

CRESCENDO WORLDWIDE NETWORK

For a more human and christian ageing

<http://www.rcrescendo.net/>

ELECTRONIC BULLETIN

Christmas



N° 19, DECEMBER 2008

EDITORIAL

As this year draws to an end, we find ourselves faced with worrisome events and tragic situations in which the Elderly are often the most vulnerable victims. In the light of Christmas, may our vision, like that of the Good Samaritan, be that of a “glance from the heart.” Our Holy Father, in his encyclical, *DEUS CARITAS EST*, makes clear that: “the heart perceives where love is needed and reacts in consequence. Naturally, in addition to the spontaneous reaction of the individual, and the charitable activity assumed by the Church as a community, there should be joined the programs, the provisions, and the collaboration of other similar institutions.” “Naturally...” that is what we think as well here at *Crescendo*.

Allow us to focus on the last part of this document, since it is generally the least understood! Collaboration among institutions is a requirement for efficiency, which, in turn, is a requirement for an authentic charity. Often, we are not conscious enough of this fact. The *raison d'être* of *Crescendo* is

exactly that—to raise awareness of the problem of “the Elderly and Old Age” and to promote collaboration among institutions for a greater efficiency in this domain.

This edition of the bulletin contains several novelties. The first is the Letter from the Spiritual Counselor written by Father J. Joblin, s.j. From now on, this will be a feature in each bulletin.

Man does not live on bread alone . . . Certainly, the need for spirituality is a need that increases with age. For this reason, *Crescendo* has created a committee for the “Spirituality of the Aged,” as was recommended by the Geneva Seminar in 2006. This edition contains links to two articles on this subject:

- ▶ **Excerpts from the document of the Pontifical Council for the Laity: "The Dignity and Mission of the Elderly in the Church and in the World."**
- ▶ **SPIRITUALITY, Andrée Thomanek, previous vice-president of AIC**
- ▶ **"Old Age, an Enemy," by Hortense de Villers,** article which appeared in LA NEF n° 197 October, 2008 (and reproduced with the authorization of this review) www.lanef.net

This edition also provides a link to **the Message of the UN Secretary General of the for the World Day of the Elderly October 1, 2008.**

and to **the MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE WORLD DAY OF PEACE, 1 JANUARY 2009**

Just a few days before the Sixth World Meeting of Families which will take place in Mexico January 13 to 18, 2009, there is an **article on the presence of Crescendo at this event.** The website of this Encounter is: www.emf2009.com

With the exception of this editorial and the Letter from the Spiritual Counselor, all the articles are presented as hyperlinks. Naturally, they may be printed. They are accessible by simply clicking on the title in bold characters.

Merry Christmas and happy New Year to all!

Alberto



CHRISTMAS FOR THE ELDERLY

J. Joblin sj

Christmas transports the elderly back to their past and often precipitates nostalgia when they do not succeed in integrating the charm of their “Christmas Past” with the reality of their “Christmas Present.” If Noël is popular among Christian populations, it is because, for many children, it is their first religious experience. Even though in a very elementary way, this feast is a real source of sentiments of satisfaction or fulfillment. The more apparent festive realities, like the Christmas Crib, the carols, and the family reunions, lead to a discovery of a superior reality that escapes the senses but is no less real. This experience on the sense level introduces children to another world, a world of interior peace flowing from harmony with those who surround them.

We must deepen our appreciation of this primary experience throughout our lives. This presupposes determination and personal effort. For Christians, there is the danger of being seduced by the commercial, recreational ambiance surrounding Christmas in our societies of consummation that tend to eliminate the religious dimension of this feast by reducing it to mere expressions of good will. Now, Christians who intend to make this celebration an experience of faith cannot accept these secular limitations because their sense of the sacred is essential for them. Those who fail to recognize this dimension are unable to benefit of the spiritual enrichment Christmas brings. We must be determined to deepen the religious dimension of our celebrations in order to share it with others.

We must focus on the newborn lying in the manger. His presence brings us to discover the contradictions confronting every human being. This totally dependant infant is none other than the Son of God who unites within himself the fragility of man and the power of God. If the Almighty chooses to manifest himself in weakness, it is to overturn our penchant to base our judgment of persons and events on appearances. St Francis of Assisi grasped this perfectly. And, because he wanted to bring home to his contemporaries

this lesson of Christmas, he adopted the lifestyle that was his and popularized the construction of Christmas Cribs in the churches and households of Italy.

Anyone who wants to fully experience the mystery of Christmas must ask himself how to bring it to life in his everyday existence. It is up to each one of us to meditate on this point. However, it seems to me that there are two dimensions that must be present to those who want to “appropriate” this mystery, to use the expression of the masters of the French School of Spirituality. The first of these is the Child in the manger: he came to cast a loving glance on the whole world, to bring it to salvation. The other dimension is the distance between the intention of the Child and the welcome he receives in this day, showing that we must not be discouraged. The transformation of humanity takes place in the course of history according to the law of growth that he teaches us. We ourselves participate in the realization of this transformation if we allow ourselves to be inspired by it in our everyday lives.



**The Dignity of Older People and their Mission
in the Church and in the World
Pontifical Council for the Laity**

EXCERPTS

The third age seems particularly conducive to transcendental values.

Often lived in a simple way, but not for that reason any less profound, the religious faith of older people of both sexes is highly diversified; this is also determined by the relative strength of their faith in their earlier life.

