

FOURTH INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS

Theme: Family, Builder of a New Society

Dates: March 3rd - 9th 1991

Venue: Madras-India

PREAMBLE:

0.1 The Fourth International Congress for the Family was held at Madras -India under the auspices of the Service Research Foundation of Asia on Family and Culture (SERFAC) from March 3-9, 1991 98 participants from 18 countries had an historic opportunity to deliberate on the theme "FAMILY, BUILDER OF A NEW SOCIETY"

0.2 The First International Congress was held in 1983 on "The Family at the Service of Human Life" In 1984, the International Workshop reflected on "The Family in a Technological Society'. The third Congress held in 1986, delved deep into the various aspects of "Family and Culture".

0.3 This Third Congress suggested that "We commit ourselves to new and liberating relationships with God and neighbor and to the creation of new liberating structures". (Statement of the Illrd Congress - NO. 3). The Statement continues with the "Call and commitment for on-going reflection and action" It is in answer to this call that we have had as our theme: "THE FAMILY, BUILDER OF A NEW SOCIETY".

0.4 The Congress took place in an atmosphere of prayer and spirituality that had a multi-religious flavour This brought home to the participants the centrality of God's presence in our lives as well as the inherent commonality of all religions for re-creating a New World

0.5 Many of these achievements was due to one of the prophets of our times. Fr. D.S Amalorpavadass. He was President of SERFAC, an office that ended tragically with his

passing away on the 25th May, 1990. His spirit and foresight was evident in our deliberations. His contributions were much appreciated in the one-day symposium held on the last day of the Congress.

I. THE FAMILY IN THE GLOBAL CRISIS OF THE 1990:

1.0 There is a global crisis of vast and profound proportions. The family, the fundamental unit of society has been deeply affected by it.

1.1 A crisis is a time of decision, an opportunity to face a challenge with a radically new response. History reveals that the inability to face new challenges produces the disintegration of society, the ability to face new challenges demands a great upsurge of the human spirit, capable of transforming society.

1.2 The challenge to the global society comes from the over-arching process going on in the world, called modernization

1.2.1 Modernization is a process of people consciously participating in the direction and nature of change as they encounter new challenges. But the way modernization is actually taking place is an ambiguous process, especially in its scientific and technological dimensions

1.2.2 Science and technology have immense potential to enhance the quality of human life and happiness. But when it is controlled by some dominant groups or institutions whether national or multinational whose motive is merely profit, it becomes an instrument of subjugation, manipulation, and exploitation of the people. It often creates an ethos of life characterised by consumerism, materialism and hedonism for some and of poverty, oppression and marginalization for others.

1.2.3 Industrialization, another dimension of modernisation has had disastrous effects on many families in the developing countries of the South. The introduction of certain industrial

technology, does not necessarily herald progress. Often it replaces human persons leading to massive unemployment. So on the one hand, wealth and profit increases for the owners of machines; on the other hand, unemployment and poverty also increases for the workers who have only their labor to offer. The value theory that supports this sort of industrialization is the subordination of labor to capital, and of the human person to profit.

1.2.4 Rapid urbanization is the process that usually accompanies capital-intensive industrialization in the South. There is a mass exodus of peasants, the landless, the destitute and the youth towards the cities in search for some fringe benefits from industrialization. This exodus has created innumerable slums and squatter colonies which present a pathetic sight of misery and squalor.

1.2.5 There is an urgent need for spiritual and cultural values to humanize the brutal aspects of economics and politics. Otherwise, economics becomes only a matter of money and profit and politics a selfish struggle for power.

1.2.6 Even Asian religions lose their power to humanize people, when they lose their sense of the transcendent. Religion emptied of the transcendent dimension of human person, can become either a personal matter without social responsibility or an instrument of religious fanaticism, manipulated by dominant groups.

1.3 It is this type of modernization, controlled by a few dominant groups and institutions that began in the North and is now itself in a state of crisis, that has caused the crisis in most countries of the South. For the teeming millions of families of the South burdened by the crisis, what began as an energy crisis in the 1970s, became the debt crisis in the 1980s, and now the ecological crisis in the 1990s. They are impoverished economically, made powerless politically and are classified as anomy in culture.

