full-time at home while his wife works, feels very positive about himself. He talks about the reasons for his healthy self-image in spite of adverse opinions from others:

When my wife and I first decided that I should be the one to stay home, I was at peace with it. But other parties - in-laws and family members - could not accept it because the Chinese culture viewed that men must work outside the home. Some friends were also of the same opinion.

But I was clear that it was a decision between my wife and I ... that I stayed home for the sake of our son, and not because I was lazy to work.

There were times at family gatherings when some of my cousins would ask me what I was doing. I would tell them that I was full-time at home looking after the children and doing the housework.

I remember on one occasion when I was asked that question, my mother-in-law quickly answered on my behalf that I was running my own business. She then cautioned my wife and I to answer likewise whenever relatives asked that same question again.

I am also not really troubled about marrying a wife who is academically better than me. When we began to get serious in our relationship, I asked her: 'Would you mind marrying someone who is lower than you academically?' Her answer was a firm 'no'.

I was attracted to her because of her personality. She was attracted to me because she liked my leadership quality. She confessed that she saw in me a reliable and dependable person.

Yes, some Christian friends did discourage her from going out with me. To them, I was lower than her academically and less mature than her as a Christian. But we managed to overcome those hindrances. These people changed their attitude after knowing me better.

As for our parents, my father was proud that I had married a graduate. But my mother-in-law was a different story. Initially, she was not too unhappy with me - she had 4 daughters and were concerned that they were not able to find life partners. But when I was out of work and eventually became a full-time person at home, she began to compare me with her other sons-in-law.

Our relationship was strained and my wife and I avoided visiting her. She felt our displeasure and got an uncle to talk to us. We told him the reason. Today, my mother-in-law's attitude toward me has changed because she realises that I am sincere and care much for my family.

At the end of the day, what is important to me is that both my wife and I know what is best for our family situation. We make our decisions and do not let others' opinions upset or pressurise us. In fact, we are not ashamed to tell others that we have switched roles - I am not ashamed to tell others that I am a full-time househusband; my wife is also not ashamed to let others know the same about me.

5.2.4 Interpreting the sentiments. Having heard the stories of the conversational partners, the task now is to interpret the sentiments expressed in order to present a preliminary profile of the average Christian man in Singapore as a basis for further research. Below is a thematic interpretation of the men's sentiments:

- *Competition is inevitable in a meritocratic society.* M1 is one who recognises the inevitability of competition in the workplace. He acknowledges that this is even necessary in a meritocratic work culture. Indeed, outcomes, results and performances are important to M1. He even admits that he gets frustrated and doubts himself when he 'couldn't see the end product appearing, or sensed that my best did not seem good enough.'

M2 is all eager to make his way to the top since he first started work. To him, the way to work his way out of his humble beginnings is to sharpen his competitive edge by way of better education and experience. As he puts it: 'It is the fittest who will survive. If you have low education or any shortcomings, you better do something about yourself ... to catch up with other people.'

Though M3 is not a very driven person by his own admission, he accepts the fact that 'it is only reasonable for people to want to be ahead in life.' Sometimes, he even finds himself drawn into the competition to be ahead 'just to be part of the competing culture.' But on the whole, M3 is contented just to be doing what he can manage, implying that he wants to be sure of delivering the results.

Being in the information technology industry, M4 is well acquainted with the challenges of fast change, innovation and maximisation of resources. He has come to terms with the frenetic pace in his work - 'there's no way for you to stand still or slow down for your own interest ... you'll become irrelevant in no time.'

- *Work-family balance is not easy to maintain.* The working men take their breadwinning role seriously. They work hard not only to maximise their potential, but also to provide well for their family materially. Understandably, most of them find it difficult to balance work and family demands.

Some of them feel that their family members misunderstand them at times. For example, M1 speaks of bad timing when 'things happen at work when the family needs you.'

M2 laments that while he and his wife have worked hard to provide well for their children, they have little time to parent them. In fact, he is disappointed that his children today lack Christian commitment and wonders if there has been 'a lack of biblical upbringing in their early years.'

M3 shares that his wife will openly remind him if he is spending too much time at work. This does sound like nagging to him at times and that she does not understand 'the stress and strain that he is going through at work.'

M4 is now trying to make up for lost time in that he wants to help his son develop a foundation of good values as he is into his teenage years. Also, he wants to spend more time communicating and praying with his wife about how to journey the next phase of their life together. However, he confesses, 'I do not have much time at this point to really get down to doing it.' Though he is seriously considering a slower pace, he wants to do it 'without going into too much uncertainties' that will affect the family's financial stability.

M5 ensures that both his career and that of his wife will not affect their family life adversely. Thus, while not deliberately trying to be under-achievers in the workplace, both he and his wife have learned to say 'no' to certain things. This then allows them more time to be together as a family. Though they have adequate financially, the trade-off is that he is 'still not a full commanding officer and she is still not a manager.'

On the other hand, M6 who has spent many years at home caring and parenting his two children, is quite unprepared to do some regular work outside the home. He knows that a regular job can be demanding and views his priority now as still with his children.

- Family responsibilities are often shared rather than gender specific. There seems to be a narrowing of the gender gap in Singapore. What this means is that family roles and responsibilities are often shared between man and woman without any strict adherence to gender distinctions. Rather, the determinative question is this: 'How can man and wife share in family tasks in order to bring about the best possible arrangement for the family?'

Though M1 believes that man should be directly involved in the breadwinning role, he feels comfortable sharing this role with his wife if the home and children are not unduly neglected, even if she earns more than him. M1 says: 'When I married my wife, she was already earning more than I. But who earns more is not really an issue with me. What's more important is what we do with the income we have; how do we spend it wisely. What's important to me is that I still have a part in bringing in money for the family.'

Though he very much wants to bring in the money for the family, M1 is also equally willing to pick up the broom at home. He shares how he and his wife work together at home: 'On my part, I will take care of all the housework - cleaning up, washing dishes ... and all that. She will take care of the children's homework ... some sort of division of labour.'

However, this 'division of labour' between man and wife is one arrangement that is more idealistic than realistic in M2's situation. He explains: 'Both of us had to be working because our children were small and we needed the money

for them. Now, they are much older ... but they still need our financial support for their studies.'

M3 is the breadwinner in his family. However, he considers it his responsibility not only to support his family materially, but also emotionally even as a man. In spite of his heavy work demands, he wants to let his children know that 'it is their father who has to take the lead in imparting good, Christian values to them.' Hence, he makes and takes time to work with his wife in nurturing their children together. He adds: 'I use family time on weekends to bond with my family - going to church together, interacting with other Christians, shopping ... and doing other things together.'

Echoing the same thinking is M4 who works in the fast-paced computer industry. Though his work is still taking him very much away from home, he is now reading and attending seminars on how to impart values to his teenage son. He says this concerning his son: 'But today, I do see the need for greater involvement on my part in his life. I think it is important to leave behind a good Christian legacy to my child' And concerning his relationship with his wife, M4 adds: 'My wife and I are considering how we can be more involved in touching lives ... we need to see how we can fit into each other's passion. At this point, we need to communicate and pray more together.'

M5 is another father who does not see child nurturing as belonging only to the female gender. Married to a woman who is a computer professional, he says this of their family situation: 'My wife is busy during this period with a project that will stretch from this year till next - this makes it even more important for me to spend time with my children ... at least one of us must do it ... There is this sense of mutual support. I have never understood that a wife cannot work outside the home. I respect and honour my wife's need to be fulfilled as a person ... to allow her the choice to do what she wants as a person. Also, I have never understood that housework is only my wife's job. I'll help in whatever housework that needs to be done though we do have a maid.'