At times, it is distinguished by a kind of fatalism: in such cases, suffering, disabilities, illnesses, the losses inseparable from this phase of life, are regarded, if not as divine punishments, at least as signs of a God who is no longer benevolent. The ecclesial community has the responsibility to purify this fatalism by helping to develop the religious faith of older people and by restoring a horizon of hope to it.

In this task, catechesis has a role of primary importance to play. It is the job of catechesis to purge faith of fear, to overcome the image of a wrathful God, and to lead the older person to discover the God of love.

Older people are the privileged witnesses, who can testify—both before human society and before the Christian community—to God's fidelity: he always keeps the promises he has made to man.

The pastoral task of evangelizing or re-evangelizing older members of the community must aim at fostering the spirituality that is peculiar to this age of life: i.e. a spirituality based on the continual rebirth that Jesus himself recommended to the elderly Nicodemus. Jesus urged Nicodemus not to let old age stand in the way of rebirth. To be reborn to a life that is ever new and full of hope, we don't need to go back to our mother's womb: we need to be “born from above”, by opening ourselves up to the gift of the Spirit; for “what is born of human nature is human; what is born of the Spirit is spirit” (*Jn 3:6*).

Christ's call to holiness is addressed to all his disciples, in every phase of human life: “You must therefore set no bounds to your love, just as your heavenly Father sets none to his” (*Mt 5:48*). In spite of the passing of years, which risks dampening enthusiasm and draining away energy, older people must therefore feel themselves more than ever called to persevere in the search for Christian holiness: Christians must never let apathy or tiredness impede their spiritual journey.



SPIRITUALITY

Andrée Thomanek
previous vice-president AIC

“Aging is above all a gift, but without doubt also a task” (Piet van Breeman, s.j.)

It is often said that old-age is the evening of life. This being so, it is also the case that it is impossible to live as though it were morning. Things that were important at other times have often lost their meaning and those which seemed insignificant take on great importance in the last years of life.

Thus old-age gives priority to those values which, though essential to existence, have not had the importance which they have deserved. With the advance of age, the human being is brought by nature to withdraw, to turn-in on himself, often to live in solitude. He becomes silent in order to

- listen more peacefully to those who are dear to him.
- bring to mind significant memories and savour them calmly.
- free himself from all profane or other compulsions.
- penetrate his own interior life, undertake what Dag Hammarskjold, previous secretary general of the United Nations, called “the longest voyage”.

Unfortunately these moments of peace are often accompanied by a diminution of physical and mental capacities; the human becomes more fragile and the list of health problems lengthens. He more and more needs the help of others and the progressive loss of autonomy sometimes goes as far as complete dependence, a heavy cross to carry. In this phase of life, he must therefore acquire a new maturity at the cost of a conscious effort, combined with self-honesty and humility. Once reached, a successful old-age can become an enrichment for the person himself and those near to him. C.G. Jung used to say in this regard: “man changes himself only if he accepts” [and allow me to add “only if he accepts himself”].

For us Christians, the message is formulated thus: even if our strength abandons us and we can no longer work, we still have a part to play on this earth. Ignatius of Loyola went so far as to say that our mission includes “the fact of dying”.

We know the different stages of aged persons:

- “the newly retired”, those who have already had “aches and pains”, but still have an active lifestyle; then
- those aged persons having lost autonomy; et finally
- those touched by personality changes brought on by senility or a dementia like Alzheimer.

What use is a life so seriously disrupted, at this last stage? In fact, by all known values, human dignity remains and the gravely ill, without being aware of it, raises the gaze of others towards the transcendent. [a service of inestimable value].

In general, the aged like to repeat themselves, whether consciously or otherwise. They are delighted at taking center stage in a conversation, even if they have nothing new to say. They are then the same stories of a past which they have idealized out of need for security, for ritual and from inertia.

Some aspects of spirituality in old-age.

A. Prayer

As the human ages, his social contacts diminish. It can be a difficult experience to find oneself alone, but equally an invitation offered by nature to enter into oneself. One must take advantage by praying. No doubt, the prayer of the aged is marked by maturity and depth, but not without difficulties. It can be that access to this place of interior peace may be difficult for an aged person because he has lost his ability to concentrate or because physical pain prevent him from entering into himself. One should not therefore idealize old-age as a time of prayer. If one has prayed traditional prayers his whole life (Our Father, prayers of the Mass, the Rosary, the Psalms), these become a great help. With the prayer of supplication and especially thanksgiving, they constitute a support upon which the person can lean, especially if he is unable to participate in the religious offices.

B. Relinquishment

It is a law of nature that obliges us to continually abandon something in order to grow physically and mentally. The refusal to progress, to mature and give-up what is past and which only proves an obstacle to the spirit is what some psychologists consider as the source of numerous mental disorders. In old-age, relinquishment, letting go should take place more and more, and this is why it is important for the spirit to stay awake, even at the cost of giving up certain comforting and habitual things.

In reality, this experience of letting go is very difficult. The aged person remains conscious of having engaged in a process which touches goods in various areas: material goods, physical activities now impossible, loss of friends and loved ones, progressive isolation. At the same time, at the spiritual level, the aged person can pass through a stage of spiritual darkness like that experienced by Saint Therese of Lisieux in the last months of her life. The obligation to let go becomes more and more frequent, it is the preparation for the final sacrifice, that of one's earthly life, so that the person who will die needs to abandon himself completely to God. However, there is nothing passive in all this; the grace needed is assured and the final relinquishment,

and it needs to be maintained, will be followed by an incomparable return, that of beholding God face to face.

