

FINAL REPORT

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Is not Venice built upon the sea, even though it was built in such a way that a generation finally came along that did not notice this at all, and would it not be a lamentable misunderstanding if this latest generation was so in error until the pilings began to rot and the city sank?

(Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*)¹

Among democratic peoples ... the fabric of time is torn at every moment and the trace of generations is effaced. Those who have gone before are easily forgotten, and no one gives a thought to those who will follow.

(Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, II, 2, 2)

In this first Plenary Meeting on Intergenerational Solidarity, the Academicians were like explorers slowly making our way into a new territory, clearing away obstacles, and charting the main features of the terrain. Building on our earlier, preliminary expeditions,² we chose to concentrate in this phase of our project on the implications of changes in inter-generational relations for 'welfare' (broadly understood as encompassing all the networks and institutions upon which the very young, the frail elderly, the sick, and the incapacitated depend for support and security). The speakers and commentators confirmed the existence of a sobering array of challenges for social science, social policy and the Church's social teaching. There was significant agreement concerning the nature and urgency of

¹ Princeton University Press, 1985, p. 98.

² See papers by Dasgupta, Donati, Glendon, Llach, Malinvaud, Raga, Ramirez, Villacorta, Zampetti, and Zubrzycki in *Intergenerational Solidarity*, Acta 8, Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences (Vatican City, 2002).

those challenges. The conference also generated a number of proposals for addressing those challenges, and a number of questions for further study.

In this report, I have reviewed our proceedings with a particular question in mind. In keeping with the central concerns of Catholic social thought and with the welfare theme chosen for this meeting, I focus primarily on what the changing picture of intergenerational solidarity means for human *dependency*. By human dependency, I mean not only the composition of the dependent population at any given time, but the dependency that is an inescapable fact of the human condition for all men and women at various stages of their lives, including the dependency of the human race on its natural and social environments. I have divided these reflections into five parts: the demographic earthquakes, the dependency-welfare crisis, the breakdown in social norms, the new 'woman question', and scotomas in social policy and the social sciences.

Demographic Earthquakes

One point upon which all participants agreed is that the latter 20th century was a time of extraordinary upheavals in generational relations. The extent and rapidity of the changes are plain from studies that document what Professor Vallin described as

that great historical movement known as the demographic transition that has changed the face of humanity and whose latest phase, now in course, is leading us toward age structures that we know will bring about profound transformations in our societies.

Many persons alive today need no special demonstration of how far-reaching that historic transition has been, for they have personally witnessed the passage from one way of life to another. In a short story written in the 1950s, and titled, simply, 'Life' the Irish writer Liam O'Flaherty provides a telling glimpse of generational relations as they existed in many subsistence economies before the 'demographic transition'.³ The story begins shortly after a baby boy has been born to a farming family in rural Ireland. Three generations of the family live together in the same house: the farming couple, the wife's elderly senile father, and six of the couple's ten living children (four other children having died in infancy). The youngest and the

³ Liam O'Flaherty, 'Life', reprinted in *Being Human: A Bioethics Reader* (President's Council on Bioethics: Washington, D.C., 2004).

oldest members of the household have similar needs – they both have to be fed and cleaned and kept from hurting themselves. The busy women of the family attend to those needs – readily in the case of the infant, rather impatiently in the case of the old man. Between the little boy and his grandfather there is a special bond. They both take pleasure in such things as basking in the summer sunshine, or watching birds in flight. One day, while they are outdoors together, the grandfather falls lifeless to the ground. The story's final image – of the little boy hopping merrily beside the body of the old man – speaks of human continuity and renewal of 'life'.

The story evokes without sentimentality a not-far-distant world where the links in the chain among generations were taken for granted. In many ways, it was, as Professor Vallin pointed out, a harsh world where children often died in infancy and women in childbirth. The elderly, if unable to work, were entirely dependent on family members; and opportunities for men and women to reach their full human potential were severely limited.

The developed nations left that world behind over a century ago as the majority of men, and later, women began to work for wages outside the home. By the end of the 20th century, many developing countries were experiencing a transition from age-old patterns of work and family life, often on an accelerated basis. And yet, the human race remained every bit as dependent on child-raising families and on the earth itself as it had been in ages past. What was new was a spreading forgetfulness of the simple fact of human dependency ('Is not Venice built upon the sea ... even though a generation finally came along that did not notice this at all ...').

