



Dear friends!

“A society is measured by the way it deals with its most vulnerable members” – this sentence is today more up-to-date than ever. One striking contradiction in most modern societies is obvious: on the one hand many laws are being made for the protection of the weak. On the other hand society has widely forgotten how to deal with the weak and suffering.

The oncologist Xavier Mirabel is president of the “Alliance for the Right to Life” and father of a little girl suffering from Down syndrome. He points out the danger created by the believe in an “omnipotent medicine abolishing all suffering”. We have forgotten to see the person behind the suffering. We only see the suffering which seems unbearable to us. Our own despair impedes us to feel true compassion, which originally means to ‘suffer-along-with’ someone.

As Christians this is precisely what we are called to do: suffer with those who suffer and relieve suffering where possible. Let us pray and work for a society that respects the needs and the needy, not excluding but accepting them. Only in this way we will achieve a truly Christian society.

Your Europe for Christ Team

PS: Don't forget to pray the daily Our Father for a Europe embedded in Christian values!

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Why death seems preferable to suffering – and why it shouldn't

by Xavier Mirabel

Medical technologies develop fast. What we know about a child before birth increases rapidly. The way a pregnancy is experienced today is no longer comparable with what it was like 10 years ago. Serenity is over! Confident waiting is no longer feasible: prenatal tests are systematically suggested and sometimes even imposed. And it's not only about knowing the sex of the child so as to choose the colour of the clothes and the first name, but about being sure the child, genetically and physically, conforms to the new canons of normality.



However, we have seen nothing yet! Already now one can calculate the risk factors of certain diseases. In the near future these techniques will be done with samples of the mother's blood and therefore be much easier. It will be possible to know at a very early stage whether the child is healthy and 'normal'. It will be even possible to predict the risk of falling ill later in life.

We know the consequences of these diagnostics all too well. Indeed our threshold of tolerance towards people suffering from handicaps or diseases continues to diminish. Our societies are profoundly ambivalent: they profess respect for the ill and those suffering from a handicap, while - not knowing how to handle suffering - they at the same time reject and exclude these 'abnormal' people. This new form of eugenics is ultra-liberal and as violent and totalitarian as previous eugenic ideologies.

In fact it seems to me that despair is the most worrying symptom: the despair of not to be able to help. Not only does one seem to believe that frailty would take away all meaning of life, but more worrisome is the fact that one ends up persuading oneself that there are cases where no one or nothing could relieve, reassure or console.

Why is it so hard to accompany the suffering? Due to the fascination with science and technology and the loss of spiritual cornerstones, we lose our benchmarks. As a result we begin to worship health. We expect an omnipotent medical science to abolish all suffering. Dependence, illness and the loss of autonomy seem to us so horrible that death appears preferable. One shouldn't be surprised to see the high number of citizens turn into self proclaimed judges of a 'relative dignity' which to them seems destroyed by illness or handicap.

Human life is threatened by abortion, the view of the human embryo as disposable, eugenics and euthanasia. The exorbitant numbers of these 'deaths in the family' reveal to us the magnitude of a humanitarian disaster without comparison. Jean Paul II spoke about a war against life, a war of "the powerful against the weak 1". Of course, facing the scale of the drama, "it's not possible to stand aside and do nothing". The defence of the weakest concerns us all. But the remedies aren't obvious. The milestones offered by the Church are helpful to find the right words.

To improve our way of welcoming life and the suffering, we have to work for a change of hearts: It is on us to begin with this conversion: let us welcome the gospel of life in depth, in our personal life and through our work in truth and charity. Let us pray every day to reach this goal - and we will change the world.

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1 Encyclical Evangelium Vitae, 1995, John Paul II, 12