C. Forgiveness

Entering into oneself, which takes place in the aged person, permits him to re-examine his life, to pick up the main lines and, as needs, to finish with that which is not yet resolved. Just as a writer reviews his manuscript many times before bringing it to the editor, the human being reviews his existence in order to die in peace.

One of the most significant aspects of this task is called FORGIVENESS, that which one gives and which one receives. Forgiving someone can be quite difficult and one can delay for a long time. One must remember when one waits upon a word or a gesture of reconciliation from another. It is in any case a very serious step which should lead to the undoing of all aggression and all violence. Pope John-Paul II never stopped stressing that there is no peace without justice and no justice without forgiveness.

Finally, granting forgiveness is not:

- wearing out simplistic naiveté, and more than “dropping” the matter in order to find peace. Forgiveness is confronting and combating the evil.
- forcing oneself to forget, but to see the wounds that were inflicted on us from a different perspective.
- being weak and refusing to face reality, but instead being courageous.
- a synonym for reconciliation. This occurs between two people, while forgiveness remains independent of contact with the other.

Forgiving means maturing, a long and difficult journey which calls for strength, but not forgiving entails the loss of much energy and joy.

Being forgiven is something quite different: like “the ordeal of love is faithfulness; forgiveness is its perfect fulfilment” (Werner Bergenguen). God being all love, He is equally all forgiveness and the human being can only receive this gift by which his faults are remitted.

For aged persons, this act of forgiving and being forgiven (by others or by God) represents an important task which brings peace and the confidence to realize the last part of the journey.

[the following fact was recounted to me: the mother of a young man, victim of violence, wanted to meet the murderer of her son before dying in order to tell him that she had forgiven his atrocious act]

D. Loneliness

The loneliness of aged persons constitutes for many of them a problem to fix. They lament: “No one needs me”, “Hardly anyone visits me”, “I have been forgotten”, “No finds time to come and see me”.

Others succeed in occupying themselves in their solitude, finding satisfaction in the fact of being alone and end by accepting it, even if they suffer at times. The poet writes “In the afternoon, the light becomes peerless. When the shadows draw out, the stars are born. It is the great silence. You are by yourself. But do not be alone”.

It would be an error, then, to evade the worry and throw oneself into excessive activities which prevent living the solitude. Old-age should be a peaceful time because it calls towards a higher goal, that of loving and having faith in God and one’s own. It becomes, then, indispensable to find new roads towards these and to fill the solitude with love of others.

To conclude, it can be stated that contact with aged persons represents a confused way of facing one’s own age. “Accompanying a person in his illness and up to his death is a profound privilege which transforms all of life”. (Piet van Breeman, s.j.).

N.B. This text was inspired by the reading of a German book “Vieillir, une voie spirituelle” of Piet van Breeman, s.j. (Editions Echter, Wurzburg, Germany, 2004). I must confess that I drew extensively from his writing in translating it into French. Consequently, my text should be considered as one long citation, where I have allowed myself to insist on certain passages and to add some personal reflections [found within inverted commas].

A. Thomanek, previous vice-president AIC



OLD AGE ENEMY ?

By Hortense de Villiers

In 2008, the “High Authority in the Fight against Discrimination and for Equality” (Halde) recorded an upsurge in complaints coming from seniors. At the same time, “anti-elderly” leagues, committees, and other groups have

been posting on the internet such subjects as : “*Old Folks at the Wheel,*” “*The Elderly in the Supermarket,*” “*Can’t wait for the next heat wave!*” We might like to attribute these allegations to a passing exasperation or to a rebellious adolescent, but neither can account for the mindset so prevalent nowadays. Is there not, at present, a penchant to hide, out of sight, all signs of aging by having recourse to Melatonin, DHEA, GH, Botox and other facelifts, Viagra, and Thalasso, --and for the hopeless cases, nursing homes and euthanasia?

Who is concerned?

Indeed, if we accept *Littré’s* definition of old age as the last stage of life, starting at age sixty, although the time of this beginning may vary, “*depending on the individual’s constitution, lifestyle, and many other circumstances*” then there are some 13 million persons in France who are concerned at present. Of course, the “early retired” avidly enjoying his new “liberty” is a long way from the miserable bedridden Alzheimer patient. Rather than being based on the degrading effects of age, the definition rests essentially on the fact that elderly persons are those who have passed the age for working and are no longer considered part of the active workforce.

At any rate, our seniors represent 21.8 % of the present population of France. It is now imperative to take into account a new type of society in which the elderly are gradually outnumbering the young. From now on, the population ready to retire corresponds with the baby-boom, that is, the massive rise in births over a period of 30 years. There will be, therefore, during the next 3 decades, 380 to 450 million persons retiring each year, instead of the 200 to 280 million annual retirements of the past 10 years. “*There will be fewer young people entering the workforce than elders retiring each year. The cost of living will therefore weigh upon the shoulders of those who are actively employed,*” according to Ined.

This “inverted pyramid,” even though foreseen for several years, is a novelty for the human species and demands adequate solutions for preserving equilibrium in the economic and political domain, as well as in the social and spiritual sphere.

