

## On Family and Community Leadership: FAMILIA's Reception of Ephesians 5: 22-33

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**Abstract:** Concentration of power in one dominant group is inappropriate nowadays when gender equality, democracy, and egalitarianism are the prevailing ideals in the contemporary times. Along with this positive social change is the ecclesial renewal since Vatican II. The Catholic Church has been traversing the journey to synodality in the principles of communion, full participation, and openness to the mission (Vademecum, 1.2). Despite the ideals and the pursuit for renewal, the monopoly of power by one group still exists today in both secular and religious structures. Among religious communities, certain biblical texts with its interpretations that allegedly contain the truth are used to justify the hold of power by the dominant group as divinely pre-ordained. This paper specifically focuses on Ephesians 5:22-33 and how it is perceived by FAMILIA leaders that, subsequently, impacts their community leadership structures and household relationships. This study is a qualitative descriptive research using online structured interview of twenty-one participants generating electronic transcripts subjected to Richard Lyn's qualitative analytic coding strategies for textual data. Consequent concepts and themes lead to establishing FAMILIA's reception of Ephesians 5: 22-33 then juxtaposed with various exegesis of bible scholars to gauge whether the interpretation is the intention of the biblical text itself. The outcomes of the study show perceptions lie on a wide spectrum from literal to complementarity, to egalitarian views. The literal view of absolute male headship or limited women leadership as a mere compromise is the dominant theme in FAMILIA leadership structure and family relations. It shows that along with other faith-based communities, FAMILIA is faced with the challenge to respond to the call for synodality that involves renewal of mindset and structures (Vademecum, 1.3). The way towards such renewal is the introduction of biblical hermeneutics and gender education in the community's adult faith formation program.

**Key words:** FAMILIA; mutuality; egalitarian; patriarchy; leadership; family; community.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

"Wives, submit to your own husbands...husband love your wives..." This is one characteristic being used to describe the Christian marriage as found in the deuterion-letter of St. Paul to Ephesians 5: 22-33. The relationship of Christ to the church as described therein is the ultimate model for relationship between

husbands and wives. Other deuterio-Pauline passages echo the same in "Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord" (Col 3: 18); and, "To be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled" (Titus 2: 5). The Old Testament texts primarily the book of Genesis has the

same appeal, as in “The LORD God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him’” (2: 18); “To the woman [God] said, “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to[a] your husband, but he shall rule over you” (3: 16). The aforesaid texts seem to assert wives have the roles of supporters, followers, helpmates and being under the authority of their own husbands. Accordingly, the insinuation of the same pericopes is husbands have the corresponding roles as head, ruler, provider, protector and enabler in relation to their wives.

The above understanding of biblical texts subsequently creates power structure in husband and wife relationships. Such structure that places a man over a woman, where men must rule, is patriarchy (De La Torre, 2002). By virtues thereof, Christian marriage becomes patriarchal. Evidence of this component of patriarchy is likewise present in the institutional Church as a constant tradition. For instance, on the question of admission of women to the ministerial priesthood, the Catholic Church has never felt priestly or episcopal ordination can be validly conferred on women (Inter-Insignores, 1976). Church authorities presented this canonical documents throughout history that seem to defend that limited women leadership is to be faithful with the model left for the church to conform.

The rapid changes in the world exhibit the growing emphasis on the need for equality on leadership opportunities. One group in the forefront of these changes is the women sector (John XXIII, PIT 41). Many women assumed increasing leadership roles and made great contributions in different levels of society. The task of building a just, humane and progressive society is now in the shoulders of both men and women. This is the call of the times that confront the institutional church as well as faith-based organizations or ecclesial movements here and abroad (Pilario, 2013).

Ephesians 5: 22-33 is an oft-quoted biblical text, partial or entirely, in some church documents on marriage and family relations (CCC, 110-111; AL, 156; *Mulieres Dignitatem*, 23). The researcher opines that it may have strong influence in community and leadership structures of faith-based marriage and family oriented organizations such as FAMILIA (Family and Life Apostolate). This trans-parochial community derives its teachings from scripture and church documents. In fact, FAMILIA draws its vision “Communities of empowered Christian families passionately witnessing everywhere” and its mission “to bring more families back to God’s plan” from

Familiaris Consortio. This paper specifically examines the perceptions of FAMILIA leaders on Ephesians 5: 22-33 and, subsequently, its implications on their community and leadership structures as well as household relationships. As of 2016, FAMILIA has grown to 11,000 members with almost 4000 in Metro-Manila and 7000 in the provinces. Recognized in 23 dioceses, it is present in 120 parishes throughout the country. It is also present in Milan, Italy (FAMILIA website).

