

## COMMENT ON PROF. DUMONT'S 'LES EVOLUTIONS DEMOGRAPHIQUES DE LA JEUNESSE DANS LE MONDE'

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It is a pleasure for me to comment the paper of Prof. Dumont which offers us a worldwide view about youth from the hard facts of demography. As he indicates, youth's situation are extremely variable in the entire world and it is quite complex therefore to reach conclusions of general application. Nevertheless, Prof. Dumont's presentation concludes with five recommendations that I consider very relevant: 1. the need to improve the measurement of demographic realities keeping in mind their great geographical diversity, 2. the need to stimulate the consideration of the educational function among the youth, 3. the need to give priority to the sanitary progress in the fight against poverty, 4. the need to improve equity among genders, particularly from the point of view of health and educational policies and 5. the need to adapt family policies to reality, keeping in mind, specially, the consideration of parents as their children's educators.

What impressed me very much of this paper is the decisive weight that has in the demographic view the decrease of infantile mortality, and in general all the improvements in the sanitary realm, which allow to maintain relatively constant the number of young people although there is a tendency to decreasing fertility in women. I consider that it is a fact of big consequences, since it is possible to control this variable with technical criteria that are available to all governments of the world, what evidently does not happen with fertility which depends, when there are no legal restrictions, of the decision of people themselves, of their happiness and pleasure for life, of their desires of having children and of educating them. It seems to be that the political-social policies designed up to now by governments in order to incentivate the number of children, do not have the necessary strength to persuade people to have a favourable attitude towards procreation.

I do not want to concentrate myself in the technical aspects of Prof.'s Dumont paper, but rather follow the recommendations sent to us by Prof.'s Donati as guidelines where he points out that *Speakers and commentators are invited to deal with the issue of cultural transmission between the generations (in particular as to what regards the religious faith) whenever possible. It would also be advisable to make proposals as to what can or should be done in order to foster those cultural and societal conditions which can allow younger generations to pursue their self-fulfilment in the light of the Catholic social doctrine.* Evidently, the demographic data as such don't allow us to reach direct cultural conclusions, but there is no doubt that they offer a reference frame that conditions decisively any consideration on this subject. Therefore, I want to refer specially to the last conclusion of Prof. Dumont that affects particularly Latin America but is also very strong in the case of Europe. I refer to the social change already produced but still going on of the lack of the educational capacity of parents in relation to their children, due to the increase of one parent's homes where the father is absent, to the growth of the number of children born outside of marriage and to the volatility of the married bond, when it exists, or to the breakup of non married couples. Perhaps, as Prof. Dumont suggests, the case of Mexico requires a special explanation due to the high migration of men to the United States whose families remain in their country. However, this tendency is also given in countries like Chile (my country) which although has no significant emigrant flow, one parent's homes and being born outside of marriage are growing at a very high rate (for the year 2003, 53,8% of new childs were born outside of marriage).

Perhaps the case of Latin America deserves a brief historical consideration. Contrary to the settlement in other regions of our world, the Hispanic-lusitanic conquest of Latin America during the XVI century was an enterprise of males during a long time, due to the immensity of the territory, their low demographic density and the necessarily military display, not so much because of the hostility of some aboriginal people, but because of the need of controlling their own immigrant population considering the abundance of wealth overseas, specially, of precious metals. For diverse reasons which are not the case to analyse here, it is well known that from both protagonists of the encounter among these two worlds, there was a favourable predisposition to crossbreeding, partly properly legalized and partly transcending all dispositions of the juridical order. After a few decades from the beginning of the conquest, the crossbreeding's population group constituted the one of major growth, becoming progressively the

majority of the population, except in some very individualized areas. The different crossbreeding types brought up a strength status ranked organization of social life, following the same model that had succeeded in Europe, which restricted the celebration of marriage only among socially equals, even though others forms were also legally allowed.

Such a situation fostered, still without intending it, sexual relationships outside of marriage and the constitution of families with an absent or unknown father, which reached such a magnitude that such a type of family represents a true cultural institution in Latin America. From this point of view, it can be said that in Latin America the cultural institution of the one parent's home is not new, but rather it has a deep historical root, perhaps hidden into the conscience by the fact that these realities were given inside of extended families which welcomed these new children in a wide net of relationship bonds. The progressive breakup of extended families in the urban context and the recent incorporation of women to remunerated employments, have made jointly that this phenomenon hidden before is now evident and object of public policies from the State. However, for people's conscience it doesn't seem to be a new phenomenon. It explains why repeatedly in surveys, even keeping in mind this structural weakness of families, people respond that they have a high appreciation to family and that it is their main source of satisfaction in life and their main support for the most critical moments. This answer has certainly in mind not only the nuclear family but the wide net of relatives that although they don't live in the same home have not lost their condition of being members of the family.

Anyway, the nuclearization of families and the becoming evident of the great number of one parent's families sustained by a mother that works outside of home has had a deep educational impact, specially, in the deterioration of the relationships between the family and the schools. As parents don't have time to accompany their children in the reinforcement of studies and in their school duties, because they work or because they don't live at home, parents hope the school will carry out the entire educational task without their own participation. Some school directors complain that parents simply deposit their children at school, hoping that teachers will do with them what they cannot do. Nevertheless, their renouncement to their parental responsibility they maintain high levels of expectations and of demands on the school at the moment to evaluate the educational achievements. Being at the moment the school education the best predictor in the youth's future professional destination, and investing the State consider-

able resources in this realm, public opinion has created an almost paranoid attitude towards the results of the mensuration of educational achievements, making responsible for this to the school system and hiding the lack of responsibility that family parents have in this process. Overloaded with expectations on behalf of families and of society, schools have not been able to find the way to satisfy all these demands, notwithstanding the reinforcement of school plans, of the extension of educational schedules and of investment in technological means for teachings aid. At the same time, the massification of courses as a way to pay all these expenses and investments, makes it very difficult that teachers may play the role of substitute parents and accompany in a personalized way the educational process of the youths.

