

EDITORIAL

Grandparents: Living Force for the Family

The Declaration, addressed to UNESCO Member States by the International Catholic Centre for Cooperation with UNESCO on behalf of civil society on the occasion of the 20th Anniversary, aimed at reminding them of “the importance of their support in a growing context of uncertainty and vulnerability, whereas families are finding it increasingly difficult to fulfil the role that is entrusted to them”.

The Crescendo Network whose mission it is to uphold and stimulate the active participation of the elders in the life of families and of society at large and to promote intergenerational relations joined in this endeavour. Indeed grandparents represent today a dynamic generation whose presence within the family is meaningful (break-up of the family nucleus, blended families, unemployment...). “In this family tinkering in constant flux, the role of the grandparent remains essential.[1]” “Reference points in the history of the family, grandparents maintain the link to the past : they anchor their grandchildren in a story and in a culture, allowing them to find their place in their filiations; thus, they contribute to the building of their identities. For everyone feels the need for a work on remembrances in order to transmit these links and these values that emanate from these roots: this responsibility is naturally borne by the elders [2]”. Hasn’t Pope Francis declared on October 26, 2013 in his address to the participants in the pilgrimage of families during the Year of Faith in Saint Peter’s Square, “Grandparents are like the wisdom of the family, they are the wisdom of a people. And a people that doesn’t listen to grandparents is one that dies!”

Hélène Durand Ballivet, President

[1] Serge Guérin, French sociologist specialist on ageing

[2] Cathy Borie MaxiSenior

■ **AGENDA 2015**

- . 68th World Health Assembly, Geneva: 18-26 May
- . 104th International Labour Conference, Geneva : 1-13 June
- . 10th World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, 15 June
- . 6th Session Open Ended Working Group on Ageing, New York : 13-16 July
- . 8th World Meeting of Families, Philadelphia : 22-27 September
- . 25th International Day of Older Persons: 1 October.
- . General Synod of Bishops on the Family, Rome: 4-25 October

POST

Family, Heritage of Humanity?

On May 15, 2014, to commemorate the 20th Anniversary of the International Day of the Families [3], the International Catholic Centre for Cooperation with UNESCO organised a panel discussion in Paris on the theme: “The Family, heritage of humanity?” Three theologian moralists of the Catholic Institute of Paris (Theologicum) presented meaningful papers which were very well received.

[3] UN GA Resolution A/RES/47/237

Universals of the Family

Sister Geneviève Médevielle: “Family a reality more and more empirical, makes rethink its meaning. Social sciences present the family as a founding social fact assuming a biological reality, that of procreation and of perpetuation of the species beyond death. But it is also possible to belong to a family by adoption, by medically assisted procreation, by reblending loves and solidarities.



Soeur Catherine Médevielle

Searching for what constitutes “universals” of the family is an attempt to conceive the phenomenon of the family as a function of location, of relationships, of multiple cultures, which is not simple. Does this mean defining the métamorphosis of the family from an identical core, without variant? Some consider the family as an original and

genealogical link which would not be found elsewhere in the different social units of society. Claude Lévi-Strauss defined the family as a universal form of kinship and life in society. Others, such as Rémi Lenoir, show how the family is the sophisticated result of an administrative, juridical, economic, scientific and religious construction which interprets and shapes social order.

Family ties

Why, then, do we continue to consider ourselves through the family ties? The family would be an institution of the right understanding and deciphering of oneself. Acknowledging the father-son relationship, family ties emerge going beyond the natural and contractual bond thus creating a carnal and spiritual link in which each one discovers an incomparable “between us”. One discovers a link of recognition that touches the human condition in depth, the question of “who am I?” It is a family link that could be preceded by the attention of another and of his hospitality for better or worse. It refers, here, to a universal characteristic which may signify to each one the possibility of a truly human life.

Our Christian heritage on the family

Our vision of the family is the fruit of a theological interpretation and a long history marked in the Bible by a variety of cultures and family models. Yet Christian tradition has interpreted the family as an essential reality to society because it serves for the perpetuation of creation through the difference between sexes and procreation. Now, the theological and spiritual question of creation is not to comprehend the “natural” condition of man, but that he is beckoned to the likeness of a God who gives his life for those whom He loves.

Characteristics of the contemporary family in France

The next speaker, Mrs. Oranne de Mautort, pointed out:

“The lengthening of life expectancy strongly impacts the number of generations living together (many families have four generations living at the same time.)

Changes in marriage to the benefit of free unions are a well known fact. Haven’t we gone from the indissolubility of marriage to the indissolubility of filiations?

The shift of male/female relationships might be a beneficial evolution, however the question of balancing professional and private life still remains at the forefront.

As far as children are concerned, evolution in Western society has meant that more than one child out of two is born out of wedlock.

More than 2 million children live in a single parent family, oftentimes with increasing precariousness.



Madame Oranne de Mautort

However, family appears to remain the place for personal fulfillment.