There are two principal objectives of the study. First, it is to examine FAMILIA leaders’ interpretations of Ephesians 5: 23-33. And, second, it is to determine how these interpretations regulate their views on the leadership structure and gender relations in the community and family households.

#### **INTERPRETATIONS OF EPHESIANS 5: 22-33 BY BIBLICAL SCHOLARS**

This paper employs on the text the tools of exegesis specifically structural criticism, literary approach, philological criticism (Tapiador, 2005) and feminist liberation hermeneutics (Fitzmyer, 1995) to ferret out the different perspectives.

There are varied interpretations of Ephesians 5:21-33. In one extreme is the literal view that calls for the “absolute domination” or the “rule” of men over women and at the other end is the perspective that calls for “mutual submission.” The first is conservative or traditional; the second is the moderate type. It can be inferred that interpretations of the passage have far-reaching implications beyond family sphere. For the feminists who fight for the liberation of women from oppressive structures, either way is still promoting submission of women only in varying degrees.

Is woman’s submission the original meaning of the text? De La Torre (2002) defines original meaning as “the meaning that existed in the mind of God and was revealed to the original person who verbalized this revelation to those who first heard or read the message.” To discern the original meaning, biblical interpretations develop in a social and cultural location of the readers. The interpretation that prevail is oftentimes on the side of the dominant culture of the time. Paul’s exhortation of men as the head of the wife, and women to submit to their husband favors men because such is the culture of the time—patriarchy. At this point, the text is viewed from below, the segment sidelined in the classical view. De La Torre (2002) brands this process as reading the Bible from the margins, and cites Gustavo Gutierrez who called the process as “militant reading.” This time the table is turned by seeing the text through the eyes of women, not to get even, rather to liberate the text from any

gender bias if we truly believe that we are all equal before God.

One strategy of feminist critical hermeneutics to ferret out another perspective from the classical view is to look at the text if it “reinforces the subordination of women, this should be reinterpreted to reveal a liberating content” (Brazal, 2008). To begin with, the deuter-Pauline passages under scrutiny is a problematic text because it contains inflammatory words such as “submit” (5:22) and “cleansed” (5:26) which sound discriminating and oppressive for modern readers. For using these words, does Paul really look down on women? Is he really against the leadership of women in family nor in society? However, it leaves a biblical reader in doubt looking elsewhere in other Epistles that show evidence of Paul’s equal treatment of women during his time. He said in 1Cor. 11:11-12, “Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman. For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God”; and, in the locus classicus of Paul’s teaching on women in Gal. 3:27-28, he declares “as many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Brazal 2008, p.47). The tenor of Paul’s statement in these texts is a complete opposite of the disciple’s (or Paul’s) sentiments in Ephesians 5: 22-33.

Employing literary criticism with feminist hermeneutic reveal the text is problematic in another front—the use of analogy to depict the role of women in marital and familial structure. Analogy is a figure of speech that “compares two things that are partly alike and partly different in order to highlight what is alike, and thus enhance and enrich symbolic meaning.” The two forms of analogy are simile and metaphor. “Simile is an explicit comparison using ‘like’, ‘as’ or something similar. Metaphor is a more implicit comparison made by direct statement that one thing is another” (Osiek 2002, p. 33-34). The latter is about the transfer of the essence of an object to another; while the former is about one object being likened to another as if it were that object. Simile is a process of comparison in the meaning or essence of the words, and not mere replacement or substitution of the word with another. Both figures of speech are integrated effectively in the whole passage.

Osiek (2002) identifies the whole passage as “one great simile: the relationship between husband and wife is like that between Christ and the church. This fundamental comparison is never turned into a metaphor: it is never said or implied that the wife is

the Church or the husband is Christ. Moreover, it is not the person but relationship, and therefore interactions that are compared” (p.34).

Within the simile passage are the metaphors: the use of word “head” in reference to Christ and husbands; while, the word “body” to church and wives. In the social context of Paul, the usual understanding associated with for the word “head” is leadership or authority. For the word “body,” the connotation is a group of people with certain degree of social unity is commonplace. Osiek (2002) observes the sudden shift of the meaning of “head” to authority of one person over one other person and the meaning of body to subordinate yet free individual person. “The comparison of wife to body is more shocking. There is nothing immediately obvious even about the similarity of wife to church, except that wives make up some of the members of the church. But so do husbands. Only by extrapolating from biological to ecclesiological functions can we begin to see some figurative similarities” (p.35).