The wives of M1, M3 and M4 are homemakers and all tertiary educated. And the reason they are staying at home is primarily pragmatic - if one parent is to stay at home for the children, then the more nurturing makeup of the mother often makes her the natural choice.

M1 recalls why his wife has decided to stop her work as an accountant: 'My wife stopped work when our second child came ... The reason being she wanted to give more time to the family. Moreover, our older child was about to go to primary school ... taking care of family demands can be stretching for her as well.'

In the same vein, M3 says this of his wife: 'When our second child came, she stopped work and has since stayed home to mother the children. But I must admit that to have my wife as a second income earner has always been attractive to me - it takes the load off me as the sole breadwinner.'

M4's wife stopped work when their only child was born. He reveals that 'she had never enjoyed herself in the working world' and 'prefers to help and interact with others in a non-employed capacity.'

However, M1, M3 and M4 all express no objection to their wives returning to the workplace one day.¹⁷

M1: 'She can return to work when time is right because I know she needs to develop herself as a person too, and not necessarily for the finance.'

M3: 'I realise too that for my wife to stay at home all the time with the children can be very stifling to her own personal development and fulfilment ... I'll let her have the final say as to whether she will return to full-time work in the future.'

M4: 'However, she still feels fulfilled because of her involvement, interaction and networking with other people not as an employed worker, but as a concerned person. But should she one day decide to return to full-time work, I will not stop her from doing so.'

As the only man who is parenting full-time at home among the six conversational partners, M6 has this to say about the decision: 'It was basically a practical one when we first made it - our son needed one parent to be with him full-time at home because of his asthmatic condition when he was young; the cost of living was rising rapidly; if we needed to depend on one income, then it would have to be my wife's since she was earning more than I.'

- *Major decisions are discussed in order to adopt the most beneficial family arrangement.* Indeed, all the men stress that they discuss with their wives before making major family decisions - such as work, finance and children's needs. This implies that while the men acknowledge male headship in the family, they also recognise the need to share leadership with their wives in various concerns of the home.

For example, M1 says: 'I would prefer to arrive at joint decisions with my wife on important concerns. If we cannot agree on something, I would prefer to differ the final decision till a later time ... examine why we cannot agree.'

Expressing this same consensus-reaching approach, M3 adds: 'My wife and I do discuss and agree on certain basic principles in relation to the disciplining of our children ... In matters pertaining to finance, I do have the final say. My wife's contribution is more in the area of our children's behaviour and upbringing.'

¹⁷ This provides a corrective to what has been concluded earlier based on the opinion poll - that many highly educated wives have become homemakers because they and their husbands subscribe to this as a biblical pattern.

In the case of M5, he relates an experience with his wife: 'I believe strongly that as head of the household, I am responsible to take the lead and to act with my wife as helper. It is not a matter of telling her what to do, but hearing from her ... the wise thing is to listen to her; to get feedback ... When our second child, Sarah, was born, my wife and I talked and discussed about how best to manage the family. We gave something a try - my wife stayed at home for about a year. She realised that that was not what she would want to do. She felt that she could be more productive working outside the home ... socially fulfilling for her and financially helpful to the family.'

M6's decision to stay home for his children is one made on practical grounds and mutually agreed - his wife's earning power as an accountant is stronger than his, and his children need a parent full-time at home. He explains: 'We talked and prayed about the matter. We both felt that I should be the one to stay home.' Thus, both he and his wife have decided not to stick to the old tradition of 'man works outside and woman stays home.' In spite of this unconventional arrangement, M6 says this of his 'status' at home: 'Even though I was not the breadwinner, I did not lose my headship and leadership at home. Yes, my wife is the breadwinner, but I am the one running the finances because all the money comes to me. In other major decisions, we discuss them with each other.'

This openness on the part of the men to discuss and seek the most beneficial family arrangement applies not only in the area of breadwinning, but also in child caring and housekeeping concerns. In this regard, the men acknowledge that child care centres, maids and grandparents are possible alternatives in child caring and housekeeping in spite of their drawbacks. The one important thing is this - these alternatives free couples to perform the important role of parenting their children as responsible fathers and mothers.

Perhaps, M1 best describes the collective sentiments of the men here when he says: 'Help from maids and child care centres is only good at certain times when such support services are needed for family adjustments to changes ... grandparents is a good option for child caring provided they can and are willing. They must be happy to support your family need in this area.'

Summing up, this thematic interpretation of the men's sentiments presents some notable features that profile the average Christian man in Singapore:

- i. He accepts competition as inevitable in a meritocratic society.
- ii. He works hard so as to develop to his best potential and to provide well for his family materially.
- iii. He often has little time to bond with his family relationally unless he makes a deliberate effort to do so.

iv. He does not equate male headship with sole leadership at home. Hence, he shares or delegates family responsibilities, including that of breadwinning, housekeeping and parenting.

v. He discusses rather than dictates decisions related to major family concerns. Hence, he is pragmatic enough to seek and adopt alternatives that are most beneficial to the family. These include choosing options like dual-income, child care centre, maid and grandparent to meet the breadwinning, child caring and housekeeping needs of the home.

5.2.5 Suggestions on being pro-family in a meritocratic work culture. Having tried to hear and understand the work-family complexities faced by some Christian men in Singapore, this chapter will now conclude with some suggestions on how men can work toward being pro-family in a meritocratic society. These are not meant to be pet answers, but as ideas to provoke further thinking in one's attempt to explore options and alternatives.

Before presenting these suggestions, it is appropriate at this point to briefly review some of the biblical-theological formulations summarised in Chapter IV (pp274-78):

- *Success has to do with pushing oneself to do one's 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.

- *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.

- *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.

- *Since the Christ-like personality embodies both masculine and feminine traits, taking up certain roles may just make one 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.

- *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.

- *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.

Measuring the features that profile the average Christian man in Singapore against these biblical-theological formulations, some concerns come to light:

- i. Though the man is to do all things well for the glory of God, competition today can dull his compassion for people.
- ii. Though the man is to work hard in developing his God-given potential and providing well for his family, the meritocratic culture today can lure him into elitism and materialism.
- iii. Though God does bless the deserving man with success and achievement in this world, the passion for results and recognition today can blind him to the importance of relationships and recreation, especially with loved ones.
- iv. Though God has made man to head his family within a framework of shared leadership, the busyness of working life today can lead him to knowingly or unknowingly shirk his responsibilities and push them to others, especially to his wife.
- v. Though man is answerable to God as to how well he manages his family, the pragmatism today can tempt him to use people and things as means to safeguard only his personal and family well-being, and thus, promoting self-centredness and individualism rather than other-centredness and community.

Having enumerated these concerns, they will now serve as a basis that 'authorises' some suggestions on being pro-family in a meritocratic work culture. Before that, it must be acknowledged that the Government of Singapore is now making some serious efforts to encourage Singaporeans to have strong families. In fact, it recognises that strong families is an important pillar in nation building. This statement has been made to the nation:

Singaporeans have always valued strong families. They are the foundation for healthy lives and wholesome communities. But we must ensure they are strengthened even further, because the 21st century will bring greater pressures on them. With an ageing population, there will be fewer working adults to care for aged parents. Children will need to be supported through more years of education. In many cases both mother and father will be working. Their jobs will be more demanding. Children will be open to more influences and be harder to manage.

To ensure that these do not strain the family too much in the future, we must constantly reinforce family bonding. Government policies must reflect this emphasis. Employers too must play their part by allowing more flexible work arrangements. Individuals can take the strain off ourselves and our families by leading a healthy lifestyle and planning for our old age.