Family in the Catholic Tradition

We are inscribed in a tradition which bears the universal: in Catholic theology, family is “the first and most vital unit of society.” For Social doctrine, family is the foundation *par excellence* of society. Relationships within the family teach social behavior. The possibility of common life in society takes place here. The family is the first place in which social values are put in place: solidarity, hospitality, a sense of common good, justice, peace, fraternity, liberty, etc. It also allows the development of personality, self-respect, confidence.

Moreover, not content with a legal perspective, for a long time at the forefront, the Church considers a family as a communion of persons. Marriage is a profound community of life and of love for the good of the spouses, the children, and society.

Family and the “care giving”

Sister Catherine Fino spoke of care giving, an essential aspect of family life: caring for children, relationship within the couple, help for elderly dependent parents. The family is the first place for this solidarity, refuge and assistance.

However, the family, the privileged place where each one finds refuge and assistance, is also a place for

trials: within the family, care givers are solicited more and more often in order to assume the care of handicapped or dependent relatives; parents are overwhelmed by their educational responsibilities. Thus, the stake of family and social policies that prevent families from falling into precariousness while also easing the perennial relationship within couples.



Sœur Catherine Fino

“Care giving” is inextricably corporal and relational: food, hygiene, and nursing are the means that sustain life, provide affective security, restore rewarding physical experience when insecurity is heightened due to sickness or age. However the required qualities are above all relational: taking care, responsibility, competence, ability to respond. Family is, thus, a school of abilities, as Jean-Philippe Pierron shows, which allows for the learning of a decentralization of self while fostering the art of reciprocal acknowledgement.

Managing difference

Family is the first environment of initiation into the differences between generations, sexes, personalities, tastes, interests, etc. and this is so that each one can build and restore his own identity while integrating a positive rapport with difference. Véronique Margron insists on the fact that any difference is but a blessing only because it unveils “the ethical work *par excellence*, the work of otherness”. The intra-family support of dependence, the hazards of life within the couple, etc. recall that it does not mean idealizing difference and reciprocal hospitality without setting up ethical conditions: a need to maintain an appropriate distance, knowing how to delegate certain actions for physical care, respecting family modesty. It is important to appeal to the freedom of the child just when, for his own good, he is submitted to the influence of education.

Proposing policies that “take care” of families

It is necessary, in every country, to elaborate familial policies and to provide appropriate legal structures in order to give families the means to take care of their more vulnerable members and to confer on each family the freedom and the autonomy necessary for the use of health, education and social means at their disposal. It implies not only upholding the

autonomy of individuals but also to favor social methods which allow for positive interdependence.

Dominique Lemau de Talancé

■ INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Geneva NGO Committee on Ageing met three times in 2015 and took part in several meetings

International Longevity Centre (ILC) - Forum on Ageing and Gender in Brazil (Rio 16-17 October 2014)

adopted a “Charter on Gender and Ageing” www.reseau-crescendo.org, or <http://www.ilcbrazil.org/?pageid=872>). It was pointed out that in some countries strong NGO coalitions (children, women) sent parallel reports to UN Committees when examining country reports. It could be an example to follow for ageing issues.

Geneva NGO Forum Beijing Plus 20 – UN ECE Regional Review (3 - 5 November 2014) -The NGO Committee on Ageing organised a “Round Table” which was well-attended, with well-known panellists: Prof. Doron, Gerontologist University of Haifa, Ms. Ferenczi from Hungary and Elizabeth Sclater and Bridget Slep from the UK.

Human Rights Council

The United Nations 3rd Forum on Business and Human Rights (1-3 December 2014), established by The Human Rights Council and guided by the UN WG on Business and Human Rights is a space for representatives and practitioners from civil society, business, government, International organizations and affected stakeholders to take stock of challenges and discuss ways to move forward in carrying out the [Guiding](#)

Principles on Business and Human Rights – a global standard for preventing and addressing the risk of adverse impacts on human rights linked to business activity. Next year, NGOs should be prepared to bring the issue of social protection and discrimination against older persons to the discussion.

Social Forum 2015 (Geneva - 18-20 February 2015)- “Access to medicines in the context of the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, including best practices in this regard.” Seven panel discussions took place on medical, social and health aspects of medicine, economic, legal, human rights and financial issues of access to medicine.

Rosa Kornfeld Matte, Independent Expert on the Rights of Older People - Visits to :

Slovenia (17-21 November 2014) - At the concluding press conference, the Independent Expert drew special attention to the situation of the country’s Roma population: “Slovenia is among the European countries with the most pronounced ageing of population. This does not seem to be the case, alas, when it comes to the Roma population: out of the 3 246 self-declared Roma in 2002, only 73 were older than 65 years of age according to official statistics.”

Austria (20th to 30th January 2015) – In a short summary to the press she highlighted Austria’s positive developments and strategies concerning older people’s enjoyment of their rights. In September 2015, she will submit an official report to the Human Rights Council compiling all of her experiences, findings and recommendations related to her country visit to Austria.

