

CATHOLIC FAMILY CRISIS IN INDIA

R.P. Coelho♦
Bangalore

1.0 Traditional Marriage Is Written in Man's Heart

1.1 The belief that marriage is between a man and a woman for the creation and nurturing of new life for society is "written in the heart of man", is a "natural law". About five thousand years ago, one thousand years before Moses, before the advent of the first revealed religion, Judaism, Hammurabi, the King of Babylonia gave his people what was probably the first civil Code of Law binding on all people. It was designed to maintain of law and order, to prevent oppression or denial of rights, to support community life; remarkably, 65 out of 282 rules applying to marriage and family relationships and family property. However, women and children were inferior to men, under their protection; like property or merchandise, to be used or bought and sold.

1.2 All societies have defended marriage and family by laws and helped by concessions in taxes and services like hospitals and schools. Particular laws and social mores restricted, even forbade, many sexual acts, alone or together, with or without consent, outside or within marriage, between members of the opposite sex; also forbade incest. These included masturbation, fornication, contraception, homosexuality, same-sex marriage. Sexual activity was restricted to married couples and otherwise discouraged because it

♦**Ralph P. Coelho** is a layman whose five children with their spouses and recently celebrated his Golden Wedding Anniversary with his wife. From 1980 to about 2004, he was involved in the Family Apostolate in Bangalore; first as a faculty member of the Family Welfare Centre, the Bangalore equivalent of the Diocesan Family Service Centre; he served two terms, from 1998, as a Consulter on the Family Commission. Now he spends some time daily to counter, on the internet, some of the more rabid criticism of the Church by Catholics, lay and ordained. Email: ralphpaulcoelho@yahoo.co.uk

threatened the order of human society – like alcoholism or drug addiction do today.

1.3 No religion has claimed the nature of traditional marriage to be their own. They confirmed its goodness and affirmed some aspects to be sacred, giving the institution of marriage a greater firmness in the public space. The Mosaic Law gave it in the Ten Commandments, Christianity (essentially Catholic Church), raised it to the dignity of a sacrament; Vatican II declared the family a domestic church, a sacrament. Religions proposed a way of life, a culture that placed the married couple at the centre of unique efforts to sustain and enrich entire human society.

1.4 Over the generations, right from the beginning, men and women, not always with good intentions, have sought to introduce their own variations into the form of marriage. Religions have resisted assaults that use science, philosophy, even government power. To my mind, this fidelity originates in more than natural human capacity and derives from a supernatural origin, from God.

1.5 Today, democratic man demands a perverted version of human rights that masquerades as love and its defence. Simultaneously, expelling religion from the determinants of action, democratic society is set to bury traditional marriage, the foundation of human society. Governments support this demand in exchange for political support. The Catholic Church has developed a comprehensive view of marriage and family that is not based only on religion; notwithstanding its basis in Catholic theology, persons can adapt it to their situation, not violating their consciences, to ensure success in marriage and have a happy family.

2.0 Evolution of the Catholic View of Marriage and Family

2.1 About three thousand and five hundred years ago, Judaism was revealed through Moses. The revelation occurred over a period of forty years, the process being described in five books called the Pentateuch. They describe a culture that incorporates moral and social practices that defined and sustained social order. These books describe a relationship between God and man, accepted by Jews, Christians and Muslims. They are written in the language and imagery of the time. The three religions differ in their versions and interpretation. Catholics continually search for God's will as it was in

the beginning to apply in the present times. This continuing search¹ is necessary more than ever, as man tries to find a way round restrictions to pleasure seeking.

2.2 Eighty-three years ago, in 1930, the Anglican Church accepted the permissibility of contraception. Until then, all the Christian Churches, notwithstanding the Reformation in the sixteenth century, believed that prohibition against contraception and terminating a pregnancy voluntarily was directly in contravention of the will of God as discerned in the Bible. The Lambeth Conferences of 1908 and 1920 had considered and rejected contraception. The Conference of 1930 passed Resolution 15 (193 to 67, (46 abstaining) that it is permissible in some cases. The Pope rejected contraception as bad in itself and a logical justification for abortion. In *Casti Connubii*, Pope Pius XI enunciated a well-known principle in jurisprudence. Contraception was a step on the slippery slope to increasingly heinous acts connected with conception of new life; abortion was still illegal but would inevitably be legalised. Little was known at time of the possibilities of assisted reproduction, of euthanasia. One can see how the first interference in an area that all men had intuitively believed was reserved for the will of God has lead to the present situation where IVF and assisted reproduction of various types are accepted, even believed to be morally right.