Strong families give security and meaning to life. They are the 'base camp' from which our young venture forth to reach for high aspirations. They are the conduit through which our elderly pass on their values and lessons they have learnt in life.

They ensure that our children grow up happy and well and our elders enjoy respect and dignity. They are an irreplaceable source of care and support when we need it, at whatever age (Government 1999:12).

In recent times, the Government has indeed tried to encourage building strong families in Singapore though its call to economic excellence is never muted. This is largely through the efforts of the Ministry of Community Development and Sports (MCDS) which works closely with other organisations. For example, in encouraging father involvement in the family, the MCDS has endorsed the setting up of the Singapore Centre for Fathering (SCF). This centre frequently conducts fathering seminars in the workplace, as well as organising special fun activities to help in father-child bonding. In addition, 'family day' events and family life

conferences have been organised from time to time by the MCDS in collaboration with the SCF and other family life agencies. Family life educators and experts have been invited to share their insights at these conferences. The aim is to create greater family awareness and to discuss how others' experiences can help families in Singapore. Pre-marital, marriage enrichment and parenting events have been scheduled regularly by the MCDS together with related agencies for the purpose of public education and participation. Even more recently, the MCDS has endorsed the launching of a new programme in Singapore. This is the Diploma in Family Life Education (DipFLE) which is offered by the Edith Cowan University in Australia. The DipFLE is the first of its kind in Singapore and is taught locally in collaboration with the Fei Yue Counselling Centre and the Academy of Human Development. Those who successfully complete the programme will be recognised as trained family life educators in Singapore. All these point to the Government's desire to promote public awareness in the value of strong family life.

In view of this, the suggestions proposed are not meant to be explored independently as an individual or even as a church. Rather, they are meant to be explored in conjunction with the nation's efforts to make strong families as a pillar of society. In this way, the undertakings of the Christian or the Church are not merely some means to stay apart from society, but really actions to impact society for God's glory and human good.

How can the individual Christian be pro-family? One suggestion is to *work hard so as to earn enough to turn limited time and energy into actual pro-family events*. With good incomes, people have enough to possess what they want materially. However, this will only be succumbing to the lure of consumerism. Hence, people do well to remind themselves that though they may have enough to possess many material things, they do not have to possess all of them in order to be happy. But then, how do people make pro-family 'investments' with the

earnings they have? Some common family concerns today are highlighted in order to get some

leads in answering this question:

i. The education system in Singapore is competitive even at the primary school level. Parents obviously want their children to succeed educationally, and many of them feel that personally coaching their children in their studies is a good means of bonding with them. However, the reality is that they often lack the time and energy after work to do a good job with their children. Moreover, some have found that they do not have the skills, patience and updated knowledge to tutor their children effectively in their studies. Hence, what is meant to be a time of bonding between parent and child can turn into a very stressful period for both.

There are many tutoring centres in Singapore today, and these are complemented by numerous individuals offering private tuition. Of course, the better-staffed centres and better-qualified individuals will offer their services at comparatively higher charges. But parents who can and are willing to pay such higher fees will enjoy good returns – children will be competently tutored, leaving their parents to just monitor progress and encourage effort, and most of all, maximising every opportunity together for relationship building and bonding.

ii. Men have recently been encouraged to be more actively involved in housekeeping, especially if their wives are working. Such involvement is supposed to help bring man and wife closer together. Again, the reality is that both may already be too tired, and the limited time and energy they have can be better spent in just being together and enjoying each other without exerting themselves any further.

An alternative then is to employ a full-time maid/domestic helper. The flourishing number of maid employment agencies in Singapore is indicative that many families are turning to such an option. However, the supply of such 'maid power' comes totally outside of Singapore – with the Philippines and Indonesia being the main sources. Those from the Philippines cost more to employ as they are largely English speaking and familiar with urban living – this makes it easier for them to fit into the Singapore setting which uses English widely and is highly urbanised. But this option of foreign domestic helpers is not without difficulties. One of which is the cultural gap between these domestic helpers and their Singapore employers. This gap is especially problematic when the maid concerned speaks little English and comes from a village background, and thus, ignorant of many of the norms and practices in urban living. In fact, many conflicts between these maids and their employers are the results of this cultural gap and misunderstanding. On the other hand, the many known cases of maid abuse do indicate that many Singaporeans lack patience and understanding in their treatment of their foreign maids.

In short, though employing a foreign maid is a viable option in relieving the couple of the burden of housework, it is no guarantee that things will be easier

at home. In fact, the very presence of a stay-in foreign maid can easily upset the established relational dynamics in the family system. Hence, besides being able to pay for a maid, what is equally essential is being prepared to relate with a maid in a cross-culturally sensitive manner. Yes, the might of money can demand that the onus is on the maid to please her employer. But for the Christian family, the power of God's love and grace dictates that this hired hand be treated as a worthy human being created in the image of God.

iii. Family members need something to look forward to in the midst of working or studying hard. This implies that a time for rest and holiday needs to be deliberately marked out in the family's calendar so that work and studies are not the only emphases in family life. There is a time to relax and slow down without feeling guilty about it; a time to be away from it all as a family.

Many Singapore families are taking overseas holidays during school vacations. This indicates that many are willing to spend money in order to have some time together. However, the thing that prevents busy people from coming together as a family is often not a problem with money, but with the mind. This has to do with a cultivated lifestyle – that is – the habit of being so intense and driven in what one has been doing that the preoccupation with it makes it difficult for one to focus on and enjoy a new experience.

That being the tendency, the act of coming together must then be a constant feature in family life in spite of many competing demands. Learning to enjoy the present moment together, be it just a family meal, is a disciplined state of mind that can be cultivated only through deliberate, regular efforts. Indeed, family holidays are truly 'time together' not because people have the money for them, but because they have the mind for them.

iv. Many parents in Singapore like to send their children for enrichment instructions, such as playing the piano. This is not necessarily wrong, especially if the child has an aptitude for it. However, many of such instructions are also examination-oriented, and this inevitably adds another load to the already examination-stressed child.

Perhaps, a better option is to get together for some exercise-oriented activities - like swimming, canoeing and some racket games. These activities will inject the element of fun, so essential in family bonding, into the time together. These will also help one to de-stress and keep fit physically. Indeed, healthy bonding, healthy minds and healthy bodies are worth making the effort.

A second suggestion as to how a Christian can be pro-family in a meritocratic society is to *adopt an extended family member into one's own home*. This can be a grandparent, an elderly uncle or aunt. After all, the family in biblical times was definitely more extended than the nuclear family of today.

Such thinking helps to temper the harshness of meritocracy in two ways:

i. When an elderly person becomes economically inactive, he/she often experiences a loss of self-worth and a sense of redundancy. By adopting such a member of one's extended family into the family, and allowing him/her to help out in areas like supervision, housekeeping or child caring (not the parenting), the elderly person is made to feel that he/she can still contribute. In fact, their presence at home can give the working parents better peace of mind in the workplace, knowing that both home and children are in good hands. And by helping these parents to work with better concentration, the elderly person contributes indirectly to the economic well-being of the family and the country.

ii. One danger of meritocracy is that of making yourself look good and others look bad. By adopting an extended family member into the home (often an elderly person), it reminds one that he/she is not only to look after and advance his/her own interests, but also to care for others, especially those who are related to him/her. Hence, this is pro-family in that it turns one away from an inward-looking concern for oneself to an outward-looking concern that embraces others in the extended family. This is one good value that all parents will do well to model before and pass on to their young ones.