Another metaphor within the whole simile passage is the sacred marriage of Christ and the Church: Christ is the bridegroom and the church is the bride. The meaning given to this ecclesial marriage metaphor by some men and women is “that women as members of the church should be submissive. Men certainly do identify not with the church, in this metaphor, as members of it, but with Christ, because such identification suit male interests” (Osiek 2002, p.38).

Overall, the literary criticism establishes the fact that the passage is susceptible to misinterpretation. Metaphor brings together two mostly dissimilar objects or actions to highlight those characteristics that are similar. To try to unite under the metaphor those aspects of the two objects or actions that are not similar is a misuse of metaphor. When metaphor ceases to be poetic analogy and becomes instead an obstacle to new insights, it has gone too far,” said Osiek (2002, 38).

How come the readers tend to render such interpretation of submission or subjugation through the course of time? De La Torre (2002) claims that “no interpretation develops in a social or cultural vacuum” (p.3). Applying the feminist strategy of hermeneutic of suspicion, Brazal (2008) has the following presuppositions. First, “the books of the Bible are the words of God in the words of men, that is, they were written by men, for men, from the standpoint of men in a socio-political culture where men dominate.” Second, “formation of the canon history of interpretation of text, preaching of text, and translation of text—continued to be controlled by men

within a patriarchal society and church” (p. 40). If interpretation of the text proves inimical or prejudicial to any group, not necessarily women, that interpretation must be ignored or abandoned. Kwok Pui-lan (1995) aptly puts it, “the bible should not be used to oppress or discriminate against any race or ethnic group”.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This paper is a qualitative descriptive research focusing on FAMILIA as a subject of case study. The participants are 21 FAMILIA leaders who responded to the online invitation for interview. They consist of six couple-leaders, and nine individual leaders. Overall, there are 11 males and 10 females. Majority of participants are within the age range of 50-59 representing 66.7%; six leaders are within the age range of 40-49 or 28.6%; and, only one participant within 60-69 years of age or 4.8%. They are national and area leaders of the community. They hold various administrative positions: two leadership council members, two ministry leaders, one south sector head, three area heads, five parish heads, three youth ministry heads and one homecell head. Among the participants are six married couples. The female spouses are leaders as concomitant of the headship of husbands in various ministries in the community.

The inclusion and exclusion criteria used for participants in this study were: a) leader of FAMILIA community; b) male or female leader, much preferably married couple who hold leadership position in the community; c) representing young or old generation of leaders in the community. Accordingly, the three criteria are set because the leaders are the reliable people to talk about leadership in the community. Second, the leaders are the concerned individuals on the issue of male leaders exercising authority over women; and, subsequently as married couple-leaders to find out if community structure affects marriage and family relations. Finally, participants must be representative of young and old generations of leaders to determine the perspectives of each age group.

The gathered data consist of answers from structured or directive interview stated in Google Forms. Corresponding links sent to emails, chat groups, Facebook and other forms of social media platform to as many FAMILIA leaders it can reach as far as Davao province. The interview consists of probing questions as follows: 1) How is Ephesians 5: 22-33 interpreted in FAMILIA? 2) How do these interpretations regulate or shape leadership structures in FAMILIA? 3) What is the implication of this interpretation to family household? 4) Do you agree with the prevailing interpretation of Ephesians

5: 22-33 in FAMILIA? If not, how do you interpret this text? 5) Will you allow women to assume leadership in the community or household? Why or why not?

The online interview through google forms application automatically generated electronic copies of interview transcripts. These transcripts are the data sources for analysis. The method of analysis in this research is on Richard Lyn’s qualitative analytic coding strategies for textual data. It involves the procedure of coding and classifying in order to answer the research questions. In this method, coding is about the researcher into the process of reading, interpretation and reflection to get the underlying concepts or meanings of the textual data. Then, the meanings are classified based on interrelations and connections to form the codes. A code is typifying a data segment with one or several catch words, aiming to make the dataset searchable, manageable, interpretable and manipulable (Lyn, 2005). This analytic strategy is useful to identify relevant themes and patterns in the transcripts by examining the ideas about the Ephesians 5: 22-33 as well as individuals’ experiences about community leadership and family relations. The data analysis leads to the depiction of the experiences and understanding that was present across this group of FAMILIA leaders. From there, the researcher establishes FAMILIA’s reception of Ephesians 5: 22-33 and its implications to community and family relations.

Though it is interesting to study all faith-based ecclesial communities in the Philippines, the researcher intends to focus the case study specifically on the one couple community only, i.e., FAMILIA, and their interpretation of Ephesians 5:22-33. The focus is on the community structure and leadership that has corresponding influence on their respective family relationships and vice versa.