2.3 Procreation of children was the first objective of marriage across all societies, and is so in many even today. That Catholic Church, at Vatican II, said marriage was for the good of the spouses and for the procreation of children. Procreation was not a priority. But the mind set, the culture, remains embedded in many societies today and even significant numbers of Catholics. It is constantly reinforced in real life by the social rituals accompanying most marriages and reproduced in a variety of ways in public entertainment for the family.

2.4 The average Indian knew very little about Christianity and accepted it as a foreign religion that did much good and asked for little in return. Conversion was not an issue because of the nature of Hinduism. Muslims are relatively impervious to conventional proselytisation. Christians are seen to have some foreign links and some advantages with regard jobs. At the time of Vatican II the traditional Catholic believed it was his lot to pay, pray and obey; to

¹When Jesus was questioned about Moses allowing divorce he said "it was not so in the beginning".

follow what the priest taught; the post-Vatican II Catholics, particularly the educated middle-class, learned from abroad through friends and relations and other sources. Military and diplomatic employees of USA who included some evangelically inclined Catholics were an authentic source of Catholic developments abroad. They offered a modern version of marriage and spirituality and community in the Family Movements. Vatican II concepts entered the local Catholic communities this way informally; as US business practice and management and technology entered Indian life through business and trade. They were both equally thorough and comprehensive and effective. They have now been replaced by home grown movements and evangelists, many of which are suspect about content and intent.

2.5 The average Indian Catholic has a confused view of marriage and family that is constantly changing mixture of what is seen in public of Christians, other religions and particularly depictions in media and popular entertainment. The distance kept by the local clergy Priest on issues affecting daily life, unless appealed to, and the low priority assigned by the local Bishop and the Episcopal Conference to the Family Apostolate has developed a Catholic community that is less than well informed about its faith and pretty ignorant about Catholic marriage and family. The contemporary, post Vatican II view of Catholic marriage is defined by the content and intent of the Marriage service. This is generally known, and accepted by all, not only Catholics; few, if any, are aware of the extent of their ignorance.

2.6 A comprehensive view of Catholic Marriage and Family can be derived from the content of the marriage service and related sources. The adult couple (freely, with full knowledge of intended commitments and with no internal or external pressures) bind themselves in marriage in a public ceremony. It is public reflecting the community stake in the family. Individuals, not only parents and relatives intuitively understand the importance of the family to society and volunteer help to the married couple; democratic society makes laws to help families and provide services such as school and hospitals.

2.7 In the marriage service, they publicly affirm that:

They are choosing to marry of their own free will. This means that not only is there no pressure on them but they are fully aware of the

commitments of marriage and accept them. The three commitments are unity (that they will individually and jointly ensure that no other person or activity will be allowed to hinder or damage their relationship of oneness); indissolubility (that their consent to marry is irrevocable and for life); that they will accept children as a gift from God (that they will have children if and when it is God's will) and discharge faithfully the duty to nurture them in body and give them the knowledge of the faith in word and deed; and they will love each other exclusively and completely till the end of life.

They make their consent more explicit by stating it, individually, to love the other, by name, in all circumstances, until death.

2.8 What most people, including the bride and groom, do remember is these words spoken in the midst of a ceremonial mass in which they are the centre of attraction, is solemn, romantic – and the prelude to a memorable feast of celebration. Some might have a vague idea that they are re-enacting the first meeting of Adam and Eve where Adam embraces Eve on sight and says, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; and she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of man" (Gen 2:23-24). Wives particularly remember that "therefore a man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife; and they shall be one flesh."

3.0 Popular Understanding of Wedding, Marriage and Family in India

3.1 India is a multi-religious, multicultural society that is literally awash with a variety of teachings about God, a cosmic being, a supernatural being, a force for morality – all adding up to "spirituality". There are numerous spiritualists, god-men and evangelists.