In fact, many social problems associated with an ageing population are already looming ahead in Singapore - labour shortage, high medical costs and increased elderly care. The population growth has been slow over many years. The effectiveness of the population control programme during the poor era of the early 1960s, and the present demands of success-oriented living have discouraged many from having more children.

To deal with the anticipated elderly issues, people in Singapore are encouraged to view elderly care not simply as a social responsibility, but as a family responsibility as well. However, many families today prefer to privatise their family life - that is, to guard their 'nuclear' status.¹⁸ Thus, many couples are unwilling to let an extended family member to stay in with them. Potential conflicts resulting from different ideas in homemaking and child caring are often cited as reasons for this unwillingness.

¹⁸ 'Nuclear' here refers to the family structure comprising man, wife and their child(ren) staying in the same household.

While acknowledging that such differences are real, it must be stressed again that family life today is very much privatised - restricted only to the parents and their children. This preference can be regarded as an expression of an inwardness that downplays the need for a wider community.

For Christian families to help strengthen the bonds of human relationships in their society, what is needed then is for them to first nurture a wider and stronger community sense within their own family context. Hence, the suggestion of adopting an extended family member into one's home is an attempt to bring about this sense of social cohesion - learning to bridge intergenerational gaps and live together within the family as a fundamental step toward living together with others in the larger society. More importantly for the Christian family, it is modelling before the young the virtue of loving and honouring the elders, especially one's parents.

How can the Church be pro-family? Many churches in Singapore today have set up various family-related services for the public. These include child care centres, before-and-after-school care, elderly care, and family counselling. However, much can still be done in terms of setting up more of these facilities and services, and upgrading existing ones. With more financial resources being channelled into such ministries, personnel can be further trained and better ones can be recruited. This will ensure a high quality of facilities and services. In this regard, *the Church should encourage and challenge Christians to give more* in two ways:

- i. Give financially to these facilities and services so that quality can be assured. This will not only benefit the Christians themselves as they too can have access to these, but also to the society or community in general.
- ii. Give time to these facilities and services as volunteers. Many Christians are relevantly trained themselves to effectively complement the full-time staff in these areas. Such volunteerism allows blessed and gifted Christians to look beyond themselves and to 'love their neighbours.'

Many today are highly stressed up as a result of the pressures of contemporary living. It is not surprising then that counselling is emerging slowly but surely as a much sought-after service and profession, even among Christians. In fact, many pastors and lay Christians have been competently trained in counselling because it has become a major need in the contemporary church. While this need is real and valid, what is disturbing is this - many Christians seem to lack grounding in their faith, resulting in them often not able to adequately handle their problems in life. Anthony Yeo (2000:76), who is a Christian himself and serves as Clinical Director of the Counselling and Care Centre in Singapore, sounds out his concern about counselling emerging as a major feature of Christian ministry:

... it is pastoral care that should be the prominent feature of Christian ministry. If people can experience care and concern within the Christian community, not only can problems be dealt with, they would also have available to them resources for coping with difficulties of life

If counselling is needed, it is to be located within the context of pastoral care. I tend to believe that all God's people need care but not all need counselling ... This assumes that not all have special needs, although all may have need for a listening ear, shoulder to cry on and a helping hand.

Taking Yeo's comments a step further, what can be implied is that many Christians who are competently trained in counselling may be using their skills only to meet church needs. In other words, if counselling has become a prominent feature only within the context of church ministry, it does indicate that the Church has failed in two respects - i) it has not adequately strengthened the faith of its people in that many are unable to personally take control of life's problems; ii) it has not made an adequate impact on the larger society in that many of its trained people are serving in church to satisfy 'private consumption' rather than outside church to be a 'healing balm' to the hurting world.

Indeed, the Church in Singapore can still do much to meet family-related needs (like children's education, health care and family welfare) in the larger society because it has been blessed with both the financial and human resources to do so.

The Church can also emphasise and promote family life as a key focus in Christian education. This will help Christians to communicate, to impart values and to establish biblical rituals in family life. Also, with such equipping, they can be encouraged to participate in family life education, or even be family life educators in the workplace as well.

Perhaps, one problem facing many Christians in Singapore today has to do with the fact that they are first-generation believers. This means that many Christian families do not have any Christian home traditions or rituals to go by.¹⁹ What happens then is that the children of these first-generation Christians are constantly taught in church that worshipping God is important, yet they have hardly seen it reinforced at home because there is no vital family worship. The lessons that these young ones have learned in church are then nothing more than empty religious talks to them. Larry Christenson (1970:159) rightly points out:

... Oftentimes young people who rebel against the Christian Faith are not rebelling against God at all. They have never had an actual encounter with the Living God to rebel against. They are rebelling against a dead religious formalism

Christenson must be commended here for a reminder of great significance - faith and its practice are not merely taught to the young in church, but more importantly, to be caught at home. This implies that Christian parents are to exemplify the faith life before their children at home. If children are taught that the worship of God is important, then they must see it not only in church, but also at home as they see their father (and mother) regularly worshipping God at home and bringing the family together in worship. Indeed, for the Christian family,

¹⁹ It is then not surprising that of all the conversational partners, only M5 has categorically mentioned that he maintains a regular family worship.

time together is not just centred on work, studies, things and pleasure, but on the worship of God as well. Otherwise, the message unwittingly sent to the innocent young is that God is given attention only when convenient, and not important enough to make and take time for Him when we have other demands to deal with.

The challenge then is for the church to emphasise family life as a key focus in Christian education. Family-related issues and topics should be deliberately worked into the preaching, teaching and social schedules of the church. For example, a Family Month can be planned annually so that Christians are consciously made to focus on various aspects of family issues and concerns each year over a protracted period. Besides such structured events, the church should also provide informal opportunities all year round for people to come together to share their family pilgrimages and learn from one another. And as mentioned earlier, many first-generation Christians are either indifferent to or ignorant of the importance of family worship as a means to enhance not only family life, but also family faith in God. The church then needs to encourage and challenge parents to both reinforce and re-enact the Christian faith at home - to be examples of recipients of God's love and of lovers after God's heart before their children. Family life becomes strong when there is unconditional devotion to one another as a result of appreciating God's unconditional love for each family member. For example, family worship reminds us that God created man in His own image. Thus, the hardworking man who earns less money than another, or the studious child who scores lower grades than another can still come home as one worthy of love and acceptance because he is in God's image, and not as a failure or handicap. This then is the determinative dimension that those in the church can demonstrate to the world in which many families are being torn apart because people fail to fulfil mutually imposed conditions for loving and accepting one another.

How do Christian families honour Christ in a culture that values ‘face’? In an Asian context like that of Singapore, the value of ‘face’ is very important. To have ‘face’ is to be able to hold up one’s head and look good before others. However, a negative expression of ‘face’ is the stubborn refusal to admit one’s folly or deficiency before others. A recent press report has given this picture of some ‘face’ loving Singaporeans:

Families here are saving face but not cash by insisting that their sick parents go into higher class wards.

Children who do not want to ‘lose face’ with their relatives put their parents into A and B1 wards which they cannot afford, say hospital business managers here.

‘They want to show that they are filial and don’t want their parents to see that they cannot afford to put them in a higher class,’ said Mr Michael Chong, manager of the business and admissions office at Singapore General Hospital.

A spokesman for Tan Tock Seng Hospital said the decision often works the other way around as well, with parents choosing high-class wards for their children.

