

EDITORIAL

Human Rights and Spirituality

“What do we do with Man? Whether it is in his mother’s womb, on a makeshift boat on the Mediterranean Sea, in the queues of temporary agencies or in the solitude of a retirement home. Does his dignity depend only on his good health, his purchasing power, his level of education, his passport, his sex appeal? If the shadow that extends over our civilization appears to us as accurate as it is, that is because the Light that updates it is that of a Promise. We are at a crossroads: either we choose to remain in the shadows and all that is left for us is only to die; or we understand that we are made for the Light and then it will be difficult, painful and at times crucifying, but we shall live!”¹

We are celebrating, at the end of this year 2018, the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This important text is very often flouted. The most fragile people are the first victims of this non-respect for Human Rights especially the elderly. To commemorate this 70th anniversary, the International Day of Older Persons celebrated on 1 October the elderly people around the world who dedicate their lives to defending human rights: “Older people are increasingly recognized as active holders of rights and full participants in society. This is an ideal opportunity to do so while raising awareness about age discrimination that older people face”.²

Father Joseph Joblin, who died in January 2018, was the ecclesiastical adviser of the global network Crescendo for 15 years. He has always insisted on the spirituality of the elderly and the role of the utmost importance that they could play in educating the children and young people around them and, more broadly, in the evolution of society.

In the attached article, we reproduce his last intervention on the evolution of the meaning of the word “spirituality” and on the way to reintroduce a religious dimension of faith in a spiritual secularised. It is for the leaders of the global network Crescendo the opportunity to pay a final tribute to him.

Dominique Lemau de Talancé

¹- Mgr de Sinéty,, 4 octobre 2018, Eglise à Paris

²- UNFPA, UNECE, OHCHR, WHO, the Geneva NGO Committee on Ageing and the Group of Friends of the Rights of Older People

POST

The spiritual

Certain words have a specific meaning because they are used in a limited environment. Suddenly they have such a widespread use that their meaning becomes difficult to define. So it is with the word “spiritual.” For many years, it had been reserved to the study of personal religious life, “spiritual life.” The issue was to recognize the existence of superior, religiously related principles that governed daily routines to make them more perfect. A whole conception of perfection lies behind this philosophy of life. Everyone had to use his own freedom to rise to the level of existence he held for superior and normative in the name of the values to which the name of spirituals was reserved. The Christian spiritual was the one who modeled his daily life on the example of Christ.

The Second World War was an opportunity to broaden the meaning of the word “spiritual” and its secularization. It has led the opinion to dissociate-- it seems definitively-- religious life and social or political life; it thus became necessary to find a word to refer to a morality based only on reason. The word “spiritual” then became common to designate the aspiration to a “higher level” freely chosen by man. The Declaration of Philadelphia, adopted in 1944 by the International Labour Conference, describes the right of “every human being, whatever his sex, race or religion... to his spiritual development and material progress.” This was the widespread belief in the immediate post-war period. It is echoed in the great social encyclicals of Mater and Magistra, Pacem in Terris and Populo-

rum Progressio. The humanitarian received his letters of nobility. If, at the beginning of this period, public opinion still accepted the idea of a "subordination" of the policies followed to the ideals of freedom and solidarity as they had been shaped in the Christian West, some currents, which ultimately prevailed in public opinion, did not fail to challenge this religious foundation. They substituted it for the adherence to the philosophy of human rights; but this individualism led to the adoption of a secular religion that is still pushing Western societies today into the nihilism.

Such is the evolution Christians face today and this is particularly true for the elderly. The latter, more dependent than others on the education they received, have had to make a religious dimension coexist with the secular values that the contemporary culture conveys; but the younger generations with whom they are in contact, are educated in a common thought that reduces the demands of the moral of existence to the acceptance of common behaviors judged at a given time in accordance with reason. This conception excludes anything that might evoke a religious view of existence and reduces the spiritual to the fidelity of observing rules of behavior. The question arises then of how to reintroduce in contemporary mentalities the conviction that the religious fact is not an accident in the history of civilizations but that it comes from a profoundly human attitude emerging from a need that it is inherent. It is to solve this question that the associations dealing with the elderly must also contribute; it seems to me that it is up to Crescendo to offer them some elements to help them.

