

## **SECOND INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH WORKSHOP**

**Theme : The Family in A Technological Society**

**Dates : December 8<sup>th</sup> -14<sup>th</sup> 1984**

**Venue : Madras – India**

### **Preamble:**

0.1 About a hundred participants hailing from seventeen countries of the world met together at the International Research Workshop for the Family of Asia and Australia, held at Madras 8-14 December 1984 under the auspice of the Tamil Nadu. Family Development Centre (TNFDC) to study and reflect on the theme The Family in a Technological Society. Participants were primarily from Asian countries and Australia, and also from Europe, Africa and U. S. A. As a follow-up of the First International Congress on the Family, this Workshop focussed more specifically on the sensitive issues and problems that face the family subject to the impact of technology in contemporary society.

0.2 This coming together of participants offered a unique opportunity for an in-depth search, in order to exchange ideas and information and to better identify the complexity and magnitude of the problems which confront the family in the world of today. The Workshop enabled us to focus on the strengths and weaknesses of the family affected by technology and the impact of technological developments on the structure of family life and its whole garnet of relationships. It also took stock of the activities and efforts already made for the promotion of the family and identified the different need areas.

### **1. IN THE CONTEXT OF A GLOBAL SOCIETY WITHIN THE INTERACTION BETWEEN FAMILY AND TECHNOLOGY**

1.1 The vision maintained throughout the deliberations of the Workshop was a new world which is being re-shaped by the scientific discoveries and technological advances. This vision included a vivid awareness of the inequality in the distribution of the benefits of science and technology. The chasm between the haves and have-nots would only increase unless there is greater social justice benefit. The main concern of the Workshop was that the family should so cope with the new situation as to be the basis of and contribute to the emergence of a more human, just and ecologically balanced society. The concern extended to encouraging the process for realising universal brotherhood in which equality and freedom, fellowship and peace, the deepest yearnings of humankind can be experienced by all, inspite of several forces working to the contrary.

1.2 The Family is the oldest and most basic human institution and unit of society. More than any other institution it has been affected by the profound and rapid. Changes

witnessed by the world today. Many families are struggling to live in fidelity to authentically human values, while some others have become totally bewildered. Some even doubt if the institution has any more purpose at all. However there are families which even amidst the crisis of the present day society remain faithful to the demands of love, justice and solidarity. But the danger of man becoming a victim of a certain technological and consumer mentality is ever present. In fact, the power of technology may lead people to control and manipulate not only the environment but also the very lives of others.

1.3 The situation in which the family finds itself has both bright and dark spots. Sometimes one feels convinced that modern times are better than bygone years, while at other times the so-called progress seems to be an illusion. On the one hand, we find greater sensitivity to an awareness of personal freedom, more meaningful relationships, and desire to build a more just society. On the other hand many fundamental values like the sanctity of human life, the inherent dignity of the human person and the sense of responsibility for the world seem non-existent. The family is being called upon at this hour to play new roles and be prepared to meet new challenges. As an enduring human institution and with its resilience beyond doubt it can fulfill this task.

1.4 Technology in all its forms is one of the major factors contributing to the present situation of the family.

1.5 Technology in the wider sense of the term is constituted by the manifold ways in which man tries to enrich himself, create a more just society, master his environment and make this world a better place to live in. Thereby man ought to become more human. There are families which even amidst the crisis of the present day society remain faithful to the demands of love, justice and solidarity.

1.6 God created man and woman according to his image and likeness.

Image is not merely a reflection but a genuine sharing in the power of consciousness and freedom which God freely chose to communicate humankind. As God's likeness men and women are called to become like Him and in the sense be "divinized" The family, the community of a life-long partnership of love and togetherness, is entrusted with the task of stewardship over God's creation. As a fundamental unit it serves as a pattern and model of this task of stewardship, to be fulfilled by society and the entire humankind.

1.7 As the human person carries out this task of transforming creation and building up a more just society, he not only reflects the image of God but grows into the very likeness of God. In fact the partnership and collaboration with God in the ongoing creation and transformation of our world becomes both a privilege and an obligation. Through technology, among others man exercises this privilege and fulfills this obligation.

## **2. AMBIVALENCE OF TECHNOLOGY AND NEED FOR DISCERNMENT BEFORE A VISION OF HOPE**

2.1 The created reality as it comes from God's hands is good. Man too, shares in this goodness of creation. But the entire creation including humankind has been affected by evil within man. Its forces and consequences are visible in human activities and in the structures of society. This ambivalence colours everything that man is and does. Thus technology too becomes ambivalent. At certain moments and in certain situations, technology shows forth the greatness and goodness of man. While at other times it becomes immensely influenced by the evil in man and seems to be one of the forces that seek to destroy or deform him. This calls for a serious discernment both with regard to the development of technology and its use.

2.2 In this spectre we wonder whether our vision can be realised and our aspiration fulfilled when evil seems to be so widespread and insurmountable. Our hope is that God's ultimate purpose with regard to the entire universe and humankind will never be thwarted not only because God in his wisdom and fidelity to his promise guides humanity in its history towards its culmination but also because individuals, groups and humanity as a whole are moving towards the final realisation. Man's collaboration in this task is indispensable and possible.