The speakers and commentators at the Academy's 2004 Plenary Session presented a sobering picture of the demographic upheavals – the aging of populations, changes in sexual and family behavior, the migrations of peoples – that have transformed and are transforming the social landscape. The participants pondered the implications of these changes, both for the most vulnerable members of the human family and for the institutions to which people turn in times of need. (There was some speculation about whether economic, political and cultural causes led to changes in generational relations or the other way around. But discussion of that question remained inconclusive, for economies, politics, cultures, and family structures are mutually conditioning systems whose effects on one another are hard to isolate. That, of course, is what makes the social sciences seem so unsatisfactory to so many people – everything seems to cause everything else to the point where few people are willing to draw any conclusions or make specific recommendations. For present purposes, it seems enough to

note that even those who disagreed about the causes of these changes were in accord on the seriousness of their consequences).

If one asks what those upheavals have meant and are likely to mean for the world's dependent population, probably the most striking fact is that, with declining birth rates and improved longevity, that population now includes a much smaller proportion of children and a much larger proportion of disabled and elderly persons than it did a century ago. This is so even in developing countries where dependent children still outnumber the dependent elderly, but where the relatively high birth rates are declining.⁴ In 2002, the world's fertility rate was down to 2.6 children per woman, roughly half of what it was in the 1950s when the O'Flaherty story was written.⁵

What, one wonders, will the picture of dependency look like for our children and grandchildren if current trends described by Professor Vallin continue: if life expectancy exceeds 85, if one-child families become the norm, and if far fewer girls than boys are born than has ever been the case before in human history? It will be interesting to follow developments in China where the transition to a market economy has produced a breakdown in the post-1948 'danwei' system of state-run urban and rural collectives – which until recently provided assistance to citizens in times of need.⁶ As its one-child families age, that populous nation will have a smaller working population to support the elderly, the majority of whom will not have pensions. (Each child potentially will be responsible for two elderly parents, each couple for four). And if the preference for male children continues, who will perform the care-taking roles traditionally performed by women? And what effect will a large cohort of unmarried men have upon social stability?

No less portentous, in terms of implications for welfare and dependency, is the revolution in sexual and family behavior that erupted between 1965 and 1985 in the affluent nations of North America, Europe, Australia, and to

⁴ Over the past 50 years, life expectancy in western Europe has increased by about 10 years, and the share of the population above 65 in the current 15 members of the EU is expected to grow from 16% in 2000 to about 21% in 2020, while the share of the working age population will decline. Wolfgang Lutz, 'Determinants of Low Fertility and Aging Prospects for Europe', *Family Issues Between Gender and Generations* (Luxembourg: European Communities, 2000), pp. 49-69; 'The Century of Aging: A Graying Europe Wonders how to Pay its Pensioners' (Zenit News Agency, October 4, 2003).

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, 'Global Population Profile: 2002', (March 2004).

⁶ Donald J. Adamchak, 'The Effects of Age Structure on the Labor Force and Retirement in China', 38 *Social Science Journal*, p. 1 (2001).

a lesser extent in Japan.⁷ The shifts in demographic indicators in that period were so unexpected that they took even professional demographers by surprise: birth rates and marriage rates fell sharply, while divorce rates, births of children outside marriage, and the incidence of non-marital cohabitation climbed to high levels. The changes were widespread, profound, and sudden: widespread, because all developed nations were affected to varying degrees; profound, because the changes involved increases or decreases of more than fifty percent; and sudden, because the changes took place in less than twenty years. Perhaps not sufficiently explored in our discussions was the fact that those changes in family behavior were both driving and driven by less quantifiable but equally momentous *shifts in attitudes*, that is, in the *meanings* that men and women attribute to sex and procreation, marriage, gender, parenthood, and relations among the generations.

At about the same time in the affluent countries there were signs of disturbance in schools, neighborhoods, churches, local governments, and workplace associations – the mediating institutions that have traditionally depended on families for their support and that in turn have served as important resources for families – especially in times of stress. The law changed rapidly, too, becoming a testing ground for various ways of re-imagining family relations and an arena for struggles among competing ideas about individual liberty, equality between men and women, human sexuality, marriage, and family life. It does not seem an exaggeration to speak, as Professors Donati and Fukuyama did, of a breakdown in social norms.