Mauritius (28 April to 8 May 2015)

United Nations

Resolution A/RES/69/146 adopted by the UN General Assembly on 18 December 2014 on the Follow-up to the Second World Assembly on Ageing. The resolution includes a “*call upon Member States to continue to contribute to the work of the Open-ended Working Group on Aging, in particular by presenting concrete proposals and practical measures that will contribute to promoting and protecting the rights and dignity of older persons, in order to enable it to fulfill its mandate. It also Requests the Open-ended Working Group to present to the General Assembly at its seventieth session a report containing a compilation of the above-mentioned proposals and measures*”.

ESCAP Report of the Workshop on the Social Integration and Rights of Older Persons in the Asia-Pacific Region (30 September - 2 October 2014– Bangkok), published on January 20, 2015. Its objective is to enhance awareness of stakeholders in the region on how national legislation could better contribute to the social integration of older persons and the promotion and protection of their rights.

UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (Sendai, Japan, 14-18 March 2015 <http://www.wcdrr.org>) . Older persons were visible in the proposed plan of action and recognised as a particularly vulnerable group as they were often the largest group of victims. However, older persons are not yet considered a major stakeholder group in the discussions.

First WHO Ministerial Summit on Global Action against Dementia (Geneva 16-17 March 2015). WHO hosted its first Ministerial Conference on Global Action Against Dementia. Ministers from around the world, as well as experts from the research, clinical and NGO communities, came together in Geneva for the first time to discuss the global problems posed by dementia.

The conference was supported by the Department of Health of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Both days were webcast.

■ NEWS OF MEMBERS

AIC: International Assembly 2015: 130 delegates from 25 different countries met in Guatemala, on the

theme: *"In developing our strengths, we become agents of reciprocal education."* The meeting had a double aim:

1 – Highlight reciprocal education: education in a context of poverty is not limited to filling a lack (transfer of knowledge). It also aims at reciprocal exchange and the development of the capacities of each to act in changing a situation.

2 – Plan priorities for future years, notably in the framework of the 400th anniversary (2017) of the creation of the first groups of 'Charities' by Saint Vincent, Charities which have become today's AIC. The national presidents voted to make certain changes and have elected a new administration council for a term of 2 years. The council elected a new international president, Alicia DUHNE, Mexico.

CICIAMS: March 6 was a big day for CICIAMS. That day Cardinal Stanislas Rylko, President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, and his secretary, Mgr. Joseph Clemens, handed to the international President, Sister Ann John, who came to the dicastery with the members its Executive Committee, the decree that confirms the recognition of CICIAMS as an international association of faithful and which also approved the statutes.

March 7 and 8, the Executive Committee met together. After some discussion its agreement in principle was given for the organization of regional and world congresses, as well as the sharing of revenue, for the diffusion of the ethics code of CICIAMS in English and Spanish, on the points of action for the delegates of WHO, and on the organization of the regional congress in Swaziland in June 2016.

FIAMC: Creation by the new President, Dr. John Lee, of Singapore, elected at the beginning of October 2014:

Of an Ethics Commission

Of a Commission of Young Doctors

Of a Recruitment Commission

A colloquium on end-of-life human relations (palliative care, accompaniment, sedation in the terminal phase, etc.) attracted a large public. Another colloquium: end-of-life in Europe.

[www.fiamc.org]

Little Sisters of the Poor: During the Easter week, the Dicastery for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life organized an international congress which gathered more than 1.200 formators in Rome, in which, for the very first time, several Little Sisters took part. After this encounter, they were enlightened and encouraged in their mission of accompanying the young ones who are preparing to live a Consecrated Life in their Congregation in the service of elderly poor. Apart from the main conferences, workshops on 17 different themes, each one

making its own choice, allowed rich exchanges in a very international atmosphere.

SIGNIS: 2014 has been a great year for SIGNIS in many ways, from the organization of a successful World Congress in Rome to the election of a new President, Vice-Presidents, and Board of Directors. Another highlight of the year was when the Holy See gave full recognition to SIGNIS as a public International Association of the Faithful with the approval of its canonical statutes. Also in 2014, the Board of SIGNIS chose the theme "Media for a Culture of Peace: Promoting Stories of Hope through Connectivity" to guide the work of the organisation over the next years. The annual Report gives a snapshot of the range of ways in which SIGNIS members, in every part of the world, continued their ordinary ongoing work of sharing hope and building a culture of peace through communication.

VMI: The bulletin of VMI dedicated to its International Assembly which took place in Namur in October 2014 on the theme "Seniors in a changing world: challenges and opportunities" has been published recently on the site of Vie Montante Internationale: <http://mcr.asso.fr/dans-le-monde/> Copies on request by email: vminternationale@gmail.com

Members of the new Executive Committee:

President: Marta MELO ANTUNES (Portugal)

Members: Gregoria BOYD (Peru).
Monique BODHUIN (France),
Jean-Michel SIMEON (France)

Ecclesiastical assistant: Mgr. François MAUPU (France)