‘They do not wish their children to “suffer” the discomfort of a subsidised ward - namely, no television, no air-conditioned comfort and no telephone.’²⁰

Indeed, in a ‘face’ culture, the dishonour is perceived not in one’s folly or deficiency, but in losing ‘face’ by admitting one’s folly and deficiency before others. For example, Asians find it generally difficult to apologise openly and publicly one’s wrong doing because to do so is to lose ‘face’ which is seen as perhaps a greater wrong. In this sense, ‘face’ is not the same as honour since keeping ‘face’ may just be a way of covering up one’s dishonour.

While a person works at keeping his ‘face’, the other side of this ‘face’ culture is not embarrassing someone by making him lose ‘face’. These two sides together can bring about damaging effects to family and community relationships in an Asian society like that of Singapore. For example, a husband may refuse to admit his wrong because he wants to save

²⁰ *The Sunday Times* 9 September 2001. Choosing hospital wards: A question of ‘face’, p22.

his 'face'. On the other hand, his wife is reluctant to make him lose 'face' by confronting him with the truth. For the same reasons, parents do not see their need to admit their wrong to their children, and the latter restrain from speaking their minds. Hence, in the name of 'face' and harmony, many problems are not resolved but simply 'swept under the carpet.' The reality then is that family relationships lack truth speaking, and become very superficial because of suppressed feelings and lack of openness.

Perhaps, if Christians and the Church in Singapore are to make greater impact on a 'face' culture, one thing to do is to say what is true rather than what sounds nice; to 'speak the truth in love' (Eph 4:15). And if the family is the basic unit of community, then Christians are to impact society by practising truth telling in love to one another, beginning in the home.

Wayne Johnson, former Dean of School of Theology at Singapore Bible College and currently Dean of Chapel at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (USA), once wrote on Christian ministry in modern Singapore. He (Johnson 1997:247) challenges Christians who are to be 'salt and light' to develop an atmosphere of truth telling in love this way:

... it takes hard work to develop a community which not only affirms the truth but speaks the truth in the context of loving relationships ... We must be committed to telling the truth and being faithful to that truth.

If we are not willing to call each other to the truth and the clear commands of Jesus we will soon lose any idea of how the Christian life is to be lived

Hence, the ongoing task of the Christian and the Church is to honour Christ in such a 'face' culture. This implies that while Christian teachings and practices are to be expressed in ways that are socio-culturally sensitive and appreciated, one's actions and lifestyle must not be dictated by socio-cultural norms and values that are not Christ honouring. The implied suggestion is that *the Christian and the Church must be prepared to do that which honours Christ even if it means losing 'face'*. For example, Christianity is often viewed as a 'prestigious' religion in Singapore because most Christians are English-educated, and belong

to the higher-educated and higher-income category. Why is this so? Could it be that Christians and the Church here in general are not as fervent as they should be in reaching out to the marginalised and down-and-out in society for fear of losing 'face'? Is keeping 'face' an act of exalting the pride that Christians have in their socio-cultural respectability rather than expressing Christ's humility by identifying with the lesser in society?

These are relevant questions if Christians and the Church in Singapore are to make breakthroughs in being pro-family in a meritocratic society - that is - to help build strong families in society through active involvement, and to challenge the Christian family to be an example of healthy family life for others to consider. Indeed, the stories of some of the conversational partners (M3, M5 and M6) testify that they have experienced certain breakthroughs in honouring Christ in their respective family situations because they dare to adopt what works best for the good of their own family even if it means losing 'face' in the light of socio-cultural conventions.²¹ In this sense, they are not rebels without a cause, but only being practical though not necessarily popular with what they have decided to do.

In summation, with strong families very much a concern on the national agenda, Christians individually and as the Church can now work not in isolation, but in collaboration with the nation's efforts to make strong families a pillar of Singapore society. The suggestions proposed are meant to stimulate further thinking on how Christians can work hard not only for the sake of doing well in a meritocratic society, but more importantly, for the purpose of being pro-family in a meritocratic work culture. Indeed, it is hoped that as Christians in Singapore reflect and explore further on the implications of these suggestions, they can find ways to show themselves as worthy citizens of God's kingdom and that of their earthly country.

²¹ M3 once declined a promotion prospect because it would allow him little time with his family. M5 could have done better if he has been willing to spend more time at the workplace in order to hobnob with his superiors. M6 has been a full-time 'househusband' for many years in order to allow his better-paid wife to continue her professional work.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

6.1 Review of Present Study

The theme of this study is: 'The success culture in Singapore and its challenges to the Christian man in building a strong family'. In recent years, it has been increasingly visible that the Singapore family is becoming more and more stressed and strained. With demanding jobs today, many men tend to reduce the needs of spouses and children to only the material, thereby neglecting their non-material and emotional well-being. And with women being highly educated and professionally qualified these days, the men in Singapore will also need to rethink about the traditional male role in the family.

With this overarching concern, the expressed aim of this study is: To critically correlate insights from the normative Christian sources and other disciplines so as to formulate a pastoral counsel on building strong families for Christian men in Singapore as they live out their faith and interact with others in a success-oriented society.

The study begins with a recounting of Singapore's past. This helps one to appreciate that the economic orientation in her success culture does not come about overnight. The British came because they saw the economic potential in Singapore. The Malay rulers were willing to release control to them because of handsome compensations. The early immigrants who came from China and India to settle and work in Singapore, also had making money uppermost in their minds - they hoped to give a better life to themselves and loved ones back home in their lands of origin.

Then, there was the trauma of the Japanese occupation in World War II (which also exposed the tentativeness of the British in defending Singapore), the fight against the communists after the war, and the pain of separating from Malaysia after a brief and contentious merger.

In the midst of overwhelming odds, the nation's leaders rallied the people together to persevere, excel and compete as an independent city-state. Self-belief, unity and diligence were emphasised and became the hallmarks of Singapore's rise from poverty to prosperity.

However, this preoccupation with economic success has made many Singaporeans today adopt a narrow, materialistic and individualistic perspective of life. As a result, social neighbourliness is weak and families are increasingly stressed. And since Singapore exists not in isolation, but in lively interactions with the outside world, the influence of secular success ideas have greatly affected the psyche and thinking of the people, for better or for worse.

This study then moves on to attempt a Christian-secular dialogue, giving the normative Christian traditions a platform to interact with other disciplines of learning and knowledge. Out of such an interaction, some biblical-theological formulations have been proposed. Of these, three are worth repeating here:

- i. There should be mutual dependence and cooperation in home life without blurring the distinct roles of headship and submission that God has ordained for husband and wife respectively. However, care must be taken when using Scripture to argue for these role distinctions as they may only be so because of the socio-cultural setting during a particular period in biblical history. Hence, the reason for such distinctions may be to reflect the identity of God's people in a positive way. Simply put, these distinctions may be just descriptive of desired/existing Israelite, Jewish or Christian home life at a time in biblical history, rather than prescriptive for all times. In the final analysis, man and woman need to observe their roles at home not as keepers of God's laws, but as lovers after God's heart. They find their worth in God's grace, and relate to Him and each other in love. Their willingness to play their respective role at home is evident of this transformation in them - they do not fight for equity in order to elevate their own self, but they desire an other-centred, loving life in all that they do.

ii. 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.

iii. 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 holy before the Almighty and the moral responsibility to be gracious to the less fortunate.