By the 1990s, the major demographic indicators more or less stabilized in the developed countries, but they remained near their new high or low levels, registering only modest rises or declines since then. The tremors of the demographic earthquake subsided, but the social landscape of the developed countries was irrevocably changed. The full extent of the damage, however, was not immediately apparent because, for a time, it was widely accepted as a kind of liberal dogma that actions and decisions in the highly personal areas of sex and marriage were of no concern to anyone other than the ‘consenting adults’ involved. It took time and sad experience for the understanding to sink in: that individual actions *in the aggregate*

⁷ Francis Fukuyama, ‘The Great Disruption’ (New York: Free Press, 1999); Louis Roussel, ‘Démographie: deux décennies de mutations dans les pays industrialisés’, *I Family, State, and Individual Economic Security*, M.T. Meulders and J. Eekelaar eds. (Brussels: Story Scientia, 1988), p. 27.

exert a profound influence on what kind of society we are bringing into being. When large numbers of people begin acting with regard primarily to self-fulfillment, the entire culture is transformed. We can now see that the cumulative effects of the changes in family behavior that took rise in the 1960s have been especially detrimental to children and thus have cast a cloud over the futures of the societies involved. As Professor Arrow put it,

The modern freedom of divorce and of unmarried parentage have increased the scope of expression for parents without necessarily recognizing the implications for the welfare of children.

The late twentieth century saw equally profound disruptions in many developing countries. As Professor Llach pointed out, the transitions in the developing world have taken many different forms. In China, for example, the processes of urbanization and industrialization similar to those that were spread out over the course of a century in Europe and North America have been experienced in a single generation. In sub-Saharan Africa, the social environments of several nations have been devastated by the AIDS epidemic which has already claimed twenty million lives worldwide, and which has taken its greatest toll among the parenting and working-age population. And in many places, as Llach emphasized, poverty, unemployment, and gross income disparities, have played crucial roles.

The Dependency-Welfare Crisis

The demographic upheavals of the late twentieth century have impaired the carrying capacity of all of the social systems upon which individuals depend for support and security, producing the growing dependency-welfare crisis upon which a number of speakers focussed. Professors Raga and Tietmeyer began by tracing the early efforts of 'socially conscious' industrialized states to respond to the dislocations of urbanization and industrialization by affording a safety net against certain basic risks. The economic crises of the early 20th century prompted the establishment of more ambitious welfare programs that aimed to assure health, security and subsistence for all citizens. When these programs were first established, the population of contributing workers was relatively large in comparison to the expected size of the beneficiary population. But today, as the dependent elderly population expands and the cohort of active workers contracts, all welfare states are coming under severe strain. The average European expenditure on old-age pensions rose by 32% between 1991 and 2000 (when it stood at 12.5% of GDP), and in most of these countries, public health

spending has outpaced economic growth.⁸ At the same time, the increase in poor, female-headed families puts pressure on public resources from the other end of the life cycle. Professor Tietmeyer stated bluntly: 'In many countries, nothing less than an erosion of the economic foundations underlying the welfare state is looming'.

The situation in the United States is less acute for the reasons Father Neuhaus mentioned: its somewhat higher birthrate and its steady influx of about a million immigrants each year. But even the United States, Federal Reserve Board Chairman Alan Greenspan said in 2004, 'will almost surely be unable to meet the demands on resources that the retirement of the baby boom generation will make'.⁹

Attempts to fashion political solutions are impeded by a number of factors. Donati, Tietmeyer, and Raga pointed to evidence that overly ambitious welfare states have contributed to dependency and fostered a certain loss of individual initiative and responsibility. And both Llach and Fukuyama warned about attempts to address work-force deficits through the importation of workers from other countries. What, Llach asked, will be the effects of massive international migrations on the countries of origin? And what, wondered Fukuyama, will be the consequences in some liberal democratic destination countries, as they 'attempt to absorb large numbers of people whose beliefs and practices are not tolerant or liberal?' Even modest proposals to relieve pressures on welfare systems through limiting benefits or raising the age of retirement, have thus far proved politically divisive. For, as noted by Tietmeyer and Fukuyama, the considerable political influence of the elderly and their lobbying organizations is augmented by support from family members who have become accustomed to the status quo, as well as from the general population of adults who expect, or at least hope, to be elderly one day themselves. In that connection, Professor Dasgupta noted an interesting 'free rider' problem: childless individuals (who as a group enjoy a higher standard of living than child-raising persons as a group) expect to be cared for in old age through benefits financed by a labor force to which they did not contribute.