3.2 Contemporary Catholics, particularly those born after 1960, have a confused view of the obligations of marriage and family and tend to draw on the best as experienced and seen in various marriages. Social rituals reflect the Pre-Vatican II vision of marriage, particularly the remedy for concupiscence. The family movements have greater credibility because they use the language and context of daily life. Their overwhelming sociological content and almost invisible theological content, add to misunderstanding. Catholics today are comfortable with interfaith marriages, homosexuality, cohabitation, abortion, adultery and fornication as social realities.

3.3 Public entertainment such as cinema and TV, and the media, dominate in forming the choices of how to live life – not parents, elders or religion. The preponderance of small, nuclear families with both parents busy in the world, and spinsters and bachelors choosing to delay marriage in favour of first establishing economic independence has significantly reduced the role of family in character formation. Media, particularly popular entertainment is probably most influential from amongst many forces. Main line religions are rejected in the first instance because they are rigid, old fashioned and illogical in a democracy. With parents and children together, enjoying the same entertainment it is not surprising many young people do not look to parents and elders as exemplars.

3.4 Young adults, even the less educated, realise that there is something seriously amiss in the culture they live in. They look for an assured way to happiness and will make sacrifices for a future benefit. Many struggle with guilt of intrinsic filial loyalty and their distaste for the divergence between word and action of their parents. They do not accept the excuse of peer pressure or economic pressure – not realising how much of their parents' irregular behaviour is to give their children a better life than they had.

3.5 Young adults' experience of live marriages, including those of their parents, is discouraging. They hope that older people have some special secret knowledge that guarantees their success in marriage. The views on TV and entertainment are bad enough. When they experience these views explicated at the pre-marriage parties of bachelors and bachelorettes (no more old fashioned spinsters) they are even more reluctant to entry into a way of life that emphasises sex and use of each other's bodies; nowhere is there love. It seems so much more sensible and practical to experiment.

3.6 Fifty years ago, Catholic parents were shocked that their children picked up and actively supported Pro-Choice as the only way to happy marriage. Today parents (not very) reluctantly accept their children practicing homosexuality, same-sex partnerships or marriage, cohabitation at college or in their first jobs. Aggressive promotion of "human rights" by fringe groups, risk of being ridiculed as old-fashioned fogies, silence by religious leaders and teachers legitimise these anti-family practices by default. To paraphrase, "It only requires silence for evil to flourish." The prevalence of human trafficking for sexual exploitation and the

world-wide appearance of local vicious violence against women and children, even in families, breeds cynicism and destroys trust in human goodness. The Catholic Church discovered a way at Vatican II towards halting this progress downwards, away from God. Fifty years after we are discovering that it was so little appreciated even within the Church that many of its own official teachers choose to be unaware of its discoveries and so misdirect the faithful. It is more than a little disconcerting to find members of official parish associations and national commissions openly espousing contraception. The lack of any significant theological or even Biblical content in the instruments of family pastoral care – Marriage Preparation and Pre-nuptial Inquiry makes new marriages fertile ground to adopt the areligious ways of the world.

5. 0 Defining Sexuality

5.1. In 1992, the Pontifical Council for the Family published a monograph² for helping parents. It says (nos. 10, 11) that Sexuality is a fundamental component of the human personality and human sexuality is (thus) a good, a part God affirmed to be “very good” when he created the human person male and female. Older generations knew this and were reserved, used a veil, almost like modesty, in discussing sexuality. It was “too personal”, almost sacred. Children thought they were deliberately hiding something for themselves.

5. The extensive experiments to unravel the process of conception and formation of personhood penetrated this veil. This knowledge incorporated into the humour of public entertainment destroyed the veil. People, from stand-up comics to ordinary people use humour to deny the potential evil in (erotic) love, the expected end of romantic love. Even Christopher West, who disclosed John Paul II’s *Theology of the Body* to the world, succumbed. He was away on a six month sabbatical³ during the celebrations of the 25th Anniversary of this disclosure, pondering his errors.

5.3 The pontifical society document advises “sensitivity” and appreciation of the tender age of children when educating them in sexuality. Today’s children are psychologically much older than their

²The pontifical Society for the Family, *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality-Guidelines for Education Within the Family*.