Intergenerational conflicts seem to be succeeding class conflicts. Are they not provoked by the younger generation’s fear of not being able to support financially the needs of their elders (retirement funds and social security)? This very real economic problem introduces, consciously or not, a rejection of the elderly. If we consider the blogs that militate against the elderly, claiming that heat waves serve to palliate the problem of retirement, between that and euthanasia for economic motives, there’s not much distance! On the political

level there is a similar question of the role of the elderly. Being always the largest number, seniors tip the electoral balance. But do their needs always conform to the construction of the future of France?

The refusal to Die

Add to this, for many, the refusal to grow old, the search for pleasure and enjoyment before all else; and, for others, solitude and sickness. 8.6 % of the population of France is over 75. How many are on their own to cope with the anxieties of their age? Of the 13 million who are 60 and over, Insee counts a million single, as well as a million divorced, and 3.5 million widows and widowers . . . What do we offer these persons who are, for the most part, physically fragile ? Is not our disdain of old age a sign that this stage of life is viewed as shameful, burdensome, and fearful in face of inescapable death?

In his letter, on March 23 1984, John Paul II addressed the elderly with these words: *“Be not misled by the temptation to interior solitude. In spite of the complexity of your problems [...] and your waning forces, and in spite of the insufficiency of social organizations, the delays in official legislation, and the incomprehension of a self-centered society, you are not, and you must not feel, marginalized from the life of the Church, as if you were mere passive parts in a hyperactive world. No, you are active subjects living out a period of existence that is humanly and spiritually fruitful. You still have a mission to accomplish, a contribution to make.”* The Church is well aware of the important role of elderly persons. Indeed, the Church looks to the wisdom of age to which she confides the highest hierarchical functions.

Since our society is enriched by its “old folks,” they must be taken into consideration in our reflections. We must not merely give our seniors the pride of their age; we must rely on them as we construct the future. Without them, our society is at a loss for a point of reference. They are the living memory of our past. The affective, moral, and religious values enshrined in the lives of the elderly are an indispensable resource for the equilibrium of society, families, and individuals. The elderly person realizes, more than anyone else, the superiority of “being” over “doing” or “having.” Relieved of daily stress, they are no longer dominated by time and activity in the same way. They teach us patience and wisdom, gratuitousness by way of interiority, respect for creation, and the way to build peace.

The Father Figure

“Honor your father and your mother, as the Eternal, your God, has commanded you, that you may have a long life and prosperity in the land which the Eternal, your God, is giving you.” Thus says Deuteronomy 5:16. Let’s halt the desire to kill our fathers, really or figuratively! We need this

father-figure, image of the Eternal Father, who reassures and counsels us, and empowers us to raise ourselves up. The presence of such a large number of elderly persons in our contemporary world is a gift, a newfound human and spiritual enrichment. If it is fully understood and welcomed, their presence is a sign of the times capable of helping modern man to rediscover the meaning of life beyond the significance conditioned by the market, the State, and the dominant mentality of the day.

Old Age reminds us that man, no matter how weary or wounded his mind and body, maintains his dignity. Life, in each of its stages, is the greatest value, and Old Age is the supreme gift. We must cultivate intergenerational bonds to prepare our children's future, by counting on our "active" juniors to innovate and our seniors to perpetuate. Surely, economic problems will remain, but are they not, above all, generated by the search for pleasure? Perhaps we will have to delay the age for retirement, but have not we pushed back equally the age when one is no longer able to work, and is leisure an end in itself?

With Old Age comes the stripping away of worldly illusions. It is also a slow preparation for our encounter with God.

To the rebellion against the decay of the body, we can give our contemporaries a single response of faith. Growing old has meaning only in union with God and the slow ascent of Christ to Golgotha. Here we find the unique response enabling us to resolve intergenerational conflicts, to pacify the fears of our contemporaries, and to consider respectfully the withering that comes with age.

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UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

**MESSAGE ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF OLDER PERSONS
1 October 2008**

The theme of this year's International Day of Older Persons, "Rights of Older Persons", is especially apt in this year in which we mark the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Promoting the independence, participation and dignity of older persons has long been on the agenda of the United Nations and is central to implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing. In adopting that Plan six years ago at the Second World Assembly on Ageing, UN Member States committed "to eliminating all forms of discrimination, including age discrimination". They recognized "that persons, as they age, should enjoy a life of fulfillment, health, security and active participation in the economic, social, cultural and political life of their societies". And they determined "to enhance the recognition of the dignity of older persons and to eliminate all forms of neglect, abuse and violence".

Despite this commitment, in many parts of the world, the rights of older persons are violated every day. Older persons often face age discrimination at a workplace. In social environments, they may experience a lack of recognition and respect. They may be deprived of full inclusion and participation in social, economic, cultural and political affairs. Most disturbingly, in many countries, incidences of neglect, abuse and violence against older persons are not at all rare or isolated events.

Acknowledging the crucial role that older persons play in society is an important pillar of the Madrid Plan of Action. Earlier this year, the first review and appraisal of the Plan made abundantly clear that much more needs to be done at the national level to support older persons, promote their income security and social protection, and ensure quality health care as well as the provision of long-term care services. To make this possible, national ageing-specific policies must be improved substantially and the concerns of older persons mainstreamed into a wider policy framework.

This International Day is an opportunity to stimulate discussion on promoting the rights of older persons and strengthen partnerships aimed at securing their full participation in society. Let us all redouble our efforts to realize the rights of older persons, and make the dream of a society for all ages a reality.





MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE WORLD DAY OF PEACE

1 JANUARY 2009

FIGHTING POVERTY TO BUILD PEACE

1. Once again, as the new year begins, I want to extend good wishes for peace to people everywhere. With this Message I would like to propose a reflection on the theme: *Fighting Poverty to Build Peace*. Back in 1993, my venerable Predecessor Pope John Paul II, in his [Message for the World Day of Peace that year](#), drew attention to the negative repercussions for peace when entire populations live in poverty. Poverty is often a contributory factor or a compounding element in conflicts, including armed ones. In turn, these conflicts fuel further tragic situations of poverty. “Our world”, he wrote, “shows increasing evidence of another grave threat to peace: many individuals and indeed whole peoples are living today in conditions of extreme poverty. The gap between rich and poor has become more marked, even in the most economically developed nations. This is a problem which the conscience of humanity cannot ignore, since the conditions in which a great number of people are living are an insult to their innate dignity and as a result are a threat to the authentic and harmonious progress of the world community” [\[1\]](#).

2. In this context, fighting poverty requires *attentive consideration of the complex phenomenon of globalization*. This is important from a methodological standpoint, because it suggests drawing upon the fruits of economic and sociological research into the many different aspects of poverty. Yet the reference to globalization should also alert us to the spiritual and moral implications of the question, urging us, in our dealings with the poor, to set out from the clear recognition that we all share in a single divine plan: we are called to form one family in which all – individuals, peoples and nations – model their behaviour according to the principles of fraternity and responsibility.

This perspective requires an understanding of poverty that is wide-ranging and well articulated. If it were a question of material poverty alone, then the social sciences, which enable us to measure phenomena on the basis of mainly quantitative data, would be sufficient to illustrate its principal characteristics. Yet we know that other, non-material forms of poverty exist which are not the direct and automatic consequence of material deprivation. For example, in advanced wealthy societies, there is evidence of *marginalization*, as well as *affective, moral and spiritual poverty*, seen in people whose interior lives are disoriented and who experience various forms of malaise despite their economic prosperity. On the one hand, I have in mind what is known as “moral underdevelopment” [2], and on the other hand the negative consequences of “superdevelopment” [3]. Nor can I forget that, in so-called “poor” societies, economic growth is often hampered by *cultural impediments* which lead to inefficient use of available resources. It remains true, however, that every form of externally imposed poverty has at its root a lack of respect for the transcendent dignity of the human person. When man is not considered within the total context of his vocation, and when the demands of a true “human ecology” [4] are not respected, the cruel forces of poverty are unleashed, as is evident in certain specific areas that I shall now consider briefly one by one.

Poverty and moral implications

3. Poverty is often considered a consequence of *demographic change*. For this reason, there are international campaigns afoot to reduce birth-rates, sometimes using methods that respect neither the dignity of the woman, nor the right of parents to choose responsibly how many children to have [5]; graver still, these methods often fail to respect even the right to life. The extermination of millions of unborn children, in the name of the fight against poverty, actually constitutes the destruction of the poorest of all human beings. And yet it remains the case that in 1981, around 40% of the world's population was below the threshold of absolute poverty, while today that percentage has been reduced by as much as a half, and whole peoples have escaped from poverty despite experiencing substantial demographic growth. This goes to show that resources to solve the problem of poverty do exist, even in the face of an increasing population. Nor must it be forgotten that, since the end of the Second World War, the world's population has grown by four billion, largely because of certain countries that have recently emerged on the international scene as new economic powers, and have experienced rapid development specifically because of the large number of their inhabitants. Moreover, among the most developed nations, those with higher birth-rates enjoy better opportunities for development. In other words, population is proving to be an asset, not a factor that contributes to poverty.

4. Another area of concern has to do with *pandemic diseases*, such as malaria, tuberculosis and AIDS. Insofar as they affect the wealth-producing sectors of the population, they are a significant factor in the overall deterioration of conditions in the country concerned. Efforts to rein in the consequences of these diseases on the population do not always achieve significant results. It also happens that countries afflicted by some of these pandemics find themselves held hostage, when they try to address them, by those who make economic aid conditional upon the implementation of anti-life policies. It is especially hard to combat AIDS, a major cause of poverty, unless the moral issues connected with the spread of the virus are also addressed. First and foremost, educational campaigns are needed, aimed especially at the young, to promote a sexual ethic that fully corresponds to the dignity of the person; initiatives of this kind have already borne important fruits, causing a reduction in the spread of AIDS. Then, too, the necessary

medicines and treatment must be made available to poorer peoples as well. This presupposes a determined effort to promote medical research and innovative forms of treatment, as well as flexible application, when required, of the international rules protecting intellectual property, so as to guarantee necessary basic healthcare to all people.

5. A third area requiring attention in programmes for fighting poverty, which once again highlights its intrinsic moral dimension, is *child poverty*. When poverty strikes a family, the children prove to be the most vulnerable victims: almost half of those living in absolute poverty today are children. To take the side of children when considering poverty means giving priority to those objectives which concern them most directly, such as caring for mothers, commitment to education, access to vaccines, medical care and drinking water, safeguarding the environment, and above all, commitment to defence of the family and the stability of relations within it. When the family is weakened, it is inevitably children who suffer. If the dignity of women and mothers is not protected, it is the children who are affected most.