If political deliberation continues within a framework based on the idea of competition for scarce resources, the outlook for children and child-rai-

⁸ Robert Pear, 'Spending on Health Rose 9.3% in 2002 to a Record Level', *New York Times*, January 8, 2004, p. 1.

⁹ 'Enough to live on', *The Economist*, March 27, 2004, p. 10.

ing families is troubling. With the declining birth rate, children are less visible in many societies: adults are less likely to be living with children; and neighborhoods less likely to contain children. As the proportion of childless households grows, many societies are becoming ever more adult-centered, and the general level of societal concern for children declines. (The increasingly adult-oriented content of television programs is but one indicator). Political support for measures that might address the needs of child-raising families is difficult to rally, in part because policy-making elites in modern societies are disproportionately composed of men and women who are either childless or who see little of their children. As the old saying goes, 'Out of sight, out of mind'. Yet, is not Venice a city built upon the sea...?

Thus, if we consider how the advanced welfare states currently deal with the needs of two classes of dependents – children and the frail elderly – we can see that the state's priorities are generally the reverse of the rural family's priorities in 'Life'. Families in subsistence economies are acutely aware of the importance of the human capital represented by children, while modern welfare states typically favor the elderly over the young where social spending is concerned. Needless to say, most people consider it one of the blessings of modern social security and health care systems that they have made elders more independent, relieving families of much of the burden of elder-care. At the same time, however, the bulk of the poverty population in modern welfare states, as in the rest of the world, is composed of mothers and children. Thus, no small part of the impending dependency-welfare crisis is the prospect of divisive competition for resources, and of conflict rather than solidarity among generations (None of the papers for this meeting, except that of Msgr. Schooyans, made reference to the most ominous 'solutions' to this conflict: the growing normalization in many societies of the abandonment or even extermination of persons who are inconvenient and burdensome to maintain at life's frail beginnings and endings).

There was a strong suggestion, in papers by Donati, Tietmeyer, Raga, Neuhaus and implicitly in the paper by Archer, that lasting solutions would require structures that improve the ability of persons and groups to solve their own problems through the exercise of initiative and responsibility. As Cardinal Rouco pointed out, many of the deficiencies of the welfare state have 'derived from an inadequate comprehension of the competencies, limits and duties that are [the state's], most concretely the forgetting of the principle of subsidiarity' which requires supporting the competence of those the state aids, wherever possible, rather than reducing them to passivity.

The Deeper Crisis

The prevalence of conflict models in discussing the dependency-welfare crisis, Professor Donati suggested, is a sign of an even deeper crisis that policy makers seem reluctant to acknowledge. Discussions of welfare regularly neglect the family, even though the family has always been and remains, as Cardinal Rouco put it, 'the school par excellence of humanization and social living'. One of the main reasons for that neglect today, as Father Neuhaus observed, is that to speak of the family 'is inevitably to come up against anti-familial and anti-natalist dynamics in our several societies'. But even prior to the culture wars, there was a tendency among 20th century social planners to treat society as a collection of individuals in competition with one another for scarce resources, and, if they focus on the family at all, to regard it as an instrument to remedy failures of state and market. That tendency to treat the individual as the basic social unit, Donati maintained, both obscures and aggravates the underlying problem: the breakdown of social norms upon which healthy economies, republics, and socially conscious states all ultimately depend.

Consider the implications for dependents, especially children, of the dramatic changes in social norms that took place in the affluent countries of Europe and North America in the late 20th century. The fact is that changes in the sexual mores and marriage behavior of large numbers of adults have transformed the experience of childhood in ways that would have been unimaginable in former times.¹⁰ The age-old idea of marriage as an institution mainly for the procreation and raising of children is now rivaled and in some places surpassed by the very different idea of marriage as primarily for the benefit of the adult individuals involved.

The consequences for children, upon whom the human future depends, have been drastic: millions of children have been lost to abortion, and an unprecedented proportion of children are spending all or part of their childhoods in fatherless homes, often in poverty. Female-headed families created by divorce, desertion, or single parenthood now constitute the bulk of the world's poverty population.¹¹ As for intact child-raising families, their

¹⁰ Peter Uhlenberg, 'Changing Adulthood Changes Childhood: A Working Paper for the Council of Families', Working Paper No. 57 (New York: Institute for American Values, 1998).