³Christopher West ends sabbatical, says he will respond to critics ..., 8 Sep 2010 <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/...pond-to-critics/>

chronological age and I approach it with the attitude that one has for a person intrinsically dear and loved, one that is of inestimable value, a source of inspiration and strength, definitely not weak but still to be handed gently, with respect, even awe. Clarity is essential in words and pictures. My grandchildren often surprise me by their grasp of serious topics and choice of difficult and even unpleasant alternatives. Maybe their innocence and trust is natural wisdom, written in their hearts at birth.

5.4 Christians find it easier to accept that sexuality, being a gift from God, is good because it comes from God. It is not as easy to convince them that there are good and bad “uses” of sexuality. It is not easy to counter the propaganda that says the sexual acts give pleasure and this was God’s intention. Man would be insulting God by rejecting his gift! The promise of pleasure is hard to resist; the memories of a stolen pleasure drive out all reason and ignorance of the indignity of exploiting, using, the very person one believes one holds to be priceless!

5.5 A simple description of the sexual organs, preferably using black-and-white slides ensure that both teacher and student are talking about the same thing. Describe the act of intercourse in marriage where each person gives oneself completely to the other - for the sake of love, not for pleasure, or duty or any other reason. When this intention is absent, the same act is simple fornication or even rape, and not a truly marital act, not an act sealing the promise that will be made in the wedding vows. It is an imperfect act.

5.6 It is known that every act of sexual intercourse does not result in conception. The will of God decides whether a particular act of intercourse will result in conception. We do not know why God chooses that a child is conceived in imperfect acts, even rape. Any action that either party takes to reduce the possibility of conception is then an act that deliberately obstructs God. Even if contraception is practised secretly by one partner, such as the wife using the pill, the harm is not only of this sin but the fact that any other sin, seems so much easier to choose. Lust is celebrated today openly; but every society and religion condemns it as a harm (opposite of a good), to the individual and society.

6.0 Intrinsic Male and Female Traits that Inhibit Family Relationships

6.1 The patriarchal culture is embedded in society and ingrained in men and women. Men enjoy the advantage it gives them and too

often, it dominates their human relationship in society, in the workplace; and of course, fully in the home. Each time it is acted out, it is reinforced. It encourages disrespect of the woman, even the one loved, because she is a woman. It is so much easier to see her faults, to discount her talents, to patronise her, even in love. It easily leads to similar treatment of her children. The first man, Adam, expressed this in his response when God charged him with disobedience. "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me the fruit of eat tree, and I ate" (Gen 3:12). Women in society have willy-nilly had to accept this view of man.

6.2 The female response is truthful, apparently subservient. God, who had made them in his image, knew what their future lives would be like. He told the woman that though she would suffer severely in childbirth but she will always desire the protection (rule over is a corollary to protection) of her husband. He told the man that he would choose to spend a lot of his time outside, that he would have to struggle to gain anything from the land. He would ignore and resent his wife and prefer to struggle outside. While these domineering traits of the man are the patriarchal culture, the woman has other ways to dominate her husband and her sons without losing their protection. She nurtures them even when rebuffed, even plays the role of a helpless person to justify her constant need to have them near, effectively smothering them. However her own daughters, and even more her sister-in-law and daughter-in-law and mother-in-law, are righteously kept on a leash in the interest of her brother/husband. Sudhir Kakar⁴ gives a fascinating view of this relationship in the context of Hinduism.

⁴Sudhir Kakar, *The Inner World: A Psych-Analytic Study of Childhood and Society in India*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981, 52-139. Sudhir Kakkar was comparing the Hindu world view with the western world view depicted in Eriksson. He uses a typology from the Vedas that starts with childhood and prefixes it with a single stage called prehistory corresponding to the first three stages of Erikson, considered very important in formation of the person in western psychology. Essentially boys are initially brought up by their mothers but their upbringing is soon taken over by their fathers. Girls remain with their mothers. The father focuses on his duty to provide and this becomes his principal occupation and that of grooming a successor. The wife provides him with heirs and comfort and maintains a house. She on her side tries to retain a connection with the son and constantly ponder that her daughter will suffer the same fate she does. All very involved and embodied in the rituals of traditional Indian marriages.