The study then moves into the 'real world' and some Christian men have been asked to voice their views on a questionnaire and/or through a time of conversational partnership.¹ Without insisting on being definitive in the findings here, these views on work-family complexities faced by the men have helped to draw out some features that profile the average Christian man in Singapore:

- i. He accepts competition as inevitable in a meritocratic society.
- ii. He works hard so as to develop to his best potential and to provide well for his family materially.
- iii. He often has little time to bond with his family relationally unless he makes a deliberate effort to do so.
- iv. He does not equate male headship with sole leadership at home. Hence, he shares or delegates family responsibilities, including that of breadwinning, housekeeping and parenting.
- v. He discusses rather than dictates decisions related to major family concerns. Hence, he is pragmatic enough to seek and adopt alternatives that are most beneficial to the family. These include choosing options like dual-income, child care centre, maid and grandparent to meet the breadwinning, child caring and housekeeping needs of the home.

The Christian faith has much to teach in favour of working hard, caring for one's family, and loving others. These emphases have been embodied in the suggested biblical-theological formulations (see Chapter IV, pp274-78). Measuring the features that profile the

¹ Each conversational partnership lasted about an hour.

average Christian man in Singapore against these formulations, some concerns stand out to be addressed:

- i. Though the man is to do all things well for the glory of God, competition today can dull his compassion for people.
- ii. Though the man is to work hard in developing his God-given potential and providing well for his family, the meritocratic culture today can lure him into elitism and materialism.
- iii. Though God does bless the deserving man with success and achievement in this world, the passion for results and recognition today can blind him to the importance of relationships and recreation, especially with loved ones.
- iv. Though God has made man to head his family within a framework of shared leadership, the busyness of working life today can lead him to knowingly or unknowingly shirk his responsibilities and push them to others, especially to his wife.
- v. Though man is answerable to God as to how well he manages his family, the pragmatism today can tempt him to use people and things as means to safeguard only his personal and family well-being, and thus, promoting self-centredness and individualism rather than other-centredness and community.

To help the individual Christian and the Church in Singapore explore options and alternatives in addressing these stated concerns, the study concludes by proposing five suggestions (not solutions):

- i. Work hard so as to earn enough to turn limited time and energy into actual pro-family events.
- ii. Adopt an extended family member into one's own home.
- iii. Enhance pro-family facilities and services by establishing, giving and volunteering more.
- iv. Emphasise family life education in the Christian faith in order to advance it in the Church, home, workplace and society at large.
- v. Be prepared to do that which honours Christ even if it means losing 'face', beginning at home.

The closing call is aimed at challenging Christians not only to do well in a meritocratic society, but to be pro-family in such an environment without undermining the value of working hard.

6.2 Recommendations for Further Study

It must be admitted that this study is very narrow in scope. The primary focus is on the Protestant Christian men, and not more than 15 % of the population are followers of Protestant Christianity in secular Singapore.²

Another thing to note is that the family under study is the nuclear family - that is - man, wife and dependent child(ren) staying in the same household. Again, this is restrictive because the Singapore family is becoming increasingly complex due to various sociological factors. With an ageing population, many nuclear families face the 'pressure' of looking after at least one elderly member of the extended family. With divorce on the rise, the number of families that have become single-parent homes has been markedly increased. There are also those homes in which couples are childless either by choice or by circumstances.

In view of these limitations, this study does not pretend to address the concerns of all Christian families, let alone all families in Singapore. But it is hoped that it will generate greater interest in thinking, examining and writing about the Singapore family from a Christian perspective. Hence, the following recommendations are made so that progressive and comprehensive studies can be undertaken to help Christian families:

- i. In the Christian family today, the man is not the only one who has to handle work-family complexities. The wife also has to face the same challenges, especially if she is a co-breadwinner. Moreover, children are not spared as well - they can be so caught up in their schoolwork and activities that they too have no time for the family. Hence, the complexities of roles, responsibilities and relationships apply not only to the man, but also equally to the wife and child. Hence, *a study into how women and children view and respond to these complexities in Christian homes is recommended.*

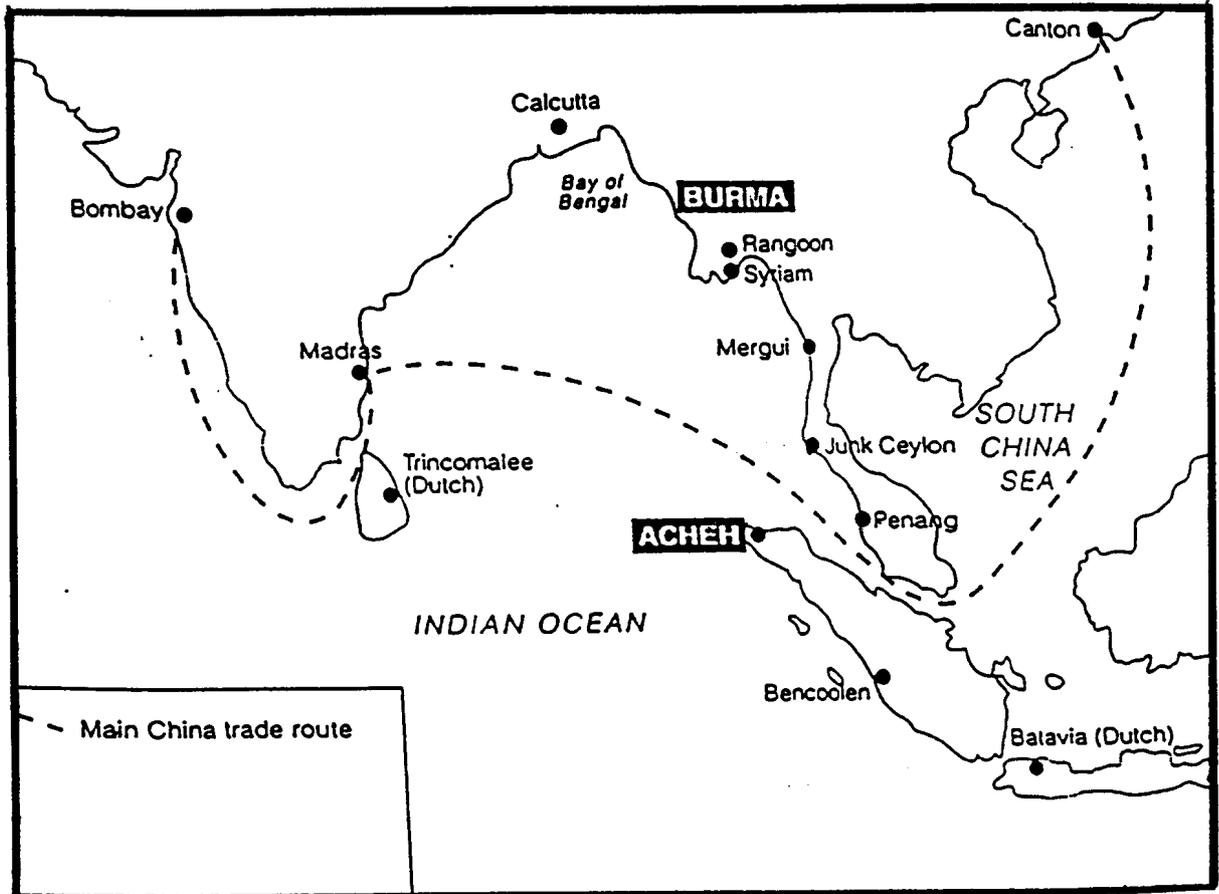
² 15 % of the population in Singapore are categorised as *Christians* (Catholics and Protestants) - Ministry of Information and the Arts 2001. *Singapore 2001*. Singapore: MITA.

ii. This study has revealed that Christian men generally have no strong objection to a maid or grandparent helping with child caring and/or housekeeping. However, the presence of such a person in one's home will bring about a whole new set of relational dynamics which can upset the family equilibrium if not wisely handled. Hence, *a study into relational dynamics with non-next-of-kin persons (like grandparents and maids) in Christian homes is recommended.*

Indeed, these recommendations are made not merely for the purpose of adding more to the body of knowledge. More importantly, it is to further help Christian families think through the implications of being 'salt and light' as subjects of God's kingdom here on earth.