¹¹ Joan Williams, 'Our Economy of Mothers and Others: Women and Economics Revisited', 5 *Journal of Gender, Race & Justice*, pp. 411, 412 (2002).

standard of living is generally lower than that of childless households, especially if the mother stays home to care for the children. The conclusion is inescapable that the affluent western nations have been engaged in a massive social experiment – an experiment that has opened many new opportunities and freedoms to adults, but one that has been conducted at the expense of children and future generations. Further, and more radical, experiments, moreover, are already underway in these countries via advances in bio-technology. Professor Possenti evoked the haunting question: What will it mean for the relations between generations if children come to be seen as products of design and manufacture?

In sum, the drastic declines in birth and marriage rates that have taken place in the developed nations, together with sharp rises in fatherless households, have cast a cloud over the economic and political futures of those societies. In places where the state once ambitiously took over many roles that formerly belonged to the family, governments are less and less capable of fulfilling their commitments, while the family has lost much of its capacity to care for its own members. In his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Europa*, Pope John Paul II referred to a spreading ‘existential anguish’ and fragmentation characterized by the difficulty of making lasting commitments, feelings of loneliness, rise of ethnic and religious tensions, and attitudes that ‘will marginalize the less powerful and increase the number of poor in the world’ (8).

Meanwhile, Professors Morandé, Ramirez and Zulu urged the Academicians not to lose sight of the important fact that intergenerational solidarity is only one dimension of the virtue of solidarity. While it is essential to plan for the future, the Holy Father has reminded us that: ‘The poor cannot wait!’ In sub-Saharan Africa, alarming numbers of children have been deprived of parents and caretakers by the AIDS epidemic. Already, more than 11 million children under 15 have lost at least one parent to AIDS. The UN Children’s Fund estimates that figure is likely to rise to 20-25 million by 2010.¹² The total number of African children who have lost one or both parents to AIDS and other causes is 34 million – twice that in any other region of the world. If UN projections are correct, 1 in 7 children in a dozen countries will be left with only one parent by 2010, and in some countries that figure will be 1 in 5. With the loss of so many parents, teach-

¹² Michael Wines, ‘AIDS Blamed for Legions of Orphans in Africa’, *New York Times*, November 11, 2003, p. A6.

ers, and others in the prime of life, these countries may become societies of old people and children.

In *Ecclesia in Europa*, Pope John Paul II identified the deepest crisis afflicting contemporary societies as a loss of hope. 'At the root of this loss of hope', he wrote,

is an attempt to promote a vision of man apart from God and apart from Christ. ... Forgetfulness of God led to the abandonment of man. It is therefore no wonder that in this context a vast field has opened for the unrestrained development of nihilism in philosophy, of relativism in values and morality, and of pragmatism, and even a cynical hedonism, in daily life (9).

The New 'Woman Question'

The observation by some of our speakers that too little attention has been paid to the family by theorists and policy makers seems incontestable. I would add, however, that too little attention has also been paid to the situation of women, especially women who are mothers. As Archer pointed out, 'the provision of care across any generation has been an almost exclusively female preserve – and continues to be so'. And as Tocqueville observed at the dawn of the modern era,

Everything that influences the condition of women, their habits and their opinions is of great political interest, for it is women who are the main teachers of children and through whom the mores are transmitted to the next generation.¹³

Perhaps no single development, apart from fatherlessness, has had more impact on the environment of childhood, the care of dependents, or the health of the mediating institutions of civil society than the increased labor force participation by women, including mothers of young children. It is a mark of great progress, and something to celebrate, that we now live in a world where women have more freedoms and opportunities than ever before in history. No society, however, has yet figured out how to assure satisfactory conditions for child-raising when both parents of young children work outside the home. And no society has yet found a substitute for the loss of other types of care-giving labor previously performed mainly by women.

¹³ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, II, 3, 9.

For many women, moreover, the picture of progress is ambiguous. Though birth rates are declining, the majority of women still become mothers. When mothers of young children enter the labor force, whether because of necessity or desire, they tend to seek work that is compatible with family roles. That often means jobs with lower pay, fewer benefits, and fewer opportunities for advancement than those available to persons without family responsibilities. Thus, ironically, the more a woman foregoes advancement in the workplace for the sake of caring for her own children, the more she and her children are at risk if the marriage ends in divorce. On the other hand, the more she invests in her work, the greater the likelihood her children will have care that is less than optimal. It is not surprising therefore that women in developed countries are hedging against these risks in two ways: by having fewer children than women did in the past, and by seeking types of labor force participation that are compatible with parenting. In so doing, they often sacrifice *both* their child-raising preferences and their chances to have remunerative, satisfying, and secure employment.

