

THIRD INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS

Theme: Family and Culture

Dates: November 1st - 7th 1986

Venue: Madras – India

Preamble

0.1 From the 1st to the 7^m November 1986, there assembled in Madras, the metropolitan city of South India, 240 persons of different religious back-grounds from 41 countries of the world covering all five continents. The Congress was organized by the Tamil Nadu Family Development Centre (TNFDC) in collaboration with other international and national organizations as well as individuals dedicated to the service of the family. The Congress provided an excellent platform for persons with different cultural and religious backgrounds to meet and reflect in the ancient land of India, steeped in a rich mosaic of many living faiths and ways of life.

0.2 This Congress which had Family and Culture as its central theme is closely linked with the international Congress on the Family (1983) and the international Workshop on the family in a Technological Society (1984) both organised by the same agency. The unique feature which distinguishes this Congress from the previous International Congress and the International workshop lay in the attempt made to situate the programme within a socio-cultural analysis of the family supported by a well-planned exposure programme.

0.3 The Congress focussed on the relationships between family and culture and their mutual impact. Understanding culture as a complex of attitudes, symbols world views, meaning and value systems, institutions and behaviour patterns, it tried to study in depth the role of technology and religion in shaping family and culture. It also dealt with the research status of Natural Family Planning around the World.

0.4 Our common search was situated in the context of a socio-political and cultural analysis together with an exposure to the reality of family life in and around Madras. We visited families in slums, fisherman and agricultural villages etc. There, through direct contact with the living conditions of families, the participants began to enter into a new perception of the forces that foster and hinder the dignity and wholeness of family and culture.

0.5 Thus we were also helped to discover the "culture of poverty". Through this discovery, we became, more aware of global injustice structured in relationships of domination and dependency.

0.6 The Congress took stock of various initiatives and activities made for the liberation and the well-being of families and also pointed out areas of promise and hope in the struggle for the construction of a more just world and the humanization of the family.

1. FAMILY AND CULTURE : AN ANALYSIS OF FORCES AFFECTING THEM

1.1.1 We came to understand the family as a primary community of relationships and a societal organization revolving around children and the bonds of kinship. Family is indeed a privileged, sacred place for the realization of genuine married love, characterized by devotion, unselfish care, faithfulness and mutual responsibility. As basic cell of society, no family can remain closed on itself it is called upon to open out to society, even as it is constantly being affected by the forces operative in society.

1.1.2 Although family models differ considerably from culture to culture, a concern for family relationships and the family's dynamic presence in society have been common characteristics of the family throughout history.

1.2 The family as a basic unit of society is being subject to blatant and subtle forms of injustice on the local level as well as on the level of the global community. In our analysis we have discovered that these forms of injustice are being perpetuated by socio-economic structures, systems of political power control of technology and the ideological use of culture and religion.

1.3 The poverty of many is the price for the affluence of the few. The production of economic wealth, its use, the distribution of its benefits and the planning for as well as the projection into the future are all controlled and determined by the powerful few. This process operates both at the local and global levels as an inter-related system of economic injustice. Some of the aspects of this system of injustice are unfair trade practices, developmental aid leading to indebtedness, child labour, unemployment, racism, forced migration and the unjust treatment of working women. This also includes the gearing of the economic system to meet the consumer needs of an elite rather than to satisfy the basic needs of the people. All these factors contribute to the deterioration of the quality of family life.

1.4 We also discovered that political systems and power structures exercise domination over decision-making processes in society. Political power, concentrated in the hands of a few, acts as a powerful support for the maintenance of the oppressive socio-economic system. The exercise of this kind of political power renders a vast majority of people

powerless and voiceless in deciding their place and role in their own family and in society. This situation leads the poor to a state of helplessness and imposes upon them the culture of silence.

1.5.1 In today's society, with such unjust socio-economic and political systems, technology is not neutral. With regard to industrial technology the choices which determine the production, distribution and consumption are made by the privileged few. In recent years advances in high technology in developed countries have become their exclusive preserve making earlier technologies obsolete.

1.5.2 Similarly, communication technologies are used by the very same few to manipulate information, distort the perspective of values concerning basic needs and wants, and project particular life-styles.

1.5.3 The same distortion is taking place in the realm of bio-technology, genetic engineering and human reproduction.

1.6 Religion is a force that permeates human experience, influencing culture and its interweaving attitudes, concerns, views and perspectives. Whilst the institutionalized form of religion has often been associated with reaction and oppression, supporting and justifying the current world view and unjust structure, it is true that religion has played a prophetic role in the reform and reconstruction of society, Today there, is an increasing recognition of the plurality of living faiths and of the value of inter-religious understanding and co-operation that goes to assist in the creation of a more humane and just society.

2. IDENTIFICATION OF AREAS OF CONCERN

Through a critical analysis of the forces shaping family and culture, the participants identified the following areas of concern that needed ongoing discernment and response:

2.1 The participants discovered the emergence of a new culture involving the majority of families, one that may be termed the culture of poverty. Some of the elements of this culture are the presence of institutionalized violence, a sense of hopelessness and resignation. At the same time such a culture also displays a great trust in divine providence and fidelity to religious practices; a strong sense of solidarity, openness to people and human dignity, despite the subhuman conditions and the degradation of the environment.

2.2 Unemployment, especially in developing countries, poses, a serious threat to the security and well-being of family life and brings about a loss of the sense of personal worth.

Far from being a product of the unwillingness of individuals to work, insufficiency of jobs or a lack of education, unemployment is a result of systemic injustice,

2.3 The system of formal education as it exists in most developing countries domesticates rather than liberates. This type of education is so well integrated with the system of exploitation and oppression that it is hardly capable of arousing the consciousness of people towards social transformation.