To God be the glory!

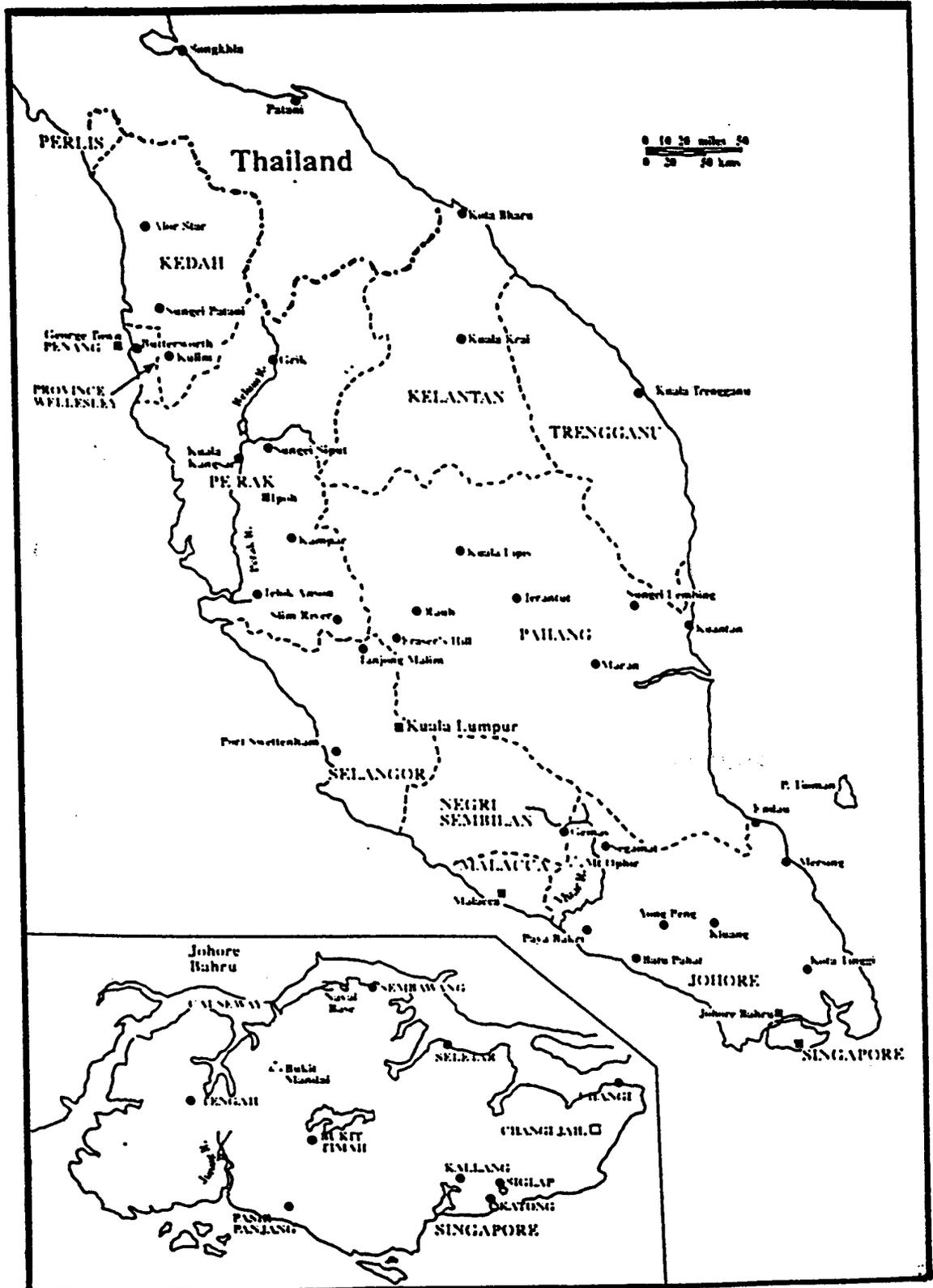
Map of Indian Ocean-South China Sea Trade Route in the Late 18th Century
(Baker 1999:80)





ANNEXURE B

Map of Singapore and Malaya (Ong 1997)



ANNEXURE C

Letter of Intent

John Yuen
Block 516, Serangoon Nth Ave 4
#08-244
Singapore, 550516
Tel: 483-4509 (Home) 9789-2414 (Hand Phone)

1 January 2001

Dear Brother in Christ at _____ Church,

Greetings in His name. Let me first introduce myself.

My name is John Yuen and I am a lecturer with the Singapore Bible College. At present, I am on study leave, writing my PhD dissertation in the field of practical theology as an external student of the University of Pretoria in South Africa. The topic of my research is on the success culture in Singapore and its challenges to Christian men in building strong families.

As part of my research, I am conducting an opinion poll among Christian men who are married and have dependent children. The purpose of this is to gauge how these men perceive their roles at work and at home in general. I have sought the assistance of your pastor, the Rev _____, in conducting this opinion poll in your church, and you have been identified as a potential respondent.

The information provided through the questionnaires will be presented in my dissertation, and used to generate some suggestions as to how family men and the Church can help in building strong Christian homes. Thus, your response to this opinion poll is very important to me not only because it is a dissertational requirement, but more importantly, as an instrument to help enhance Christian living and ministry.

Please be reassured that your response will be kept confidential, and no individual will be identified by name in my dissertation. Completing the questionnaire should take no more than 15 minutes. I very much appreciate your completing and returning the questionnaire by 31 January 2001, using the postage-paid envelope attached.

Thank you and I look forward to receiving your early response.

Yours faithfully in Christ,

John Yuen, PhD Student
Faculty of Theology
University of Pretoria
South Africa



ANNEXURE D

QUESTIONNAIRE
(For Married Christian Men with Dependent Children)

Name: _____ Age: _____ Contact Number: _____

Please tick in the appropriate [].

Own Occupation:

- Professional/Technical
- Business/Financial
- Administrative/Managerial
- Educational
- Clerical
- Others (please specify): _____

Wife's Occupation:

- Professional/Technical
- Business/Financial
- Administrative/Managerial
- Educational
- Clerical
- Others (please specify): _____

Own Highest Education:

- Secondary/'O' Levels
- Pre-University/'A' Levels
- Polytechnic
- University/Professional Qualification
- Others (please specify): _____

Wife's Highest Education:

- Secondary/'O' Levels
- Pre-University/'A' Levels
- Polytechnic
- University/Professional Qualification
- Others (please specify): _____

No. of Years Married: _____ No. of Children: _____ Age(s) of Child(ren): _____

Please choose and tick your most preferred response for each of the statements.

Statement	Agree Strongly	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Disagree Strongly
1. I compete with others so that I can stay ahead of them.					
2. I compete with others so that I can bring out the best in myself.					
3. I measure achievement in terms of getting the desired results.					
4. I measure achievement in terms of experiencing the satisfaction of having tried hard.					
5. I work hard at providing well for my family so that they can be materially comfortable.					
6. I work hard at relating closely with my family members.					
7. I expect my family members to be understanding when work takes me away from them.					
8. I enjoy doing things <i>with</i> my family more than doing things <i>for</i> them.					
9. I fail as a man if I cannot be the sole breadwinner in my family.					
10. I lead my family by sharing substantially in home responsibilities.					
11. I fail as a man if I have integrity of character but no influence of control.					
12. I lead my family by listening to their views before making decisions that will affect our home.					