6. A fourth area needing particular attention from the moral standpoint is the *relationship between disarmament and development*. The current level of world military expenditure gives cause for concern. As I have pointed out before, it can happen that “immense military expenditure, involving material and human resources and arms, is in fact diverted from development projects for peoples, especially the poorest who are most in need of aid. This is contrary to what is stated in the *Charter of the United Nations*, which engages the international community and States in particular ‘to promote the establishment and maintenance of international peace and security with the least diversion for armaments of the world's human and economic resources’ (art. 26)” [\[6\]](#).

This state of affairs does nothing to promote, and indeed seriously impedes, attainment of the ambitious development targets of the international community. What is more, an excessive increase in military expenditure risks accelerating the arms race, producing pockets of underdevelopment and desperation, so that it can paradoxically become a cause of instability, tension and conflict. As my venerable Predecessor Paul VI wisely observed, “the new name for peace is development”[\[7\]](#). States are therefore invited to reflect seriously on the underlying reasons for conflicts, often provoked by injustice, and to practise courageous self-criticism. If relations can be improved, it should be possible to reduce expenditure on arms. The resources saved could then be earmarked for development projects to assist the poorest and most needy individuals and peoples: efforts expended in this way would be efforts for peace within the human family.

7. A fifth area connected with the fight against material poverty concerns the *current food crisis*, which places in jeopardy the fulfilment of basic needs. This crisis is characterized not so much by a shortage of food, as by difficulty in gaining access to it and by different forms of speculation: in other words, by a structural lack of political and economic institutions capable of addressing needs and emergencies. Malnutrition can also cause grave mental and physical damage to the population, depriving many people of the energy necessary to escape from poverty unaided. This contributes to the widening gap of inequality, and can provoke violent reactions. All the indicators of relative poverty in recent years point to an increased disparity between rich and poor. No doubt the principal reasons for this are, on the one hand, advances in technology, which mainly benefit the more affluent, and on the other hand, changes in the prices of industrial products, which rise much faster than those of agricultural products and raw materials in the possession of

poorer countries. In this way, the majority of the population in the poorest countries suffers a double marginalization, through the adverse effects of lower incomes and higher prices.

Global solidarity and the fight against poverty

8. One of the most important ways of building peace is through a form of globalization directed towards the interests of the whole human family[8]. In order to govern globalization, however, there needs to be a strong sense of *global solidarity* [9] between rich and poor countries, as well as within individual countries, including affluent ones. A “common code of ethics”[10]

is also needed, consisting of norms based not upon mere consensus, but rooted in the natural law inscribed by the Creator on the conscience of every human being (cf. *Rom* 2:14-15). Does not every one of us sense deep within his or her conscience a call to make a personal contribution to the common good and to peace in society? Globalization eliminates certain barriers, but is still able to build new ones; it brings peoples together, but spatial and temporal proximity does not of itself create the conditions for true communion and authentic peace. Effective means to redress the marginalization of the world's poor through globalization will only be found if people everywhere feel personally outraged by the injustices in the world and by the concomitant violations of human rights. The Church, which is the “sign and instrument of communion with God and of the unity of the entire human race” [11] will continue to offer her contribution so that injustices and misunderstandings may be resolved, leading to a world of greater peace and solidarity.

9. In the field of *international commerce and finance*, there are processes at work today which permit a positive integration of economies, leading to an overall improvement in conditions, but there are also processes tending in the opposite direction, dividing and marginalizing peoples, and creating dangerous situations that can erupt into wars and conflicts. Since the Second World War, international trade in goods and services has grown extraordinarily fast, with a momentum unprecedented in history. Much of this global trade has involved countries that were industrialized early, with the significant addition of many newly- emerging countries which have now entered onto the world stage. Yet there are other low-income countries which are still seriously marginalized in terms of trade. Their growth has been negatively influenced by the rapid decline, seen in recent decades, in the prices of commodities, which constitute practically the whole of their exports. In these countries, which are mostly in Africa, dependence on the exportation of commodities continues to constitute a potent risk factor. Here I should like to renew an appeal for all countries to be given equal opportunities of access to the world market, without exclusion or marginalization.

10. A similar reflection may be made in the area of finance, which is a key aspect of the phenomenon of globalization, owing to the development of technology and policies of liberalization in the flow of capital between countries. Objectively, the most important function of finance is to sustain the possibility of long- term investment and hence of development. Today this appears extremely fragile: it is experiencing the negative repercussions of a system of financial dealings – both national and global – based upon very short-term thinking, which aims at increasing the value of financial operations and concentrates on the technical management of various forms of risk. The recent crisis demonstrates how financial activity can at times be completely turned in on itself, lacking any long-term consideration of the common good. This lowering of the objectives of global finance to the very short term reduces its capacity to function as a bridge between the

present and the future, and as a stimulus to the creation of new opportunities for production and for work in the long term. Finance limited in this way to the short and very short term becomes dangerous for everyone, even for those who benefit when the markets perform well[12].