Women in developing countries face even heavier burdens. As working age men increasingly commute to jobs in the modern sector or migrate to distant places in search of work, rural life no longer takes the form of the family production community. Today, in addition to performing the traditional tasks of child care, food preparation, and gathering wood and water, women are increasingly left to take over responsibility for cash-crop farming. Katherine Hawa Hoomkwap, a remarkable Nigerian mother of five who served with me on the Holy See's delegation to the Beijing women's conference, gave me a small statue that says it all: it is an African woman who is carrying a baby in a sling on her back, balancing a basket of food on her head, and grasping a hoe in her hands.

Thus, while enormous economic advances have been made by women without children, mothers face new versions of an old problem: Caregiving, one of the most important forms of human work, receives little respect and reward, whether performed in the family, or for wages outside the home.¹⁴ Despite these risks, most women still become mothers. In marriage, they accept primary responsibility for child care, thereby incurring disadvantages in the labor force. If divorce or separation occurs, they seek and

¹⁴ Eva Feder Kittay and Ellen K. Feder, *The Subject of Care: Feminist Perspectives on Dependency* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), p. 1.

accept primary responsibility for the care of children even when they are not well-equipped financially to do so. Indeed, if women did not continue to shoulder these risks and burdens, it is hard to see how any social institution could make up for the services they now provide.

The main solutions proposed by the feminism of the 1970s (at the zenith of the welfare state) were the socialization of care-giving and equal child care responsibilities for fathers and mothers. But those ideas have not had broad appeal – either for parents or for tax-payers. They ignore that for many women, caring for family members is central to identity; sustaining the relationships that make life meaningful. As Archer put it in her critique of cost-benefit analysis as applied to family life:

Who people are derives from their ultimate concerns which are expressive of their identities and therefore are *not* a means to some further end.

Cost-benefit analysis does, however, expose some peculiarities of social policy in the wake of the demographic revolutions. Despite the fact that those who perform care-taking roles within the family confer important benefits on the whole society, a mother who is left destitute when a family breaks up is often treated by welfare law as a social parasite and by divorce law as a burden to her ex-husband. In the 1970s and 80s, when family law was extensively revised in the developed countries ‘to conform to social reality’ (as it was said at the time), a highly unrealistic principle, self-sufficiency, was established as the aim of post-divorce economic arrangements.

Scotomas in Social Policy and Social Science

Among the accomplishments of this meeting on intergenerational solidarity was the identification of a number of blind spots in contemporary thinking about welfare and dependency. How is one to explain the neglect of such obvious facts as: the reality of human dependency, the breakdown of social norms, the value of care-giving, and the importance of the family, and its surrounding networks? The world’s democratic experiments, market economies, and socially conscious states alike all depend on the character and competence of citizens, workers, and public servants. How, therefore, can they remain indifferent to what helps or harms the settings that determine whether or not people develop such qualities as self-restraint, respect for others, work ethic, honesty, ability to cooperate, independence of mind, concern for the vulnerable, and attentiveness to the natural and

probable consequences of one's actions? 'Is not Venice built on the sea ... even though a generation came along that did not notice this ...?'

Several speakers pointed to certain flaws in prevailing modes of social, economic, political and legal thought that contribute to these oversights: incomplete concepts of personhood and society, together with a tendency to focus on the individual, the market, and the state to the neglect of families and the mediating structures of civil society.

Paradoxically, the concepts of the human person that are prominent in social science and social policy both over-emphasize individual self-sufficiency and under-rate individual human agency. The image of the free, self-determining individual exerts such powerful attraction for modern imaginations that we tend to relegate obvious facts about human dependency to the margins of consciousness. Nevertheless, human beings still begin their lives in the longest period of dependency of any mammal. It is still a fact that circumstances can catapult anyone at least temporarily from a secure to a dependent position. It is still a fact that almost all persons spend much of their lives either as dependents, or caring for dependents, or financially responsible for dependents. It is still a fact that we all depend on the earth for the resources that make life possible. As Alasdair MacIntyre has written:

It matters ... that those who are no longer children recognize in children what they once were, that those who are not yet disabled by age recognize in the old what they are moving towards becoming, and that those who are not ill or injured recognize in the ill and injured what they often have been and will be and always may be. It matters also that these recognitions are not a source of fear. For such recognitions are a condition of adequate awareness of both the common needs and the common goods that are served by networks of giving and receiving and by the virtues both of independence and of acknowledged dependence. ... In order to flourish we need both those virtues that enable us to function as independent and accountable practical reasoners and those virtues that enable us to acknowledge the nature and extent of our dependence on others. Both the acquisition and the exercise of those virtues are possible only insofar as we participate in social relationships of giving and receiving. ...¹⁵

¹⁵ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (1999), p. 146.