Please use attached envelope to return completed questionnaire by 31 January 2001 to John Yuen at:
Block 516, Serangoon Nth Ave 4, #08-244, Singapore, 550516.

Thank you!

ANNEXURE E

Name of conversational partner: _____
Age: _____
Education: _____
Occupation: _____
No. of years working: _____
No. of years married: _____
Wife's education: _____
Wife's occupation: _____
No./Ages of children: _____
Contact no.: _____
Date of conversation: _____

CONVERSATIONAL GUIDE 1

Research Topic:

The success culture in Singapore and its challenges to Christian men in building strong families

I. Conversational topic 1: Working life in Singapore

A. Main question: From your working experiences over the years, what has it been like working in Singapore?

1. An example of success
2. An example of failure

II. Conversational topic 2: How work demands affect family life

A. Main question: In what ways has your work been in tension with your family?

1. Feelings when such a tension arises
2. Attempts to resolve such a tension

III. Conversational topic 3: Man's role at home

A. Main question: As a Christian, what does male headship in the family mean to you?

1. Trend toward dual-income families
2. Value of homemaking, child-care and child-tutoring options today

ANNEXURE F

Name of conversational partner: _____
Age: _____
Education: _____
Occupation: _____
No. of years working: _____
No. of years married: _____
Wife's education: _____
Wife's occupation: _____
No./Ages of children: _____
Contact no.: _____
Date of conversation: _____

CONVERSATIONAL GUIDE 2

Research Topic:

The success culture in Singapore and its challenges to Christian men in building strong families

I. Conversational topic 1: Work satisfaction and frustration

A. Main question: Could you share some stories about the 'ups and downs' in your working life all these years?

1. Identify causes/reasons for work satisfaction
2. Identify causes/reasons for work frustration

II. Conversational topic 2: The 'rat race' - choice or no choice?

A. Main question: If need be, would you be honest enough to tell your boss that your family needs you more than your work? What struggles have you gone through in this regard?

1. Why not getting into the 'rat race' is difficult
2. What the balancing factors are

III. Conversational topic 3: Challenges facing a dual-income family

A. Main question: Yours is a dual-income family. How has this arrangement affected the roles and relationships in your family life?

1. The positive and negative effects on family life
2. How husband's headship and wife's submission is understood and practised in such an arrangement

ANNEXURE G

Name of conversational partner: _____
Age: _____
Education: _____
Occupation: _____
No. of years working: _____
No. of years married: _____
Wife's education: _____
Wife's occupation: _____
No./Ages of children: _____
Contact no.: _____
Date of conversation: _____

CONVERSATIONAL GUIDE 3

Research Topic:

The success culture in Singapore and its challenges to Christian men in building strong families

I. Conversational topic 1: Doing well at work

- A. Main question: What is more needed for you to do well in the workplace - competing with others or cooperating with them? Why so?
1. Factors favouring chances of doing well
 2. Pressures facing those who want to be less driven

II. Conversational topic 2: Providing well for family

- A. Main question: What have been your struggles as the family breadwinner in relation to your roles and responsibilities at home?
1. Material and emotional support
 2. Making decisions and giving guidance

III. Conversational topic 3: Living out Christian beliefs

- A. Main question: How have your Christian beliefs affected the way you deal with work-family conflicts?
1. Climbing up the career ladder without cheating family
 2. The traditional view of women as homemakers

ANNEXURE H

Name of conversational partner: _____
Age: _____
Education: _____
Occupation: _____
No. of years working: _____
No. of years married: _____
Wife's education: _____
Wife's occupation: _____
No./Ages of children: _____
Contact no.: _____
Date of conversation: _____

CONVERSATIONAL GUIDE 4

Research Topic:

The success culture in Singapore and its challenges to Christian men in building strong families

I. Conversational topic 1: Work motivations

A. Main question: What motivates you in your career life?

1. For self
2. For family

II. Conversational topic 2: Family income

A. Main question: Yours is a single-income family. What are your experiences like with the pros and cons of this arrangement in relation to your family life?

1. Reasons for this arrangement
2. Viability of single income today

III. Conversational topic 3: Family health

A. Main question: How do you feel about your family life, and what would you like to see happen to it?

1. Marks of a strong family life
2. Different roles and help

Name of conversational partner: _____
Age: _____
Education: _____
Occupation: _____
No. of years working: _____
No. of years married: _____
Wife's education: _____
Wife's occupation: _____
No./Ages of children: _____
Contact no.: _____
Date of conversation: _____

CONVERSATIONAL GUIDE 5

Research Topic:

The success culture in Singapore and its challenges to Christian men in building strong families

I. Conversational topic 1: Hard realities in the workplace

A. Main question: In wanting to do well in your career, what have been your experiences like with some hard realities in the workplace?

1. Own measure of success
2. Personal sacrifices

II. Conversational topic 2: Detrimental effects on family life

A. Main question: How have work demands affected your involvement in family life?

1. Husband's support
2. Father's involvement

III. Conversational topic 3: Dual income

A. Main question: Yours is a dual-income family. How has this arrangement further affected family relationships?

1. Reasons for dual income
2. Family sacrifices

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ABSTRACT

*Singapore's Success Culture
and Its Challenges to Christian Men
in Building Strong Families*

by

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The aim of this study is:

To critically correlate insights from the normative Christian sources and other disciplines so as to formulate a pastoral counsel on building strong families for Christian men in Singapore as they live out their faith and interact with others in a success-oriented society.

This study is important in that it attempts to:

- Expose the false belief that homemaking should not be a masculine responsibility, and to challenge Christian men in Singapore to lead their families as God-honouring husbands and fathers in a materialistic and success-oriented society.
- Help the Church in Singapore in the ministry of building strong Christian families so that a good witness can be presented before a highly secularised society.
- Nurture professionalism in the ministry by formulating a pastoral guide with which those in Christian full-time vocation or voluntary work can use to effectively care and counsel Christian men with troubled family lives.

To accomplish these tasks, the four aspects - descriptive, historical, systematic and strategic - advocated by Don S Browning in his book, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, were considered. An opinion poll was also done to augment the library research. Additionally,

qualitative interviews in the form of conversational partnerships were conducted to better hear and understand the work-family complexities faced by some Christian men.

The findings in terms of some features that give a preliminary profile of the average Christian man in Singapore as a basis for further research are:

- i. He accepts competition as inevitable in a meritocratic society.
- ii. He works hard so as to develop to his best potential and to provide well for his family materially.
- iii. He often has little time to bond with his family relationally unless he makes a deliberate effort to do so.
- iv. He does not equate male headship with sole leadership at home. Hence, he shares or delegates family responsibilities, including that of breadwinning, housekeeping and parenting.
- v. He discusses rather than dictates decisions related to major family concerns. Hence, he is pragmatic enough to seek and adopt alternatives that are most beneficial to the family. These include choosing options like dual-income, child care centre, maid and grandparent to meet the breadwinning, child caring and housekeeping needs of the home.

Finally, to help Christian men and the Church in Singapore to be actively pro-family in perspective and action, the study concludes by proposing five suggestions:

- i. Work hard so as to earn enough to turn limited time and energy into actual pro-family events.
- ii. Adopt an extended family member into one's own home.
- iii. Enhance pro-family facilities and services by establishing, giving and volunteering more.
- iv. Emphasise family life education in the Christian faith in order to advance it in the Church, home, workplace and society at large.
- v. Be prepared to do that which honours Christ even if it means losing 'face', beginning at home.