

which explains that '90 % of the world's working-age population is not covered by pension schemes capable of providing adequate retirement income.'

This statistic should force every leader to think even more about my remark because someone who continues to work after the retirement limit necessarily takes the place of some one who will never even have the chance to work enough and to collect enough money to prepare his retirement life. And the number of people in this situation is significant enough to be taken seriously (90 % of the world's working-age population). Leaders of all countries and I.O. Chiefs cannot really say that they do not have at least a part of responsibility in this fact.

I could present you several other arguments justifying this remark, but instead I will finish with a practical example. I am sure that if anyone of you (or your close relatives children, ...) had to undergo a grave surgical operation, you would rather be operated by a 40 or 50 years old surgeon who uses the latest technologies, is perfectly informed on the latest breakthrough in research, and is in perfect physical condition, than by a 68 years old surgeon whose hands will shake after less than an hour of operation and who knows little about the new technologies developed to improve his efficiency. Well, it is exactly the same for country leaders, except that if a 'leader's hand shakes', he does not kill one patient, but many people (even if it is 'indirectly').

And even if the physical condition may seem to play a less important role for a leader than for a surgeon, it does play a role, and the psychological effect of being 65 has a more significant impact on the efficiency of the leader. Having, in theory, only few more years to live and not being 'confident' with new technologies affect leader's ability to deal effectively with our problems. Of course, one can always argue that people are very different from each other, and that some have the capacity to live longer and in better health than other, but we don't know it before it really happens, so this argument is not valid.

Unfortunately our recent experience confirms the validity of my remark, even though I am not happy to say it. We can briefly look at some 'results' of older politicians. It is not a secret that the gap between the rich and the poor has increased in the past years, the life expectancy has decreased in some countries of Africa, and that the AIDS epidemic has worsened in many poor countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. We all know the important role the World Bank play in the fight against poverty, and the special influence it has in Africa. So Mr. Wolfensohn who surely can present us some positive aspects of his action cannot really say that the World Bank had a 'perfect' record under his guidance.

I have already made several remarks concerning Mr. Chirac's (68) behavior as President, so I will not come back again on the subject, but we can look at Mr. Jospin (65) who put himself as a 'probable' candidate at the presidency. He mainly talks about the fact that he has lowered the unemployment rate from 11.3 % to 9.2 %. Of course, this result does not make him the worst Prime Minister France ever had, but it does not make him the best politician France ever had either. Especially when you know about the many corruption scandals that arose recently. Mr. Jospin who is not directly implicated, has not done very much to prevent them from happening either.



Then we can also take the example of Israel and Palestine. Mr. Sharon (72) is the one who 'provoked', in some way, the 'intifada' by going walking on the 'Esplanade des Mosquées'. You don't show your intelligence by provoking people who live in very difficult conditions when the situation is tense. Au contraire, you show intelligence when you try to calm things down to find better and proper solutions to problems. Is he proud to have obtained the post of Prime Minister for that? And will he be proud to destroy every house and every helicopter in Palestine, and say '*here is your Palestinian State with no more building that stands up*'?

And Mr. Arafat (72) who has overreacted on this provocation (of an old man), it seems that an 'intifada' was a more appealing alternative than fighting the heavy corruption that 'seems' to handicap his administration and people, (not that this is a problem specific to Palestine as you could notice with the French exaggerated corruption). There are without any doubt social problems in Palestine and in Israel for the Arab Israeli, and Mr. Arafat (and Mr. Sharon) had very little success on solving this kind of problems. Of course, he (they) can always argue that he (they) was (were) not helped very much by the religious leaders.

This brings me to talk about the work of Pope Jean Paul II (80) during the past 10 to 15 years. During the past 15 years leaders from the East and West or North and South have made serious efforts to show more friendship and to work more closely together to solve the difficult problem the world has to face. For example, G8 leaders meets now regularly, there are also 'regional forums' where leaders meet regularly too, and China has joined recently the WTO as we all know. The gathering of head of State last years in New York was also a strong sign and proof of the efforts made by all the political leaders around the world to work together.

But the Pope has not at all showed the same kind of 'energy' and willingness to resolve the religious problems and to diminish the religious hates. He plaid no (or almost no) role in the resolution of conflicts where religion was used as an 'underlying ground' of dispute or at least as a division factor, like in Ireland, in Kosovo, in Israel, in Afghanistan, ... He has kept asking for forgiveness for all the mistakes and bad behaviors of the catholic church throughout its history, but this does not help at all. To avoid having to ask for forgiveness the church must act more 'appropriately'. There is no reason to keep such an old person at such a difficult position.

At 80, one is not fit enough to do this kind of job and one cannot understand the society well enough to plan and adapt the role of the church accordingly. Of course, the church can argue that it follows the tradition or the 'directives' of the bible but, if I recall right, it is not Jesus himself who has written the Gospel, but his apostles who were men, not Gods. And as men it is possible that they made mistakes in writing or in 'interpreting' the words of Jesus. Jesus himself knew that his apostles were not perfect, he knew that Judas would betrayed him or that Pierre would deny he had known him three time.

These 'imperfect' men may have been influenced by their own knowledge and understanding of the society of their time. For those who believe in God, it is God who has given us our intelligence and our capacity to understand our environment and our history, so we cannot reject everything that we have understood because of some words that have been written by 'imperfect' men 2000 years ago. The Catholic Church (and its leaders) seems to take advantage of