2.3 This is based upon both the biblical vision and Hindu worldview according to which the mystery of being, Life and Energy is one at whatever level it may be shared. The whole world and all people are in one single process of being awakened and growing into higher levels of consciousness until the whole of humanity shares fully in the awareness of God who is "pure Consciousness and the Consciousness of all conscious beings."

2.4 Today we are witnesses to the fact that such a process is already taking place. The dormant state and low level of consciousness of several individuals and groups is being raised; the isolated awareness are being interconnected and integrated. Such an awareness is being multiplied, increased and spread all over the world in spite of the ill effects of technology. Our own International Workshop on the Family bears witness to this reality. Such a consciousness is the basis of the whole man, and experience of peace and harmony in the emerging new society where human persons are truly themselves: sisters and brothers - and where God is all in all.

## **3. ISSUES**

From our discussions the issues which concern the interaction of technology and the family, grouped themselves into four: 1) Work, 2) Mass media, 3) procreation, and 4) health.

3.1.1. All human work is valuable, whether one is remunerated for it or not. Thus the work of the wife and mother in the home and of all members of the family for the maintenance of

the home is worthy of respect. All persons require the necessities of life. Those who are unable to provide for themselves whether for reasons of disability or unemployment must be helped by society, first of all by creating employment opportunities. Currently the basic means of sustaining life are seldom available for the unemployed.

3.1.2. Some work places are so substandard that people are depersonalised if not almost dehumanised. This is an inverse of priorities, which demand that human must not be exploited for the sake of production.

3.1.3. A technological society is one in which, the basic relationships are often built on material productivity or the capacity to produce and not on inter-personal dialogue. This can easily lead to a new kind of slavery in which people are exploited for financial gain, Such a society does not place a high premium on building and maintaining the family as one's 'home' but merely as the provider of one's material needs.

3.2.1. As the result of urbanisation and industrialisation many families are now nuclear. The parents of nuclear families have the full responsibility for the support and guidance of their children unlike previous generations. The press, radio, TV and video have become another force which competes with the parents in the education of the young. The mass media, particularly T. V. invades our homes and brings the world in. This widens our horizon but can also insert unwelcome ideas. The consumerism which many programs project can compete with more interpersonal values to the point where the home may no longer be the site of re-energizing and fostering of relationships.

3.3.1. The most powerful human function are those of thinking, willing and loving. While education is designed to socialise children into the family, culture and nation, the recently accepted population limitation policies have sought to achieve a quick reduction of family size by a combination of mass media and action-oriented programs.

3.3.2. Because of the population problem, the value of human procreation has been downgraded in the minds of many. This is a great loss, as it is in procreating a person who is our equal in dignity that we attain the summit of human creativity.

3.3.3. The knowledge of a couple's fertility has been scientifically verified, refined and made precise. Couples can exercise procreative choice without altering their bodily functions with any technology. The teaching of NFP includes not only scientifically valid reproductive physiology but the integration of this know-ledge into the couple's marriage, family, culture, religion and society.

3.3.4. The freedom of conscience of every person must be respected in the formation of public policy. When there are substantial differences in life issues such as sterilization and abortion these cannot be directly or indirectly imposed by any individual, group or authority on anyone.

3.4.1. While sophisticated medical care is within the reach of a few, comprehensive primary health care is still not available to vast sections of people.

3.4.2. As the recent gas tragedy in Bhopal has shown, technological progress especially in the industrial sector is often blind to health hazards such as environmental pollution.

3.4.3. Advance in technology insensitive to human values has resulted in the proliferation of nuclear arms which threaten to annihilate humanity itself.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

4. To all who share our concern for the family in a technological society, we recommend that:

4.1 Every effort be made to create public forums and ensure participation of people to voice their opinion about specific technological choices, specially those affecting the country and the people at large.

4.2 Technological advances with regard to life's basic necessities be directed less to the refinement of resources and more to an equitable distribution of available ones.

4.3 Leaders from all walks of life are made to realise the absolute need of value education with regard to technological developments.

4.4 Young people especially be made aware of the manipulative use of technology and be educated in ethical values like respect for life, genuine love, truth and justice.

4.5 A comprehensive family life education is given at all schools and colleges so that the youth may be well equipped to accept their responsibility in the society of tomorrow; and research studies on the family be encouraged.

4.6 All people wake up to the insufficiently met need for marriage preparation and family life education so that a purely mechanical approach to human intimacy may be avoided.

4.7 The equal status of woman in society be recognized especially with regard to laws of property, succession, wages and socialisation within the family and society at large.

4.8 The scientific effectiveness of NFP be brought to the attention of government officials and other public authorities and that efforts be made to familiarise doctors, nurses and parents with its applicability.

4.9 Opportunities be made available to families to help them evaluate the media and its impact on family life, and use the media to deepen communication within the family.

4.10 The UN incorporate family life education in its programs for the International Year of Youth 1985.

## **CONCLUSION**

5.1 We participants of this workshop commit ourselves to these recommendations and wish to involve ourselves towards their fulfillment.

5.2 The participants of the Workshop expressed their appreciation for the efforts made by both civil and religious bodies throughout the world to strengthen and enable families to face up to the challenges of modern technology. They are happy to place on record the untiring and dedicated service rendered by TNFDC to thousands of families in Tamil Nadu.

5.3 May the all powerful spirit of God who guides the destiny of humankind and history lead the families of Asia, Australia and the entire world to discover and regain their own inner resources in order to discern His will amidst the fast changing technological society of today!