

Every child “counts”

by Domenico Volpi

The UNICEF report, when referring to the 2014 statistics, says that 6.6 million children died before the age of five due to poverty and illnesses that could have been prevented. Some 230 million children have never been registered at their birth, hence it is as though they did not even exist and they can't even claim government assistance. Then among those who are of primary school age 57 million don't go to school, especially the girls. There are 168 million children (5-11 years of age) who are forced to work, even for twelve hours a day, half of these work in dangerous situations. The newspapers and the web news frequently report incomplete data and aim at sensationalism, so that readers of a certain age convince themselves that, as far as hunger in the world is concerned, un-drinkable water and diseases and so on we are faced with irresolvable situations, hence it isn't even worthwhile trying to do something about it.

If we want all the people to be moved and commit themselves in order to solve these situations, then we must give hope and also point out the positive aspects. For example pointing out that in 24 years of hard work, those who suffer from “hunger” in the world have gone down from 1 thousand million to 805 million, one could be tempted to think that these figures are not much,

but in 1990 the population of the world was about 5 thousand million and now it is over 7, hence the percentage of those who suffer from hunger has fallen by about 8 points.

Then in the field of child care there have been many successes, above all in the underdeveloped countries: infant mortality has fallen thanks to vaccinations that by now cover more than 80% of the population and save millions of children, then there is access to drinking water, an improvement in sanitary facilities (for nearly 2 thousand million people), while stunted growth due to malnutrition has been reduced by 37%. Then the number of children who go to primary school has risen from 53 to 81 per cent.

There is still a lot to be done, in spite of the progress not all of the goals that were fixed have been reached, on the world scale, but all the same it is important to know that much has been done and that everybody's efforts have not been in vain. Every human being who is saved is a victory, but also the final count is important so that we can realise what the needs are.

The UNICEF 2014 report says that every child “counts”, this has a double meaning: “everyone is important” and “everyone must be counted”, that is be visible, have a name and a civil identity enabling he or she to receive help and

claim their rights. And the “count” tells us that there are 2.2 thousand million children and adolescents, more than one third of the world population.

Nowadays the most needy are the children in war areas, refugees and those who suffer from violence and slavery or are even enrolled by different forces and are taught to kill.

Here I make a digression. Reading about the disgraceful price list of the new slaves proposed by ISIS, many of you will have noticed the highest value is not given to the most muscular boys or the most attractive girls but to the small children under the age of nine. This is not a new situation, because children of a tender age are virgin ground in which to plant any seed. In the XIV century the Ottoman Sultan Orkhan formed a body of Giannizzeri (“new militia”) who became his personal guards and the core of his army. In 1380, Selim I based his recruitment on a “collection” of children between the ages of 6 and 9 that the Christian families from the Balkans were forced to give him, or they were stolen by Saracen pirates along the Italian coasts. Chosen from among the most robust, they were brought up with care and discipline, converted to Islam and instructed in the arts of warfare. The regiment was their family, the barracks their home. Totally conditioned great warriors and slaughterers. This body was only abolished in 1826. Will we be faced with their similes in twenty years' time?

Now let us return to us. As Christians we have precise duties: 1 - to know about these situations; 2 - inform our children and grandchildren, using the means that are suitable to their age; 3 - respect their poverty, avoiding exhibitionism and waste (I have been scandalized by the money spent for birthday parties for little children of pre-school age, that we can find everywhere in this city.. that is for those who can afford them); 4 - help the institutions and people who work in the poor and difficult countries; 5 - educate children towards peace and an understanding of others, ... beginning with their neighbours and class-mates (be careful of bullying and so on); 6 - more than just performing isolated acts, although they may be noble, try to create a chain with other people; 7 - become aware of the poverty and even hunger that exist among us, in our streets, considering that very often giving charity to those who are far away is easier than helping those who are close to us and disgust us or disturb us. ●