Perhaps we do not like to think about dependency because we do not like to think about being vulnerable. But, if we were not dependent, would we be fully human? Aristotle's answer to that question was this: 'The man who has no need of others is either a beast or a god'.

Strangely, the over-emphasis on self-sufficiency in contemporary social thought co-exists with an approach to welfare that under-rates human capacities. As Archer, Neuhaus and Raga emphasized, social policy has been influenced by mind-sets that treat human beings as passive subjects or instrumental rationalists rather than as acting persons whose decisions are influenced not only by calculation of self-interest but by strongly held values. Surely social policy and social science would benefit from more attention to the fact that human beings are *both* able and dependent, with variations over one's life span. No doubt the Academy will return to this subject in its 2005 Plenary Meeting devoted to the topic: 'The Vision of the Human Person in the Social Sciences'.

Prevailing concepts of 'society', too, need re-examination. As Donati insisted, society is not just a collection of individual competitors for scarce resources; it is 'a fabric of relationships, to a certain extent ambivalent and conflictual, in need of solidarity'. There was wide agreement that a number of conceptual adjustments will be needed if policy-makers are to move beyond unpromising proposals based on conflictual models of human relations.

Here perhaps is where Catholic social thought, as President Malinvaud emphasized in our 2002 roundtable, could enter into mutually beneficial dialogue with the social sciences. Catholic social teachings have long promoted a vision of society where the dignity of the human person is the highest value; where the family has priority over the state; where all legitimate types of work, paid or unpaid, are respected; and where families, local communities and the mediating structures enjoy an appropriate autonomy. It has long presented a vision of human personhood in which each man and woman is understood as uniquely individual yet inescapably social; as a creature of unruly passions who nevertheless possesses a certain ability to transcend and even transform the passions; as a knower and a chooser who constitutes himself or herself, for better or worse, through his knowing and his choosing. It has elaborated a concept of solidarity, not as a mask for collectivism, but as a *moral and social attitude*, a *virtue* based on recognition of the interdependence of the members of the human family (SRS, 38). It has offered the fertile concept of subsidiarity in which an important role for the state is to help set conditions for personal, social and economic flourishing.

Subsidiarity, however, is not a mechanical formula or a dogma, but rather a principle whose application depends on the ever-changing relations among state, market, civil society, families and individuals in each society. Professors Stiglitz and Kirchof cautioned about excessive mistrust of the state even in countries where the state is very strong, and Professor Fukuyama observed that the standard critique of the excesses of the welfare state does not apply well to poor countries where the absence of a strong rule-of-law state is a major impediment to development. There are places, as Professors Ramirez and Villacorta reminded us, where civil society and even family structures are too strong, as well as places where they are in danger of being overwhelmed by the market or the state. The question is always one of seeking an optimal balance. Professor Morandé's observation was much appreciated: 'The principle of subsidiarity turns out to be most efficient when using intelligence and all people's capacities for the development of the common good'.

Whether and how policy-makers in modern states might accommodate a more capacious concept of personhood, an approach to gender equality that makes room for different individual vocations and roles, a deeper appreciation of the dignity of all legitimate human work, or an understanding of the cultural importance of families and the mediating structures upon which they depend are fateful questions whose answers lie hidden in the future. As Father Neuhaus wrote, it would require a certain humility on the part of theorists and policy makers to 'learn from the ways in which people, given the opportunity, actually order their lives together as *they* think they ought to order their lives together.' And it would require a certain tragic sensibility, for in the area of social policy, the problem is often, as Professor Dasgupta reminded us, one of striking balances among conflicting and competing goods.

No one will suggest that this First Plenary Meeting on Intergenerational Solidarity has reached the stage of confident answers, but it is no small thing to be able to ask the right questions. And that, I believe, our speakers have done.