

The XI World Assembly of Families Goa (India) – 10-14 september 2010

Theme: "The challenges to the family in the emerging global reality"
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1. The challenge of science and the value of human life

We are in the land of two great "saints" of India: Mahatma Gandhi and Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta.

Both of them in their lives were witness's of love, for the sacredness of life, for non violence and peace, for love, of the "poor of the poorest" and the caring love of children. For them all human beings were God's creatures, without difference of religion or cast. They both left an imprint for present and future generations.

Another great apostole, Pope John Paul II, who loved so much this great country, said: "life from the moment of conception, the life of every human being has to be respected in an absolute manner, because man is on this earth as a creature of God...created by God and brings the image of God".

Pope John Paul's "Donum Vitae" (22nd February 1987) is the "magna charta" for the defence of the unborn and life from the beginning till the end.

2. The Value of Men and Women

In the Western world in particular, the greatest challenges are against the sacredness of life. Many even question the ultimate value of human life. Advancing technology, the ecological crisis, and the world political scene call into question our Western cultural assumptions of value and the worth of every human being.

A recent affermation by the scientist Hawkings, of Cambridge, well known for the "black holes" in the Universe, has now rejected the truth that God created the world and human beings, while S. Augustine, affirmed that man is "Gloria Dei" (the glory of God) and even before that Plato in his treatise "Repubblica" and Aristotle in "Politica", centuries ago death dealt on value of life, abortion and infanticide.

International organization, like the U.N., and governments often pay lip service to life and defence of life. They readily legislate against the rights of unborn (abortion) and dieing (euthanasia).

It was Thomas Jefferson that once said: "The care of human life and happiness, and not their distruction, is the first and only object of good government".

3. The anti-life mentality

It is from these principles that we have built the foundation of ethics. "Ethics", affirms. Tristan Engelhardt Jr. "as an ethos is something you can talk in the plural". Ethics, both Christian or secular, should have as its basic intercultural principles the value of life.

I regret that this is not the case and as John Paul II affirmed, we are dominated by "a culture of death" and "an anti-life mentality".

In this technological age we are losing, or better destroying" the value of human life. Aquinas once wrote: "All arts and sciences work for the happiness of persons" (Summa Theologiae 2-2 q. 23). Clearly this was written in a better happiness age.

Another non believer was the French author, Camus, who said "Art was not invented to bring evil in the world " (Resistance p. 17). The same can be said because science, for today scientist want "to play God" and only God knows what takes place in the lab's. Scientists have decided to exclude ethics, theology, politics and human rights. For them science knows no limits and some governments have also embraced and welcomed this way of research.

4. Bio-technology

I do not think this is the occasion to go into details regarding various technological developments, which we often read or hear in the news. I will list some of them and I hope the Confederation in the family groups in each country, will develop with help of ethicists the themes.

Here are some of the major themes:

- A) Cloning. In 1997 the review Nature announces the birth of cloning of the sheep Dolly. In 1998 the University of Hawaii announces the cloning of 50 identical rats. In 1993 human cloning was attempted in the U.S. (j. Hall and R. Stilman). The philosopher Hans Jonas stated immediately: "this was the most despotic and at the same time savage form of genetic manipulation", which is never allowed and I hope will remain so;
- B) Stem Cell. Since 30 years scientists have experimented on two kinds of cells: the adult and the embryonic, in animals and humans. The use of adult stem cells does not raises any ethical objections, but the use of cells from embryos or fetus's from spontaneous or provoked abortion raises many ethical objections and is not allowed. However, many scientists (like Vescovi in Italy) assert that the same result can be ~~abstain~~ *obtained* with either cells.
- C) Euthanasia. It is clear that a wide range of euthanasia is practised in some forms in the Western world, so much so that some countries have

legislated in favour of it. Doctors and nurses have the right to ~~obtain~~ ^{abstain} and object to any form of direct or indirect euthanasia.

D) Various. For brevity I cannot go in detail in many other scientific and ethical problems, but I refer you to read in the family groups the encyclical letter of John Paul II issued in 1995 "Evangelium vitae" wherein he proposes "A new culture of human life". The encyclical deals with abortion, experimentation with human embryos, pre-natal selection in diagnosis, techniques of artificial reproduction, contraception and so forth.

An international global responsibility

All the issues are "Challenges to the family in the emerging global reality", which is the theme of World Assembly.

My final conclusion is while looking ahead to the progress of science in combating various diseases and a better quality of life, technology raises many international moral and ethical issues.

They can only be tackled through the basic fundamental ethical principles of preserving the value of human life.

This requires a moral enterprise based on a global responsibility for a possible new international community of human beings. This may even frighten us, for the problems of science, medicine and bio-technology are all problems about human life: that is the life of future families and generations.

As I started by calling to mind two great expressions of the moral conscience of our century, and of all centuries, I will end by quoting Mahatma Gandhi: "God is our strength, God is the essence of life. For me God is truth and life. God is ethics and morality".

Mother Teresa of Calcutta: " Love is the fruit of faith".

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For eight years he represented the government of Malta at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg.

His latest book in English, Italian and Maltese is: "Ethics at the service of the sick" (Veritas Press, Dublin - english version; Edizioni Paoline - Italian version).

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