11. All of this would indicate that the fight against poverty requires cooperation both on the economic level and on the legal level, so as to allow the international community, and especially poorer countries, to identify and implement coordinated strategies to deal with the problems discussed above, thereby providing an effective legal framework for the economy. Incentives are needed for establishing efficient participatory institutions, and support is needed in fighting crime and fostering a culture of legality. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that policies which place too much emphasis on assistance underlie many of the failures in providing aid to poor countries. Investing in the formation of people and developing a specific and well-integrated culture of enterprise would seem at present to be the right approach in the medium and long term. If economic activities require a favourable context in order to develop, this must not distract attention from the need to generate revenue. While it has been rightly emphasized that increasing *per capita* income cannot be the ultimate goal of political and economic activity, it is still an important means of attaining the objective of the fight against hunger and absolute poverty. Hence, the illusion that a policy of mere redistribution of existing wealth can definitively resolve the problem must be set aside. In a modern economy, the value of assets is utterly dependent on the capacity to generate revenue in the present and the future. Wealth creation therefore becomes an inescapable duty, which must be kept in mind if the fight against material poverty is to be effective in the long term.

12. If the poor are to be given priority, then there has to be enough room for *an ethical approach to economics* on the part of those active in the international market, *an ethical approach to politics* on the part of those in public office, and an *ethical approach to participation* capable of harnessing the contributions of civil society at local and international levels. International agencies themselves have come to recognize the value and advantage of economic initiatives taken by civil society or local administrations to promote the emancipation and social inclusion of those sectors of the population that often fall below the threshold of extreme poverty and yet are not easily reached by official aid. The history of twentieth-century economic development teaches us that good development policies depend for their effectiveness on responsible implementation by human agents and on the creation of positive partnerships between markets, civil society and States. Civil society in particular plays a key part in every process of development, since development is essentially a cultural phenomenon, and culture is born and develops in the civil sphere[13].

13. As my venerable Predecessor Pope John Paul II had occasion to remark, globalization “is notably ambivalent”[14] and therefore needs to be managed with great prudence. This will include giving priority to the needs of the world's poor, and overcoming the scandal of the imbalance between the problems of poverty and the measures which have been adopted in order to address them. The imbalance lies both in the cultural and political order and in the spiritual and moral order. In fact we often consider only the superficial and instrumental causes of poverty without attending to those harboured within the human heart, like greed and narrow vision. The problems of development, aid and international cooperation are sometimes addressed without any real attention to the human element, but as merely technical questions – limited, that is, to establishing structures, setting up trade agreements, and allocating funding impersonally. What the fight against poverty really

needs are men and women who live in a profoundly fraternal way and are able to accompany individuals, families and communities on journeys of authentic human development.

Conclusion

14. In the Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, John Paul II warned of the need to “abandon a mentality in which the poor – as individuals and as peoples – are considered a burden, as irksome intruders trying to consume what others have produced.” The poor, he wrote, “ask for the right to share in enjoying material goods and to make good use of their capacity for work, thus creating a world that is more just and prosperous for all” [15]. In today's globalized world, it is increasingly evident that peace can be built only if everyone is assured the possibility of reasonable growth: sooner or later, the distortions produced by unjust systems have to be paid for by everyone. It is utterly foolish to build a luxury home in the midst of desert or decay. Globalization on its own is incapable of building peace, and in many cases, it actually creates divisions and conflicts. If anything it points to a need: to be oriented towards a goal of profound solidarity that seeks the good of each and all. In this sense, globalization should be seen as a good opportunity to achieve something important in the fight against poverty, and to place at the disposal of justice and peace resources which were scarcely conceivable previously.

15. The Church's social teaching has always been concerned with the poor. At the time of the Encyclical Letter *Rerum Novarum*, the poor were identified mainly as the workers in the new industrial society; in the social Magisterium of Pius XI, Pius XII, John XXIII, Paul VI and John Paul II, new forms of poverty were gradually explored, as the scope of the social question widened to reach global proportions [16]. This expansion of the social question to the worldwide scale has to be considered not just as a quantitative extension, but also as a qualitative growth in the understanding of man and the needs of the human family. For this reason, while attentively following the current phenomena of globalization and their impact on human poverty, the Church points out the new aspects of the social question, not only in their breadth but also in their depth, insofar as they concern man's identity and his relationship with God. These principles of social teaching tend to clarify the links between poverty and globalization and they help to guide action towards the building of peace. Among these principles, it is timely to recall in particular the “preferential love for the poor” [17], in the light of the primacy of charity, which is attested throughout Christian tradition, beginning with that of the early Church (cf. *Acts* 4:32-36; *1 Cor* 16:1; *2 Cor* 8-9; *Gal* 2:10).

“Everyone should put his hand to the work which falls to his share, at once and immediately”, wrote Leo XIII in 1891, and he added: “In regard to the Church, her cooperation will never be wanting, be the time or the occasion what it may” [18]. It is in the same spirit that the Church to this day carries out her work for the poor, in whom she sees Christ [19], and she constantly hears echoing in her heart the command of the Prince of Peace to his Apostles: “*Vos date illis manducare* – Give them something to eat yourselves” (*Lk* 9:13). Faithful to this summons from the Lord, the Christian community will never fail, then, to assure the entire human family of her support through gestures of creative solidarity, not only by “giving from one's surplus”, but above all by “a change of lifestyles, of models of production and consumption, and of the established structures of power which today govern societies” [20]. At the start of the New Year, then, I extend to every disciple of Christ and to every person of good will a warm invitation to expand their hearts to meet the needs of the poor and to take whatever practical steps are possible in

order to help them. The truth of the axiom cannot be refuted: “to fight poverty is to build peace.”

From the Vatican, 8 December 2008.