7.0 Human Development Theories

7.1 Sociology, based on classical human development theories, dominates our understanding human relationship. In the forties Maslow proposed his Theory of a Hierarchy of Needs. He hypothesised that lower level needs had to be satisfied before higher levels. At the same time, Erikson developed eight stages of human development starting with infancy and ending with old age, leading finally to death.

7.2 Theories were based of generations of human experience in civilised human communities.⁵ Most women were housewives or spinsters and men worked to support the family. Large scale migration, voluntary and involuntary was yet to become a fact of life. Husbands could come home at night, joint families and extended families (married sons and daughters lived with one of the families of origin or in the neighbourhood), and some form of schooling and health treatment was available though not equally to all.

7.3 These structures were prevalent even in the late fifties and were the basis of these and other human development theories that were used by religions and playwrights. Shakespeare wrote the seven ages of man; Christians saw the emergence of Christian virtues such as trust, hope, industry, etc. at different stages in Erikson's eight stages. Sudhir Kakar has shown the congruence of the stages of development in Hindi philosophy have an equivalence with Erikson. Programs for family and marriage still draw heavily on their sociology.

7.4 Both Maslow's theory and Erikson's theory must be considerably revised to incorporate the effect of twenty-first century life dominated by technology and the opportunity for individualisation and effective isolation while retaining some contact. An emerging theory is that contemporary children who lose the continuing contact with the birth mother within weeks after birth do not fit Erikson's theory because they lose the consolidating effect this contact has to build on the mother-child relationship established during gestation. Again, the penetration of man to almost all corners of even remote areas and the wide availability of products of civilisation virtually eliminate some of the lowest level needs for the majority of people. The impact much smaller families, of losing the closeness of family members who move away for jobs, have all

⁵Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Erikson's Eight Stages of human Development.

influenced the later periods especially late middle age and old age. Better health care and public hygiene have very significantly extended life span.

8.0 Critical Aspects Peculiar to Marriage and Family Relationships

8.1 Spouses promise to love and honour each other until death in all forms of marriage. This promise is an essential requirement in Catholic marriage while for others it appears to be a desirable requirement bound up with romance rather than reason. Men and women will find it difficult to achieve this relational state if they do not recognise and control the actions they instinctively use to dominate the opposite sex, acts that militate against unconditional giving, love. When one spouse is stronger, the marriage is an unequal, unhealthy association that keeps them less than happy; worse, it distorts the character formation of their children, a fault for which society will suffer. Genuinely interested men and women who want to fulfil what they know is a difficult promise, will find their own ways – once they understand the inherited traits, reinforced by an approving society, that direct them in their own favour and against the other. Their root of their problem is to summon the courage to act out their respect to all men and women, not only each other, in public, to withstand the certain ridicule of their peers and even parents. Today's adults are more likely to respond to challenges than the unequivocal but unearned promises of joy and happiness.

8.2 Once the learners admit the existence of these destructive traits each one will suggest various ways of controlling their responses and choosing positive ways of responding that will build the recipients self image. They can be encouraged to consider what their new way of life will mean to their children. Notwithstanding the contemporary voluntary delay, by both men and women, in having children, the wish to have children of their own, in their own image, is written in their hearts. The complementary nature of their sexuality, both physical and psychological, is part of God's design of the human person.

8.3 The foundation of lasting love is respect, something that men and women have to fight for in their own selves as well as in their peers. Society intuitively destroys attempts to develop anything that enlivens their conscience – except for those who have deliberately destroyed their conscience or its effect is reduced by disease. The spouses will find ways to transform their genuine respect into love.

However, they must be aware of friends, family, peers who want them for their own and sometimes deliberately will find ways to insinuate themselves in between. The Genesis author emphasised this need for Adam (cleave to his wife); it is necessary for both spouses to guard against letting their love for parents to come in between their love. But it does not mean they should love their parents any less than before. Often it is the spouse who reminds the other to remember and show love to parents.

