Family Issues as Seen by Different Religions
Category : March 1996
Published by Anonymous on Mar. 01, 1996

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Presenting: the Never-Published UN Book Assessing the Trials and Turmoil Of Families in Today's Global Village

Above all else, the holy Hindu Vedasexalt the performance of sacrifice, and this month, in the spirit of sacrifice, Hinduism Today has set aside most of its regular features for the sake of the oldest and most influential institution the planet has ever known--our kindred-conclave, the family. There are many items you will miss in this issue: Letters to the Editor, My Turn, News in Brief, andGlobal Dharma.All these and more have been precluded in order to seize the rare opportunity to serve world religious leaders and to deliver a significant salvo in the efforts to save the sacred dharma of the family.

The United Nations declared 1994 "The Year of the Family." Among many noble projects inaugurated was the book, Family Issues Today as Seen by Different Religions. The production was coordinated by Rev. Father Dolan of New York's Temple of Understanding. It compiled a unique vision of family from the point of view of Hindus, Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Baha'is and the Akan indigenous faith--all seeking to preserve family values. Father Dolan also contributed his own wisened insights. Taken together, the articles bring to the fore the difficult and sometimes dire troubles families are now facing around the world. They also affirm family joy and purpose. It is a small misfortune that our brothers and sisters of the Sikh,

Jain, Taoist, Zoroastrian and Confucian traditions were not included in this project; UN resources were limited.

The articles were written by noted authorities, edited and flown to New York to be assembled into their final form. But as the Year of the Family was coming to a close, the UN budgets had already run dry. On December 13, 1994, Father Dolan faxed Hinduism Today, "I'm very sorry that our papers will not be published. Is anyone in a position to take this work on?" Resolving to not let this noble effort go in vain, merely collecting dust on a shelf, Hinduism Today rose to the occasion. Now, with permission from the authors, we happily present in this special edition the Family Papers in their entirety.

Introduction

By Father Luis M. Dolan, C.P., New York City, August 12, 1993

In July, 1992, the Coordinator for International Year of the Family (IYF), Mr. Henryk Sokalski, asked me to write a volume on the family as seen by different religions, in order to complement the efforts of IYF "in describing the pluralistic family phenomenon around the world." I contacted members of the following religious/spiritual traditions: BahÃi'Ã-, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Indigenous Spiritualities, Islam and Judaism. I stated to these writers that the purpose of their contributions should be to portray the views of different world religions on the family from their own personal experience. I did not, therefore, ask for an article necessarily conveying the official teachings of the leadership of a religion, nor a thorough, academic paper. I wanted simply to offer the

reader a sample of different experiences in order to motivate others to investigate more seriously the relationship between family and religion in the new society in the making. I proposed as specific objectives, for their papers, the following:

a.To increase the awareness of family issues from a religious perspective.
b.To highlight some of the most serious problems families are facing today.
c.To suggest policies to tackle these problems.
d.To show how to build "the smallest democracy," i.e., the family in the heart of society.

The papers are a true response to my request, for they are not written in the name of a religion, but of a believer in that religion. Not everyone will agree with what each writer says. There are also lacunae that stem from the fact that each paper represents one viewpoint from that religion. Nevertheless, a new multi-religious story on the family is being written. Others will enrich the story. Each writer has written in his or her own name. That becomes evident as one reads the papers. Some of the papers stress the customs, traditions, etc., others the doctrinal or religious aspects. Some are very experiential.

The paper by Peter Richards is a clear presentation of the essence, rights, problems, of family from a Catholic-Christian perspective. It gives some practical ideas on what can be done. The paper by Lori Forman is presented from the vantage point of one who has taught children of Jewish families. It shows the importance of religious feasts, of charity, tradition, and suggests some of the problems Jewish families encounter

today. The paper by Mohammed Shaalan is a comprehensive study on Egyptian families today and the role of Islam in their lives. It is written from a psycho-religious perspective that makes it unique. It also goes deeply into the Qu'ran to appreciate the customs and rituals of Moslems. The paper by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami is a Hindu vision of the family. It is presented as a series of case histories, and uses these to bring out the basic teachings of Hinduism on the family, including the dowry issue, the joint family, and the extended family. The paper by Park Chung-Soo is a presentation of Won Buddhism, its teachings, its principles and the beautiful concepts and practices concerning responsibilities for a family and children. The paper by Brad Pokorny shows the BahÃi'Ã- teachings on the family. It is unique in its elaboration of family sharing and consultation. The idea of unity is expressed throughout the paper. The paper by Nana Apeadu is an example of how Ghanaian families live out the age-old indigenous spirituality passed down to them by their ancestors. It vividly shows the role of women and deals at length with the rites of passage. The writer offers several recommendations.

The paper I have contributed is a personal reflection on all papers, as well as on my own inter-religious experience with families. I emphasize the concept of family and the new problems families encounter today. I make specific recommendations, the strongest being a call for a Congress on Religion and the Family. I believe this collection is an important step toward a modern multi-religious family encyclopedia.

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