BENEDICTUS PP. XVI

- [1] [Message for the 1993 World Day of Peace](#), 1.
- [2] Paul VI, Encyclical Letter [Populorum Progressio](#), 19.
- [3] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter [Sollicitudo Rei Socialis](#), 28.
- [4] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter [Centesimus Annus](#), 38.
- [5] Cf. Paul VI, Encyclical Letter [Populorum Progressio](#), 37; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter [Sollicitudo Rei Socialis](#), 25.
- [6] Benedict XVI, [Letter to Cardinal Renato Raffaele Martino on the occasion of the International Seminar organized by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace on the theme: “Disarmament, Development and Peace. Prospects for Integral Disarmament”](#), 10 April 2008: *L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 30 April 2008, p. 2.
- [7] Encyclical Letter [Populorum Progressio](#), 87.
- [8] Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter [Centesimus Annus](#), 58.
- [9] Cf. John Paul II, [Address to the Christian Associations of Italian Working People](#), 27 April 2002, 4: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XXV:1 (2002), p. 637.
- [10] John Paul II, [Address to the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences](#), 27 April 2001, 4: *L'Osservatore Romano*, English Edition, 2 May 2001, p. 7.
- [11] Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution [Lumen Gentium](#), 1.
- [12] Cf. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, [Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church](#), 368.
- [13] Cf. *ibid.*, 356.
- [14] [Address to Leaders of Trade Unions and Workers' Associations](#), 2 May 2000, 3: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XXIII, 1 (2000), p. 726.
- [15] No. 28.
- [16] Cf. Paul VI, Encyclical Letter [Populorum Progressio](#), 3.

[17] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter [*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*](#), 42; cf. Encyclical Letter [*Centesimus Annus*](#), 57.

[18] Encyclical Letter [*Rerum Novarum*](#), 45.

[19] Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter [*Centesimus Annus*](#), 58.

[20] *Ibid.*

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Crescendo at the 6th World-Wide Families Meeting

Mexico 14/18 January 2009

The World-wide Network Crescendo "for a human and christian ageing" has obviously given always a great interest to the role of the grandparents and eldest in the family. The Founding Act already stress es the necessity of supporting the family and particularly to promote the fa m ilial and intergeneration solidarity.

The two main actions undertaken by Crescendo in this field are:

The message addressed to the UNITED NATIONS on the occasion of the Second General Assembly on Ageing - held in Madrid in 2002 - and the taking part in the speech at the World- Wide Meeting of Families in Valencia in 2006.

Providentially, a workshop leading to this meeting had been organized in Spain whose main target was the active participation of grandparents and elderly persons to the 5th World- Wide Meeting of Families.

This group,linked to the Archbishop of Valencia, the present Cardinal Agustin Garcia Gasco, has first organized a preparatory International Symposium in 2005 - held at the Catholic University of Valencia - whose purpose was a launching meeting to organize within the Meeting a "grandparents and elderly Congress", as it has previously been organized for the 'Children's Congress'. Simultaneously, other attempts were made in Rome.

All our wishes and prayers have been fulfilled. In Valencia, the Congress of the elderly has been successful, both in its content and audience; and its conclusions have been displayed at the end of the Theological Pastoral Congress.

Besides, Crescendo has been invited to such a Congress among important movements of the Church.

During the Theological Pastoral Congress, a few lectures have made references to the multi-faced aspects of the topic concerning the elderly and ageing.

Last but not least, the Holy Father has declared - both in his homily on the 9th July and in his message on the previous festive day, 8th July that *"the family includes not only parents and children but also grandparents and ancestors"* and he has exhorted in these terms: *"In no way should they ever be excluded from the family circle!"*

The Pope has also proposed as the topic for the Plenary Assembly of the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council of the Family - held in April 2008 - : *"The grandparents, witness and presence in the family"* and has asked the participants not to forget his exhortation in Valencia on the above mentioned topic. This has been welcomed by Crescendo with great surprise and pleasure.

Unfortunately, Cardinal Lopez Trujillo could not participate in that plenary conference and died after a few days. However he had told his collaborators that, for the Mexico Meeting, he would prefer a unique congress to give a stronger unity and to avoid any dispersion.

Nevertheless the program of the Mexico Meeting which might be found on the web www.emf2009.com 2009 doesn't talk at all about either grandparents or elderly. This, however, doesn't exclude the possibilities of speeches concerning this topic at the Congress.

Crescendo - as already done in Valencia - has been invited at a workshop to which eight other organizations will participate. Among these: Saint Egidio, 'Les Equipes Notre Dame', the Christian Movement of Families, (very well known in Latin America) etc., each one have the possibility of speaking for not more than five minutes.

We hope that we won't be the only ones to deal with the problematic concerning the grandparents in the family, but in any case we have to profit the more we can of this opportunity. The message of Crescendo - for which we have received some contributions of great interest - should concentrate on what is essential, in other terms, on what Crescendo means by working through the net and, on the other hand, on what Crescendo

has already done concerning the United Nations and in the Church, to support the family.

This message will be presented by Jean Marie de Scals Klein, belonging to the family of the Spanish Caritas, who has been one of the most important promoter and supporter for the participation of Crescendo in the 5th World Wide Meeting of Families. He will participate as a delegate of Crescendo. A part from his speech, he will also be a reliable observer of the Congress since his mission will be to establish contacts with delegates of the participating movements.

He will present a report at the next meeting and board of Crescendo.