8.4 The covenantal, unconditional spousal love reflects the love between the different members of the Trinity. One person describes it as the love received from God being brought to life in passing it on. This same love should be the principal element in the environment of the Domestic Church, the ideal environment for the new life God wills in the marital act. It is acted out from parent to child in response to the will of God. Unlike the covenantal love between spouses, it has no end-time. Parents need to write this covenant in their hearts. Parenting is so fraught with difficulties even in the best circumstance when ill-health or financial problems or other earthly issues are absent. The Ten Commandments do not enjoin parents to love their children; but children are asked to honour their parents. As we saw in the case of spouses, human love needs a foundation of respect and this is something that the infant instinctively expects and acts accordingly. Parents do not always respond properly so that this instinctive trust is eroded; interestingly, it is never totally destroyed; numerous anecdotes relate how children in adulthood spend enormous effort to trace their parent, even though he is an uncaring sperm donor! What does God write in the heart of a child?

8.5 I have discussed above the change of mind set, of world view, required to fulfil the spousal promises and establish the life time limits of parental responsibility. The problem with discharging parental responsibility is that as children grow, develop, through different stages, parents need to rein back on their control and sooner than later accept that they must allow them freedom, relate to their children as God plays with parents. God makes known his will and reminds us through conscience. He has given us freedom to choose how we respond, even to ignore him altogether. Parents should do the same with their children. It requires a considerable amount of trust to believe that it will all work out. My observation is that parents fall short because they do not understand this.

9.0 Conclusion

9.1 More than ever today, man experiences the need to respond to God's will inscribed in his heart. The Church has discovered in Vatican II a comprehensive way to do so in the area of marriage and family. It includes not only the basic law with theological and philosophical explanations incorporating the latest knowledge drawn from the various life sciences. This will not only contribute to the growth of the faithful but will make available to all others a means they can modify to achieve their goals in marriage and family. This will go far towards developing the solidarity of the human family, though all are still not believers of the same faith.

9.2 In this paper I have traced the history of the development of understanding and knowledge about marriage and identified the particular human aspects that have to be addressed to develop the Catholic Family in the image of the Domestic Church, where spousal and family relationships are attuned to God's will; to be different from, and an improvement on the contemporary practices. Work needs to be done to develop a particular program to replace existing programs that fail to identify the critical hindrances in man's and woman's nature that have endangered marriage and family.

9.3 It is practicable to undertake a complete revision of the Immediate Marriage Preparation Course that is just before the marriage. It should be based on the seeds discovered in Vatican II and, at the minimum; take into consideration post-Vatican II documents specially *Familiaris Consortio*, *Theology of the Body* and the directives of the Pontifical Society for the Family. The realities of the hindrances intrinsic to human sexuality described in paragraph 8.0 can be used to alert the learners about these difficulties and ways and means proposed to change themselves. The disruptive nature of erotic love to both parties needs to be explained, enabling them to choose how they will work for a change in themselves to enable a fruitful spousal relationship.

9.4 The Biblical roots of the prohibition against contraception can be explained and they can be told how the same arguments that justify using contraception justify abortion, euthanasia, suicide. This section requires to be extended to explain the sinfulness of IVF, the long term health effects for the wife due to the very vigorous procedures that have a low success rate and finally the evidence

emerging that IVF children are more prone to physical and mental problems that show up in later life.

9.5 The nature of parenting and the irrevocable life time commitment of the parents should be discussed and explored. It is particularly imprint for them to understand its covenantal nature and compare it with God's relationship with each of us. They should be explained that answers are in themselves, if they accept the responsibility. Parenting, as they promise at their wedding, cannot be delegated to anyone, even grandparents. What has to be discovered is how a father and mother can fulfil their obligations in the contemporary society that requires both to work and social system that divorces the child from family.

9.6 There should be a section on Civil Family Law particularly about duties and responsibilities for parents enforceable by law, of the many laws that seek to protect wives against husbands and in-laws and compare them with the aims and objectives of Catholic Marriage.

9.7 All priests must have detailed knowledge of the ecclesiastical and Civil law regarding marriage. This is particularly necessary to properly and authentically instruct/advise the faithful in the pre-nuptial inquiry. Today the pre-nuptial inquiry is largely inadequate and is, in my opinion, responsible for many marriage failures purely due to ignorance. Too many priests are ignorant of even the applicable ecclesiastical law and actually misguide person in need of help. This should not be all the difficult to rectify – if there is a will.