

## **Corruption, Wealth Polarization Weaken Korean Family**

By T S Thomas

Negombo: A Korean archbishop has called for urgent intervention by the Church as families in his country are facing increasing divorces and suicides amid economic crisis.

“Many families on Korea find themselves in the mire of economic difficulties because of the collapse of the middle class and increasing unemployment,” observed Archbishop Hyginus Kim Hee-joong of Gwangju, president of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Korea (CBCK).

The prelate told the plenary assembly of the Federation of the Asian Bishops Conference (FABC) in Sri Lanka that many Koreans are now in deep despair as they are directly affected by severe corruption and injustice in society.

He said urgent intervention by the Church’s family apostolate is needed to help the Korean society tide over its many challenges.

The FABC is holding its eleventh plenary assembly in Negombo, a Christian stronghold in Sri Lanka from November 28 to December 4 with a theme, “The Asian Catholic Family: Domestic Church of the Poor on a Mission of Mercy.”

The Korean archbishop said even the Catholic Church experiences “polarization of wealth and severe economic inequality” because of Korea’s “preferential economic policies for the rich.”

One of the few developed countries in Asia, Korea has witnessed a cozy relation between politics and business as well as irregularities of politicians, leading to widespread corruption.

Further unemployment dissuades youth from marriage, while it forces newly married couples to give up their hope of having children. It drives even double income families into difficulties as they struggle to bring up and educate their children.

On the other hand, as young family members indulge in internet and smartphone, many families suffer from ruptured dialogue, disregard for filial duty and disrespect for the elderly.

“There are many problems which defame the sacred value of sex: depreciation of matrimonial values; contempt for life; inundation of pornography in the internet; and commercialization of sex,” the head of the Korean Church bemoaned.

Responding to the working document of the plenary, the archbishop noted many challenges to the treasured Asian traditional family values as well as to the “matrimonial vocation” the Church promotes.

He asserted that the Church in Asia must actively deal with such problems as they cause “deterioration of religious faith and spiritual values in the family.”

Korean families, he said, were seldom affected by religious violence, but some pseudo-religious sects such as Church of Jesus, the Temple of the Tabernacle of the Testimony have caused conflicts among family members.

As Korea has accepted increasing number of migrant workers since 1990s the Church has taken several steps to provide them protection and care as well as to check social discrimination and inequality against them.

Considering the drastic increase of divorce rate, especially among the elderly, the Church stresses pastoral care for the family. The Church must also develop various pastoral measures to promote attending Mass as a family to strengthen the bond among its members.

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