2.4 The growing secularization of the family is pushing religion into more or less a private area of life, thus depriving it of its social and liberating potential for the family and society. There is indeed an authentic secularity that rests on the fact that the world is God's creation with its own legitimate autonomy. This authentic secularity is being threatened by religious fundamentalism and communalism and is creating deep divisions in family and society.

2.5 Despite a gathering of momentum of movements for the liberation of the woman and an affirmation of the equality of women and men as persons, communities in different parts of the world show overt and covert forms of male domination and continue to discriminate against women thereby creating a low self-image. The contraceptive culture is a contributing factor to the depersonalization of women.

2.6 The evil of abortion, which in a male dominated society appears in the form of selective elimination of female fetuses, is a denial of the basic right to live.

2.7 Another form of oppression of the family appears in the form of child labour, especially in developing countries. A family has to be on the very edge of despair to let a child go away from it. Child labour is the product of an unjust society that creates and maintains unemployment and unjust wages. Child labour is not just a result of poverty, it is an effect of unjust labour relations and means of production.

2.8 Technologies for population control are instruments of the injustices of the global system. Policies of population control are generally linked with the fear of lowering of the standard of an affluent life-style, unfair trade relations, inequitable distribution of resources and the operation of multinationals. All this leads to the destruction of conjugal values and the quality of family life. Ultimately it is the family itself which discerns and decides its size in responsibility to its welfare and the good of society.

2.9 The effect of the forces enumerated above has been a displacement of the family from its central role and place in society to the backstage. This has deprived the family of its formative and caring functions as well as its own unique contribution to society.

3. TOWARDS A NEW SOCIETY

Having identified the areas of concern, we look to the future with confidence and hope. The basis of our hope is our faith in God, the common Father of us all, who has called us to live in freedom, fellowship and justice, and to commit ourselves to new liberating relationships with God and neighbour and to the creation of new liberating structures in society. This call and commitment needs to be translated into an ongoing reflection and action.

3.1 The family is primarily called upon to rediscover its original and central role for its own well-being and that of society. This role is two-fold, it has to protest against the social system that contradicts the basic values of marriage and family, it also has the creative task of forming relationships and fostering values.

3.2 It is in the family that all authentic human relationships based on love, justice and concern for the other are nurtured and built up. By strengthening the love between husband and wife as well as that between parents and children, the family will find a strong alliance in those movements and groups engaged in the struggle for freedom and justice.

3.3 The rights of the child as a human person must be recognised and respected in the family and in society.

3.4 At the local, national and international levels a new socio-economic order based on justice and a life-style that is non-acquisitive, non-competitive but simple and co-operative, caring and sharing needs to be created and fostered.

The exercise of political power and the process of decision-making must aim at the well-being and wholeness of the family. This calls for bold steps and courageous initiatives to enable those immersed in the culture of poverty to become active and responsible agents for their own liberation for the creation of a more participatory society.

3.5 Technological choices at all levels should always be made in the service of justice. Advances in technology should be shared with all without discrimination. In the field of communication, technology must always be placed at the service of truth and the promotion of the right order of values. Moreover all forms of technology, including technologies of fertility awareness and population control, must be appropriate to the socio-economic and cultural context of different communities.

3.6 Each culture has its own specific excellence in so far as it represents, conserves and communicates something, of the total human experience. The encounter of cultures leads to mutual enrichment. The plurality of cultures has the potential for the organisation of neighborhood communities. By thus organising themselves the families will reach out to

others in a spirit of solidarity on issues of common and urgent concern.

3.7 In the same way, dialogue and mutual understanding will foster an honest and sincere appreciation of each religion as an embodiment of the experience of transcendence and the ultimate meaning of life. It also helps the families to come together in a spirit of Common service. This coming together of families of varied religious backgrounds in the same neighbourhood will assist them to journey together as members of one human family. In a world filled with injustice and oppression, religions have a prophetic role to play.

3.8 They must rise against the evil forces that threaten society and family, and effectively announce with clarity the faith-vision, the dignity of persons, family and humankind.

3.9 We express happiness at the many initiatives taken all over the world in the service of the family and in particular the services rendered by the TNFDC.

3.10 In keeping with the recommendation of the First International Congress to have an informal Asian Family Service, the Tamil Nadu Family Development Centre (NOW KNOWN AS SOCIETY FOR FAMILY INTEGRITY AND DEVELOPMENT - **SOFID**) has inaugurated an organization called "**SERVICE AND RESEARCH FOUNDATION FORASIAON FAMILY AND CULTURE**"

3.11 The TAMIL NADU FAMILY DEVELOPMENT CENTRE, on its 10th anniversary has been registered as **SOCIETY FOR FAMILY INTEGRITY AND DEVELOPMENT (SOFID)**. This anniversary was marked by the release of a Souvenir.

3.12 The Centre keeps abreast of recent developments in the area of NFP. Its services include Family Life and related programmes such as Premarital Guidance, Education in Human Sexuality, Family and Youth Concerns, Counselling, Home and Women's development. Family and Religion.

4 CONCLUSION:

4.1 At the conclusion of this World Congress - FAMILY AND CULTURE, in which delegates from all continents were present, we express our appreciation for the significant contributions made regarding the current status of research in NFP as well as the study of Family and Culture.

4.2 May the hope enkindled in our hearts by this gathering of peoples and the common search for the wholeness of the family and society lead us to the promotion and renaissance of culture.