The reintroduction of a religious dimension of faith in the spiritually secularized person will not come from discourse on the single truth made up by the Christian discourse on mankind. The first step in this direction must be ensured by the testimony of the human wisdom that comes from a faith that is practiced. Demonstrating that there is another way of life than the purely human one who seeks new satisfactions in the present moment, this way of life invites the one who is the witness to think and to raise the questions: Is it true? Is it more human, more authentic? This is the role that the elderly can play for the younger generations. Hence the question: How can Crescendo help its member associations to fulfill this role?

The risk today is that one continues to try to achieve the unity of mankind by a "mechanization" of consciences and not by voluntary adherence of each person to a higher ideal. A first attempt took place with totalitarianism. It is again on march in Western societies with the search for the "one-dimensional man"; the union of the peoples is not expected to be a "leap of consciences" dominating their individualities but of an adherence to procedures and behaviours decided by others.



Christian discourse must help the elderly to realize what their mission can be towards young people in this instance. They can raise awareness of the fact that the union can be carried out by an effort on oneself as seen in the example given by the family. They help to substitute conformity for a sense of personal dignity.

This effort to elevate the psychology of the younger generations to a greater awareness must be completed by recalling the framework within which each person's responsibility is exercised. While contemporary civilization of Western origin removes any historical dimension in the exercise of responsibility by ignoring everyone's free contribution to the growth of mankind towards unity, it is up to the elderly to show that, for them, there is a history or movement of growth of the world and of mankind towards life and that, for them, this natural history sees its meaning revealed by the supernatural history inaugurated by Christ.

Father J. Joblin SJ. (1920-2018)

■ INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS

Social Exclusion of Older Persons – impact & solutions

Social exclusion of older persons is a complex process that involves the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services as people age, and the inability to participate in the societal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people across the varied and multiple domains of society. It affects both the quality of life of older persons and the equity and cohesion of an ageing society as a whole, with significant implications for the enjoyment by older persons of their human rights.

By 2050, there will be, for the first time, more older persons than children under the age of 15 worldwide. This unprecedented demographic shift has far-reaching implications for society at all levels. As the world population continues to age, notably the human rights dimension of ageing becomes an ever-growing concern.

The Independent Expert emphasizes in her recent report (A/HRC/39/50) the imperative need to adopt a human rights-based approach to ageing. This entails active measures against ageism and reconceptualising the way in which societies view older persons, from passive receivers of care and assistance and an impending burden on welfare systems and economies, to active contributors to society.

To foster social inclusion of older persons there is a need to mainstream older persons' rights in development, urban policies and poverty reduction strategies, including by installing processes that allow to scrupulously scrutinizing policies and plans that promote or reinforce discrimination against older persons in ultimately all fields.

Finally, the Independent Expert stresses that the lack of a comprehensive and integrated international legal instrument to promote and protect the rights and dignity of older persons has significant negative practical implications.

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23530&LangID=E>

■ NEWS OF THE CHURCH

During the World Meeting of Families held in Dublin, the booth of the World Network Crescendo was staffed by the local community of the Little Sisters of the Poor. They were very enthusiastic to participate in this important ecclesial event.



The booth with its section devoted to Crescendo documents received visitors from many different countries.



Two nuns from the Congregation of the Sisters of Nazareth, whose mission is welcoming the elderly.

■ NEWS OF MEMBER

Daughters of Wisdom: The general chapter was held during the whole month of August, in France, based on the theme "Love without Borders." The elections that took place during this chapter elected a new general

Mother Superior, Sister Rani KURIAN who is Indian, and with her a general Council constituted by Sisters from The Congo (DRC), Canada, Italy and France. The report of this time of strong devotion has not yet been formalized, we are expecting it...

The terms of the International Treasurer and the Secretary-General are maintained.

At the international level, our Provinces share their trials; The Philippines, Indonesia and recently Haiti shaken by yet another earthquake that affected the Haitian people and our communities!

Little Sisters of the Poor: A Council of Congregation was held from September 25 to October 16, 2018. Consisting of the Mother Superior General and its Council, the Mothers superior of the 17 Provinces of the Congregation, as well as the general procurator and the general steward, it usually occurs once between two general chapters. Its role is advisory. It aims to inform the General Council about the realities experienced in the different countries, and to study the problems and needs in the plan of the whole congregation. In preparation, all the communities have, for several months, deepened and prayed about the proposed theme: "to taste the joy of the Gospel through our consecrated poverty," in its personal, community, and apostolic dimensions, and sent their reports. As our constitutions states, this council "makes everyone aware of the respective diversities of each region and tightens the unity and sense of universality, which make up the Congregation's strength and vitality."