II. THE ENCOUNTER OF TODAY'S TECHNOLOGICAL CULTURE WITH TRADITION AND EXISTING PATTERNS OF LIVING.

2.0 All over Asia, as well as in other countries of the South there are millions of families suffering the dehumanizing effects of the clash between today's technological culture and their own tradition and existing patterns of living.

2.1 To-days technology, whether industrial, communications or medical, invades and pervades every facet of human existence. It seriously disrupts the traditional values and existing patterns of living, often depriving families of their self- identity and national dignity.

2.1.1 For the massive number of families living below the poverty line, they can easily succumb to the dis-integrative socio-economic, political and cultural forces Many families are fragmented or are one parent families Often we are bystanders of their degradation, helplessness, alienation and loneliness

2.1.2 Unfortunately, very often the God given dignity of human persons, particularly women and children are trampled upon in physical violence, rape, bride burning, dowry, child labor, abortion and infanticide.

2.2 Yet, despite this terrible onslaught against the family, husbands, wives and children there exists a tremendous resilience in their human spirit, that refuses to be crushed and destroyed.

2.2.1 This resilience struck all of us during our one day exposure programme to the poor families in Madras during the Congress. It is founded on a firm trust in the divine, an abiding sense of solidarity, strong familial relationships, an amazing spirit of tolerance that flow into hospitality and openness, an abounding resourcefulness that surmounts the most helpless situation

2.2.2 It is these qualities that make even poor families a resource to be harnessed for building a new society

2.3 On the one hand there are families of goodwill that have undergone a radical change of self-emptying, from being immersed in the milieu of the poor. On the other hand, there is the rising tide of dispossessed families, conscientized and struggling for their rightful place in society Together these two groups can grow into strong grassroots level communities with vast potential to breakdown the structures of oppression and build up a new society of justice, peace and love

III THE CHALLENGE TO THE FAMILY TO BECOME BUILDER OF A-NEW SOCIETY

3.0 The Congress had awakened, enlightened and challenged us with the call of the Family to a unique and irreplaceable role in the building up of a new society.

3.1 The family envisioned by us, is the smallest but most vital cell of society It finds its identity, purpose and goal In God, its creator. It is a natural community of life and love, wherein each individual discovers and experiences one's own personal uniqueness and inalienable dignity.

3.1.1 The family has the privileged task of forming and educating the person to the full flowering of this dignity Thus the family lives up to its sublime vocation to become co-creator with God.

3.1.2 The family is indispensable link between the persons awareness of human dignity and a society that fosters and respects this dignity to the full

3.1.3 We have realised that the society, of which the family is a basic unit, can be renewed authentically, if human relationships are based on unconditional love for human persons, an uncompromising respect for their rights and selfless concern for others.

3.2 To fulfill this challenging role effectively, the family today needs to move out from exclusive pre-occupation with its own interests into caring for and sharing with others. This is not an easy task, but it can become both a healing and a growth process

3.2.1 To meet this challenge, a spirituality of the family is an absolute necessity. For the development of this spirituality, the prophetic rather than the cultic dimension of all religions offers us an immense source of inspiration, sustaining power and unfailing hope.

3.2.2 The family of today can become the new family of tomorrow when life-style is animated by a rediscovery of primordial values especially those of inferiority, sacrifice, unostentation and co-operation. The rediscovery and practice of these values will pose a cumulative threat to the values with which the society of today is trying to develop.

3.2.3 The families of today will be communities of love when each and every member accepts responsibility for decision making, in a spirit of genuine love, respect and concern. Technological choices will be introduced after a critical awareness of the consequences. Above all, the new family will be guided by a religious practice that takes sides with God's favorite people: the dispossessed, the marginalized and the downtrodden.

In conclusion, we join each family in its pilgrimage towards becoming a new creation, centered on God and dedicated to the quest of making each person fully alive. In this quest and in order to give further shape to the vision of the family as Builder of- a New Society, the ground breaking ceremony for **THE SERVICE AND RESEARCH FOUNDATION OF ASIA ON FAMILY AND CULTURE** was conducted by Archbishop G Casmir SJ, (Late) Archbishop of Madras on the 7th March 1991 in an idyllic, rural setting to the south of Madras-India.