## 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Researcher’s examination of interview transcripts yielded specific underlying concepts that illustrate participants’ perceptions about the text. These concepts are coded into three clusters: 1) Literal views 2) Complementarity views and, 3) Egalitarian views. The literal views have two tracts or sub-themes categorized into absolute male headship and the limited female leadership. The sequence of this section presents the underlying concepts first, followed by the specific sub-themes. When referring to the participants, the sample acronyms FP1 and MP5 will be used for female participant one and male participant five respectively to identify any of the 21 participants while preserving their anonymity.

### Underlying Concepts

Literal Views. It emerges from the question probing FAMILIA's interpretation of Ephesians 5: 22-33. Majority of participants simply iterated the words of the text itself that husbands are the heads or takes headship of the family. They describe this role in varied ways such as the one who leads the flock, pastoral leader, father who governs, provides and protects. Likewise, the participants use variety of words to describe wives' role as the one who submits, supports, and helps. FP16 illustrates this female role succinctly using Tagalog words "Katuang" or "Kaagapay" which means helpmate or helper. FP21 uses the anatomical make-up of the "neck" supporting the "head" as analogy for the typical role of wives for their husbands. Some invoke the image of Christ as the head of the church as the model of husband-wife relationship. Some pronouncements affirm the literal understanding as MP13 "interprets this verse as it is interpreted in our faith." MP18 and MP20 say, husbands being the heads "is in accordance with and consistent with the verses" and "it is being observed because of the willingness to follow what is written".

Explaining further the FAMILIA's interpretation, MP4 cites another biblical texts in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 11:3, "But I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God". He reasons out that while there are women members imbued with gifts, talents and skills, the leadership of husbands in FAMILIA is strictly imposed based on God's Word. Overall, the views seem to be in tacit agreement among many participants on what they perceive is the interpretation of the pericope.

Consequential to the majority's literal view, the structure in the participants' households do exhibit headship residing in husbands and the wife as helpmates. MP1 claims, "while the husband is the head, both spouses should work together in raising a Christ-centered family". FP2 supports this by saying, "the same thing happens in our family; My husband is the head of our family and he's usually the one deciding while I'm here to support him". Such sentiment is shared by MP4 and FP7 who essentially believe that the husband is the head and the decision-maker who has the accountability for the family, the wives regardless of the stature/roles in the workplace

or society is the helpmate in the ultimate mission to bring the family to heaven. In the FAMILIA community set-up, FP2 and FP5 opine similarly that "husbands lead the group while wives help and assist their husbands in pastoring their members or in doing the tasks they are given to fulfill." MP14 describes succinctly the impact of the literal view, "this will bring order across the whole community and will strengthen the Pastoral Leadership starting from the family". He adds, "for my family, it avoids conflicts and help us make decisions faster and execute plans as a team".

Complementarity Views. There is one participant who view the text differently. MP11 believes FAMILIA's interpretation is that "husband and wife should practice mutual submission to each other. When they get married, they become 1 flesh". He further describes how this assumption plays out in the FAMILIA leadership structure by saying, "as I observe, the leadership structure in FAMILIA does not belong to the husband or wife alone, but we serve leadership as one couple, and will work together as one. It implies running the household smoothly, as long as the husband and wife practice mutual respect and put their love first, set aside their individualities."

Some participants who acknowledge the pericope's interpretation of male headship, but expect its practice in the community and households is shared with wives or, at the very least, they should be consulted in decision making. FP3 has this to say, "I believe submission should be in the proper context and not to be done blindly by women. I go for mutuality and partnership. I urge my husband to lead the family but consultation with me is a must". The same line of thinking for FP17 who admits that wives should give way to the headship of the husband for the sake of peace, but the wives can reason out if there is serious consequence to the husband's decisions. Apparently, this notion of shared or consultative leadership is not a popular interpretation of Ephesians 5:22-33 among the participants.

Egalitarian Views. While some participants have the literal interpretation, they have reservation or disagreement for its practice in the community and households. MP10 views male headship is not absolute in the following words, "In some ways yes, in some ways not since nowadays there are other aspects

that leadership does not reside with the husband/male alone but rather can already be portrayed as well by women/wives.” For MP15, it is ideal to allow everyone to have voices and express their opinions for the community’s welfare. The egalitarian view or the idea of women having equal right to be the head or leader of the community is not a popular interpretation. This view allows for the openness of the couple for the reversal of roles. In short, the supporting role is not exclusive to women. Like the complementarity view, the egalitarian view is not prevalent among the participants.