Regarding this last dimension, I would like to mention additionally that in the Chilean case (I ignore if this same observation could be extended to other countries), a progressive feminization of school teacher's profession has taken place. As much as in the pre-basic level as in the basic one, practically all teachers are women and at high school, although there are still some males, women teachers are the majority. If we consider the high percentage of one parent's homes sustained by women and this new reality of schools, we can conclude that school has become an extension of one parent's homes with male's absence, or at least a substitute of them, loosing their old traditional role of taking out youths from home to enlarge their reality's horizon to global society and to the cultural traditions of the respective nations. This lack of an hypothesis of wider reality than the one developed in home intimacy, and now extended to schools, makes, on the other hand, that even the precariousness of family stability does not have an external point of reference from which it could be judged as an objective, contingent or transitory situation. As a result youths have many times no other alternative than the internalisation of frustration and rage, which is frequently somatized through varied illnesses of the spirit or also, in most dramatic cases, the seek of escape ways through alcohol or drogadiction. And, although the growing phenomenon of school violence is very complex in its ethiology, personally I don't have any doubt that it also has a strengthful association to the described situation.

Which effects will have these new realities that are not only demographic, but have their foundations in it, on the intergenerational solidarity that represents the culture of the nations? How is it possible, under these conditions that parents could educate their children, that could transmit

them the deepest cultural values, the selective criteria to choice information and behaviour and to contribute, in this way, to the sustainability of the ontogenetic chain that sustains life in the medium and the long run?

In the context of current globalisation it is often spoken of the 'deterritorialization' of culture due to mass-media and also to the role that these same means can carry out with efficiency in youth's education. Although I do not question that this statement contains true elements, I think that it is a rush and exaggerated one. On the contrary, I believe that culture is intimately bound to human ontogenesis, since as rational beings, human beings do not only acquire their filiation and paternity conscience by virtue of the procreative act itself, but rather incipiently during the expectation for birth and to its fullness since the upbringing and education of the children. Nobody is born knowing what paternity is, but rather he/she learns how to know it from his/her son's/daughter's condition. For this reason, the sustainability of the ontogenetic chain that sustains in life different generations cannot be understood merely from the point of view of biological reproduction, which evidently is at its basis, but also from culture which is not other than this enormous effort, simultaneously personal and social, of communicating the wisdom learned from those who have preceded us in the existence, selected and enriched by the experience of sense of those alive, to the generation of their children in order to educate them in that peculiar way of being a person in the worldliness and historicity of inter-generational coexistence.

As Pope John Paul II pointed it out with great sharpness 'All people are part of a culture, depend upon it and shape it. Human beings are both child and parent of the culture in which they are immersed. To everything they do, they bring something which sets them apart from the rest of creation: their unfailing openness to mystery and their boundless desire for knowledge'. (*Fides et ratio* n. 71). Human cultures are therefore simultaneously particular and universal, depending of the finitude of our world and history, and of the educational responsibility of those who brought us to existence and, at the same time, open to understand all that is real in an horizon of infinite transcendence. As the Pope suggests, filiation and paternity experiences are in the core of cultures and in them the sustainability of human ontogenesis leans.

Is the functional organization of society sensitive to the cultural imbalance introduced by the one parent's homes with absent father? Until now, it seems not to have been. The educational policies of the States are oriented basically to the improvement of educational achievements of the

school system, those which are not measured in relation to the personal development of the students, but to comparative performances among people, schools and countries. They don't consider that a bond exists between the sustainability of education and the sustainability of families. Paradoxically, on the other hand, the designers of public policies are aware that once the educational covering has been extended to the whole group of youth, it is necessary to improve the equity and quality of education. But could a better quality of the learning processes be achieved without the personalization of the intellectual capacity that can discover the wisdom of knowledge? Is it possible to substitute the wisdom of people and of cultures with nothing else but information? Could schools collaborate to the personalization of learning without the help of parents and families? The Social Doctrine of the Church has sustained ever that the main educational responsibility resides in parents and that the school has, to this respect, only a subsidiary role. This deep expression of human wisdom is the one that seems to be lacked at present time as an effect of the new demographic realities and of the educational policies of the States. Its loss represents one of the most serious problems in 'human ecology' to use John Paul's II expression.

But on the other hand, how could parents assume their educational responsibility if one of them is not at home and sometimes is also unknown? Keeping in mind the past situation of Latin America, where one parent's families were not left alone but rather considered as a part of the extended family, inside which the children could get the adequate social protection for their growth, I think that the new cultural and demographic situation suggest us to do something similar. We have no more extended families but everywhere there are enough associations of volunteers which could act as substitutive extended families if they only orient their scope not to the reinforcement of the functional aspects of educational achievements but to the more wisely transmission of human wisdom and cultural patterns, notwithstanding the legal rights of the biological progenitors which must be undoubtedly recognised. Many of us have had the experience of growing up, besides our family, in a religious community and we have certainly had the opportunity of a deep experience of filiation and paternity from other persons who complemented the education we had received at home. Anyway, what is for me very clear is first, that we have to recognise that one parent's home are increasing and the figures show that probably it will increase even more in the next future; and second, that the functional organization of the school system and of

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society as a whole, does not have the ability to suggest to police makers that public policies should help families to fulfill the duty that functional organization cannot fulfill. Therefore, it is time for civil society to do its own, to assume its human ecological responsibility. As all other ecological problem it demands from us to raise the view from the short run toward the medium and long run, and I believe that we all should thank Prof. Dumont who has helped us to do it.