#### **Specific Themes Related to Literal Views**

Absolute male headship. This is the most common reception of Ephesians 5: 22-33. MP12 who is among FAMILIA’s top leader reveals, “for the last 25 years, the leadership of FAMILIA and its structures were based on Ephesians 5.” Some participants are resolute in their belief in absolute male headship in the community and households when asked about allowing women expanding their roles even to the extent of assuming the headship or leadership in different domains of the family and community life. MP14 and MP20 answered in the negative, “with all due respect to our sisters, but back to our teachings, it is the man who leads and pastor the sheep” and “we have to follow what is written, men must be the 'one responsible', the wife be the helpmate”.

Limited Women Leadership. While majority of participants understand women’s roles as supporters or helpmates, they are open to women occupying certain position of leaderships. FP5 aptly describes what it is like, “Yes I will allow women to assume leadership in the community or household, but, only on certain tasks where she has core competence, e.g. handling a ministry, leading a worship, budgeting, etc. However, for the highest role of Leading FAMILIA and Family, I believe that it must still be a male leader”. MP4 asserts that this ministry should be only the ministry for women”. This resonates with FP19 opinion, “I think as a woman, we should not deprive them (us) in assuming leadership in whichever way. But should be side by side with the husbands. It should not be above and beyond the responsibility of the husbands. For that, we will live out what Christ wants us to be and should do”. FP16 has this to say,

“Yes, there are certain task or function in the community that is best handled by women. Women are more sensitive to feelings. But in running the household of couples, it should be clear that the headship comes from the authority of the husband”. The foregoing statements reveal underlying concepts of limited leadership of women in the community. This is attested by the statement of MP9, “women leadership is limited and behind her is the husband”.

The inference from these expressions is that limited leadership means women taking the lead only in selected capacities, but never the highest positions which is exclusive to men. FP7 elaborates, “men continue to hold the pastoral leadership in FAMILIA as guided by the scriptures and at the same time FAMILIA recognizes the important role of women in the work of evangelization. Women, being naturally nurturing and encouraging, having keen attention to details, ability to strike personal conversation easily, etc. are recognized to be effective tools for both pastoral caring and evangelization.”

#### **4. CONCLUSIONS**

Overall, the reception of FAMILIA leaders who participated in this study on the understanding of Ephesians 5: 22-33 lie on a wide spectrum from literal to complementarity to egalitarian views. 90% of them perceive the pericope in the literal views. Some of these 90% believe in absolute male headship or limited women leadership as a mere concession. The former asserts that leadership in the community and family is exclusively for husbands and the wives are only their helpmates; the latter refers to the concession of leadership to wives or women under certain conditions and circumstances. Around 21% out of 90% are open to revisit or modify the practice of male headship at all times to adapt to the changing time. They are open to the complementarity view that male headships are practiced in the spirit of mutual, shared, and consultative manner. They are likewise open to egalitarian view that posits equal rights and equal opportunities for leadership regardless of gender. There are only 10% of the participants who understood the pericope on these two views. The skewed results of the survey questionnaire towards the literal views connote gender equality and women empowerment exist in limited extent and varying

degrees in FAMILIA community leadership structures as well as in the marriage and household relations. It seems evident the culture in the larger community is the macrocosm of the families it constitutes. In the same vein, family culture is the microcosm of the larger community.

The various views of the text by FAMILIA leaders from across the age range and gender give rich insights for evaluation as to what direction the community should take in the work of evangelization as it continues to grow in the future. It shows that along with other faith-based communities, FAMILIA is faced with the challenge to respond to the call for synodality that involves renewal of mindset and structures (Vademecum, 1.3). As an ecclesial community, FAMILIA considers texts from sacred scripture as important resource for guidance. The difficulty of lay people to understand some bible passages is inevitable. Majority of participants view biblical text in its literal meaning. Osiek observes, “we are confronted with a formidable text, not only because of the layers of association and feelings it evokes, but also because of its complexity and the importance it has had in the Church’s understanding of itself.” To counter this problem, the researcher suggests an inclusion of basic Bible study or biblical hermeneutics and gender education in the leaders’ faith formation program. Such knowledge and skills are not exclusive to religious educators and clergy but a valuable tool even to lay leaders who pastor a community as they journey together to building God’s reign in the world.

There are gaps of information in this study. Future researchers can conduct a validation study in what other aspects of community and family life Ephesians 5:22-33 have made such great impact other than leadership issue. An assessment study among ordinary members, across age groups, is likewise a good area to explore to determine whether they have the same reception of the text as majority of the leaders who participated in the present study.

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